

Ivan Doig--phone (206)542-6658  
17021 10th Ave. NW  
Seattle WA 98177

Possible use:  
essay titled  
January's  
January

for ROLLING STONE  
first North American rights only

At sea with the Alpha Bell and four Swedes.



Strange one, '01. January all year.

In original January, the model with the phony guarantee that it would last only 31 days, I flew to Alaska--Sitka first, then on to Juneau. [Alaska has had considerable lately of writers coming up, rummaging, and returning south to tell tales of what's there in the national attic.] I, though, was amending that by carrying along my own <sup>story</sup> tale. It was of another January, the one back in 1853: four men, Swedish workmen indentured for seven years to the Russian-American Company at New Archangel (the once-and-future Sitka), decide the hell with fetching fur for the Tsar; they steal a Tlingit canoe and aim downcoast for Astoria, twelve hundred miles. The story existed as a five hundred-word newspaper account from the time. Round it out with sixty, seventy thousand more, I figured, and there's my novel.



Most of those words needed to be got, of course, from the source: the Northwest Coast, the surf-moat and timber-palisade where the Pacific and the continent contend along Southeast Alaska and British Columbia and the state of Washington. Captain Cook's coast, and the Nootka chief Maquinna's--and imminently the Alpha Helix's, which was going to be my ticket to ride. An oceanographic ship of the University of Alaska's Institute of Marine Science, the Alpha Helix was 133 feet long, <sup>Painted</sup> a winsome baby-blue, and bound from Seward to Puget Sound for a winter of refitting. I was to go aboard <sup>at</sup> in Juneau and coastwatch my way home to Seattle.

Coastwatching seemed one of the saner speculations available just then--Inauguration Day still warm on the airwaves, Reaganomics and Wattage and Haigiography loose among us now--and Alaska just the moody sort of place to begin. Both on this trip and in the time I had spent there the previous summer on the historical track of my Swedes, Alaska struck me as at once damn wonderful and edgy. Paul Bunyan, but with alimony and a hangover. (Even such Alaskan politesse as fishing invitations can be a bit on the excitable side. In Juneau I was repeatedly adjured: "C'mon up in summer and we'll go kill salmon.") Moreover, the send-off was auspicious: Juneau folk were celebrating the birthday of Robert Burns. Well, not the poet's two-hundred-twenty-second natal day so much, as that somebody had come up with the idea that it would pass time improvingly for Juneau to have a bagpipe band. [Contrary to universal assumption, the name Doig is not Mittel-Ruritanian, but Angusshire.] I was blood-bound to attend.

Painted  
+  
Nootka



So a pipe band there was, and haggis, and a large ruddy kilted fellow pouring the lead piper a splash of the auld pure and asking, "Piper, wha 'll ye have i' your whiskey?" and the piper giving proper Caledonian response, "More whiskey!" and probably the skirls were still echoing through the mountains and terrifying moose the next day when the Alpha Helix <sup>cast off</sup> ~~lifted anchor~~.

I expected that shipboard life had to be calmer than Alaska ashore, and by and large this was so. Its Three<sup>C</sup> Commandments proved to be the ones I'd learned on Montana ranches. Say fewer words than anybody else. Work as long hours as anybody else and longer if you can. And never rile the cook.

But the coast: this long labyrinth of pastscape my Swedish quartet--Karlsson, Melander, Wennberg and Braaf I knew them as now--needed to paddle through, muddle through, winter day on winter day: the Northwest coast was agitation a thousand new ways. Arithmetic of the Alpha Helix's voyage was plain enough. Eight hundred and eighty miles, Juneau-Seattle, at about  $10\frac{1}{2}$  knots. But arithmetic isn't always trustable dimension, so here was a kind of sovereign galaxy of coast; more moods of water than I had seen in 15 years of hiking Washington and Oregon shores, a brinking spruce forest so thick it seemed to be thatched, islands islands islands. . . . a commotion of landscape which I strained to put down in my journal, log, sea-diary, whatever it would quiet itself into at last.

Nor did the coast let go of me, even once the Alpha Helix



was berthed snug in the Duwamish and I had traipsed off to my Seattle suburb. I walked into my house and found that the floor had caught the exact lurch-and-roll of the ship. Three days, it took to coax my inner ear out of that slosh--more metaphor of unsettledness than I really needed.

