

LUXURY YACHT

CHARTER

ART, NATURE AND HISTORY
CONVERGE IN THE SAN JUANS.

By Kara Murphy

*North
By
Northwest*



inserted messages and prayers into an opening at its top. That's why Moench's prayer wheels here in the sculpture park have removable lids. In leaving a message, I feel that I've left something of myself in this enchanting place.

Today is my first day exploring the San Juans, which encompass hundreds of islands and reefs—only a fraction of them named—between Anacortes, Washington, and Vancouver Island, Canada. My family and I are aboard 75-foot (22.8-meter) Hatteras *Jamal*, cruising with a view of Mount Baker towering 10,781 feet overhead. Capt. Jennifer Hanna is a Bellingham local who spent summers chartering for the past three decades. Now, retired from teaching middle school, she is at *Jamal's* helm full time. She and her crew have a well-honed charter program. Prior to our arrival at Roche Harbor, a lunch of berry and goat cheese salad and salmon arrived, just as we cruised past Orcas Island.

Roche Harbor is a great place to stretch your legs, with miles of walking paths and a wealth of history. In 1845, the British Hudson's Bay Company built a trading post here, in spite of the fact that the United States also claimed the island. U.S. settlers arrived, and in 1859, one shot a pig that was raiding his garden and belonged to a Hudson's Bay employee. When the British demanded the settler pay an exorbitant amount or face arrest, the settlers called for U.S. military protection. Forces on both sides swelled, and officials eventually agreed to a joint military occupation. Finally, 12 years later, following the signing of the Treaty of Washington, the San Juans question was settled in favor of the United States. Thankfully (and famously) the only casualty was the pig.

Roche Harbor is named for Lt. Richard Roche of the Royal Marines, who was ashore when lime deposits were discovered. Tacoma, Washington, lawyer

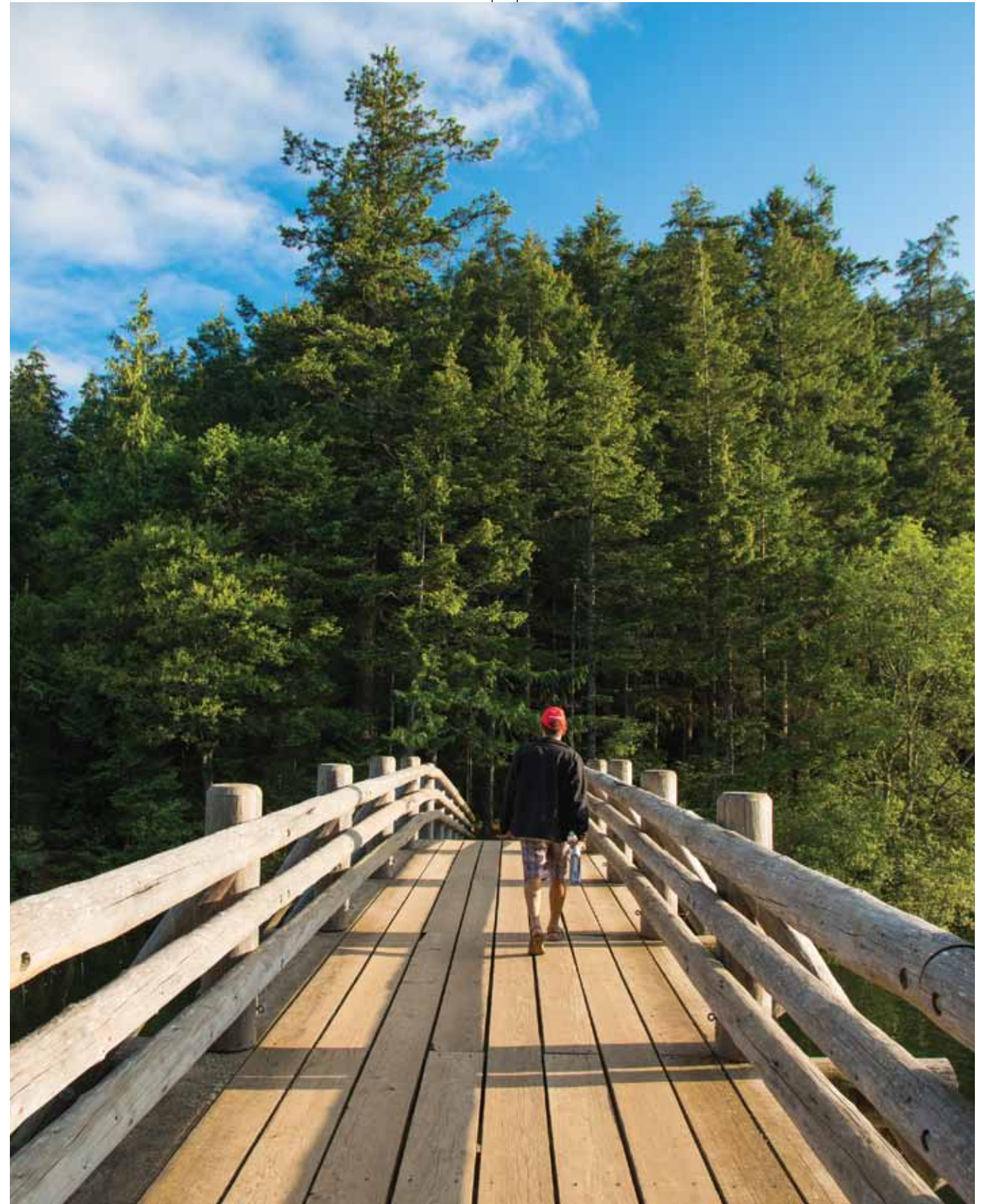
Wandering the 20-acre San Juan Islands Sculpture Park, a short walk from historic Roche Harbor Resort, I'm struck as much by words as by physical expressions of art. The poems of David M. Jenkins pepper the spaces between the park's dragons, mirrored easels and whirligigs, adding a wise voice to the whimsy. Together, the poems and more than 150 sculptures inspire a joyful, contemplative journey along a mile of trails through field and forest, around a pond and near the northern reaches of Westcott Bay.