But the Januaryness, the temblors from the coast, refused to leave at all.

*Read here*

... sea lions alongside. . . swim like dogs, noses high. . . swim like otters.

Manuscript, March: A thirty-foot sea creature poked abruptly from the water, delivered the canoeists a thunderous burp, and sank.

"Sea Lions," Karlsson called. . .

Altogether big: Queen Charlotte Sound. . . Knowing we'd hit the Qn C swell about 3, prepared myself with seasickness pill, then handful of gyp for energy, then propped myself in open door of the bridge for fresh air, by god determined I'd stick out the entire Qn C crossing. . . 20 min. later, was sprawled flat on my bunk.

Manuscript, August: Swells were spaced wide, perhaps two lengths of the canoe between crests, but regular as great slow breathings. Each swell levered up the prow of the canoe, then the craft was shrugged downward. . . . Wennberg held his paddle just above the lapping waves, as though trying to recall whether water or air was the element in which it operated. His face hung open in surprise.



Wk 4

Terry McDonnell - (212) 350-1247

- Yr-end dubl issue / on strds for month

- "time capsule" / '81 happen'g

1000-1500 wds →

12 photogs / and cntry

- Ken Kesey - China: poet, 1st since 1952

Abbey

Hannah - sober

McLuane - death

Stone

Nancy Dowd - leave cntry for Canada / Jews

Ray Carver

Stan Elkin

M Richler

John Irving

Silko - coal explor: snake sculpture

Puyo (tentatively)

Scott Spencer

Rascoe

Wk of Nov. 2 / two weeks from now  
\$1,000

Alaska - unsettledness: isolation;

PNW as its <sup>own</sup> country

- relate

call before mail / overnight

have some fun c it





745 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York 10151 (212) PL8-3800

---

December 4, 1981

Mr. Ivan Doig  
17021 Tenth Avenue, N.W.  
Seattle, Washington 98177

Dear Ivan:

I hate to write this letter and I also hate to write it at such a late date. I am sorry that I was unable to use what you sent in my year-end issue. I know that it was inconvenient for you to drop your other work and do what I proposed. Definition of a magazine editor is a person with no friends. Perhaps this is why. I will be forwarding you a check for \$250.

Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Terry McDonell", written over the printed name.

Terry McDonell  
Managing Editor

TM:rb



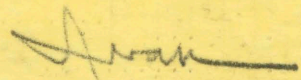
29 Oct. '81

McDonnell  
Man. Ed.  
Terry-- Rolling Stone 745 Fifth Ave NY 10151

Okay, here it is. As I told you I'd have to, I cadged a bit from diary and manuscript, but that's the point of my year.

\$8 ought to cover the postage.

best





His mouth made motions but no sound. Then: "I'm. Getting. Sick."

Alpha Helix log: . . . clouds have singled out one mountain to southeast, blotted it. . .

Manuscript, October: Time and again, the canoe men would see a storm swoop onto a single mountain among many, as if sacking up a hostage as a lesson to all the rest. Once Braaf pointed out a narrow white sheet of sky, very likely snow, north on the coast behind them. "Stay north and frost the Russians' asses," Melander directed the storm with a push of his hands. It stayed.

That's been '81, then. Me sitting to the typewriter and telling myself, yeah, okay, getting underway a bit with these Swedes here now, let's see, which eyeload of coast today, put the guys in fog or rain or what, maybe serve 'em up the last of their salt beef for breakfast. . . and now I glance up and both the book and the year are about tapped out. This kind of trance can happen plenty out here--Alaska, British Columbia, Washington, Oregon, down into Northern California--you're blithe amid the evergreens and one day it blinks through to you: that those frisbee-hybrid aircraft parked at Boeing Field are the AWACS planes their very selves and that just over the line of trees there is where the Trident missile subs will come home to roost, the arms race has been making its ruts in Ecotopia, too. That the Inauguration Day dreck centered over D.C., political equivalent of January murk and frogstorm, is still



on the weather map. You can think yourself bald on this one,  
how a January of the soul can be vivifying, gusty, cleansing  
(manuscript this week: Sometime in those days the canoe slid them  
out of winter into not-winter. . .), simultaneously the national  
January so bleak and icicled.

But then, Janus is the two-faced god.

###