Some of the art has deep local history, including the four clay prayer wheels by Bellingham, Washington, artist Chris Moench. Eighteen years ago, in response to a hometown tragedy, Moench built his first: a 3-foot-tall clay cylinder with memorial images. People were encouraged to touch, turn and interact with the sculpture; some



ABOVE LEFT: *Jamal*, anchored in Sucia Island's Echo Bay. ABOVE: Harbor seals congregate on Clements Reef, San Juan Islands.

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A charter guest explores a trail on Orcas Island.

John. S. McMillin turned those limestone deposits into a business that blossomed in 1886. The 19-room hotel that McMillin built, Hotel de Haro, is still just beyond today's 377-slip marina. Wandering northeast of the hotel, toward the sculpture park, I can still see reminders of Roche Harbor's heyday, when the place was a busy company town. There's a church, a school, barns and cottages, many now used as resort accommodations.

A forest trail leads to the McMillin mausoleum, completed in 1936. Even here, I feel like I'm seeing a memorable type of art. The bases of the chairs that surround a center table hold the family's ashes, and one of the seven columns is broken, representing how man dies before his work is completed.

When we return to *Jamal*, chef Lenore Nolan-Ryan has local cheeses and chilled wines ready. She travels here each summer from South Florida, where she runs a catering business and restaurant. Nolan-Ryan says she often comes up with an idea for the next meal a couple hours beforehand, sometimes based on a conversation she's had with a guest. But on this night, as with the first evening of most charters, the dinner is almost always roasted chicken and veggies—because she says it makes guests feel comfortable after their long travels. Since I'm pescatarian, she's substituted Alaskan halibut alongside the vibrant vegetables and herbs.

RIGHT: A warm vegetable salad glows in the sunshine on *Jamal's* upper deck. BELOW: Views over Sucia Island from the summit of Mount Constitution, Orcas Island.



When we wake the next morning, Hanna proclaims it "Whale Day." She's received reports that some of the archipelago's resident orcas are to the north, in Canadian waters. As we cruise in that direction, the views of the Olympic Mountains are spectacular, as is the sight of Vancouver Island to the west. Mount Baker dominates the forward vista, a view we savor by

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ABOVE: Chef Lenore Nolan-Ryan, Capt. Jennifer Hanna and first mate Joey Sternhagen serve lunch. ABOVE RIGHT: Seagulls land near the shoreline, Sucia Island Marine State Park. BELOW: The historic Our Lady of Good Voyage Chapel overlooks Roche Harbor Marina, San Juan Island.



dining on the upper deck aft, digging into cool gazpacho and warm vegetable salad as we scout for whales, harbor seals and bald eagles.

As we enter the Strait of Georgia and cruise north toward Point Roberts, Hanna sees several whale-watching boats, and sure enough, an orca is nearby, its inky dorsal fin slicing the silver water. We follow, and several more orcas appear, with Mount Constitution providing a backdrop to the breaching and tail slapping.

First mate Joey Sternhagen says some of the orcas are transients while others are residents. The oldest known



resident, "Granny," is 105 years old and was in the "Free Willy" movies. Sternhagen can distinguish among the transients and residents by appearance: Transients tend to have a more pointed dorsal fin top, and their feeding behavior is a giveaway. While residents eat only fish (in summer, mainly salmon), transients also consume marine mammals. If you see a group of orcas hunting a harbor seal, sea lion or minke whale, they're from out of town.

We cruise from there to Sucia Island and spend the afternoon hiking along the island's 10 miles of trails, with the peeling, rusty bark of Pacific madrone trees lining the way. One path leads from Echo Bay's cluttered driftwood beach to pebble-strewn Shallow Bay, and others head to Ewing Cove and Fossil Bay. These spots are also accessible by dinghy, of course, and that's the transportation we take at high tide the next morning to watch a colony of harbor seals lounging on exposed rocks.

Later, as we cruise south to Orcas Island's Rosario Marina, the crew hands us pieces of local driftwood. To my eye, this is yet more art, shaped and smoothed by the forces of nature. We're encouraged to write a message, including our contact details, on the wood before hurling it off *Jamal's* stern into the choppy sea.

Nearly three weeks later, my father, back home in Virginia, received this email from a kayaker: "Found your piece of driftwood in the beach clutter at the campsite on the south end of James Island on Sunday night. Set it free again yesterday morning in the middle of Rosario Strait as we paddled over to Anacortes."

The idea of sending words out into the world, whether intended for sculpture park visitors, a clay pot or a stranger, is beautiful indeed. **Y**

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