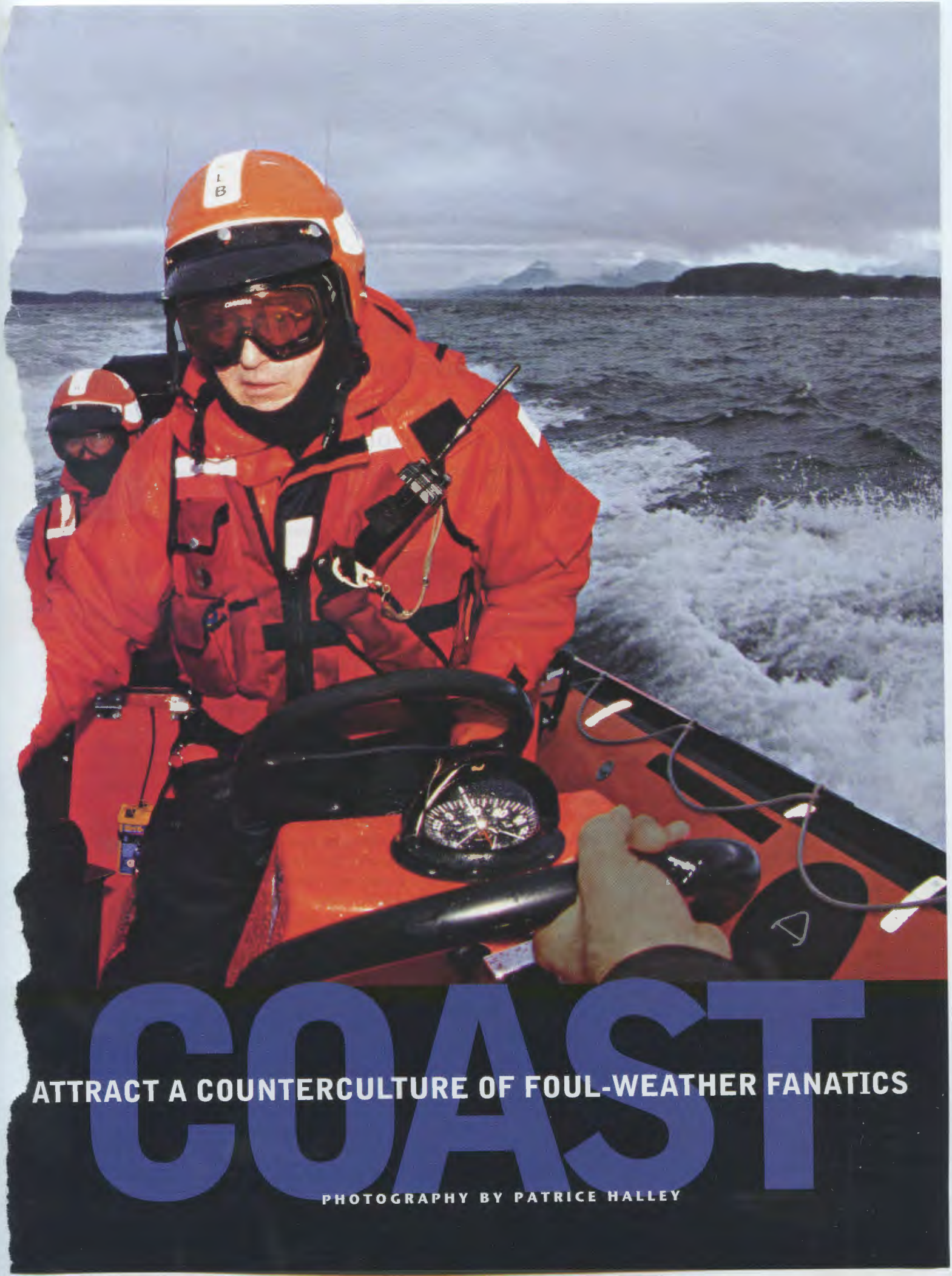
STORM

THE WILD, TEMPESTUOUS WATERS OFF VANCOUVER ISLAND

TEXT BY CHARLES MONTGOMERY



COAST

ATTRACT A COUNTERCULTURE OF FOUL-WEATHER FANATICS

PHOTOGRAPHY BY PATRICE HALLEY

THE *Kella-Lee* TOOK ITS FIRST HIT AROUND MIDNIGHT. A wave to starboard heaved the trawler on its port side, nearly tossing crewman Beachum Englemark right out of his bunk. It was the 27-year-old's first time on a halibut boat, and this one was lurching 20 kilometres off the northern tip of Vancouver Island. Englemark's crewmates had seen this kind of weather before. It was no big deal, one mumbled from his bunk. Just try to sleep.

Then a wave knocked the boat even more violently to port. Englemark scrambled up to the galley and found water gushing in from around a hatchway and Skipper George Newson hollering "mayday" into his radio. Englemark pulled on a waterproof emergency suit and tried to untangle the *Kella-Lee*'s life raft.

Within an hour, Englemark and Newson were treading water in the swell. The *Kella-Lee* had disappeared into the waves. The life raft was gone and so were two of the crew. There was nothing left but heaving ocean and darkness punctuated by the phosphorescent flashes of collapsing whitecaps.

"The wind was so strong," remembers Englemark, "it was like a knife spreading the whitecaps out across the water like butter on bread. All I could see was white foam. Then bigger waves would roar up through the sea behind us, catch us, tumble us under water for 15 or 20 seconds, then spit us out their backs. It was like falling off a surfboard, over and over again."

In his desperate attempt to radio for help, Newson hadn't managed to find his emergency suit. Even as a search plane began to drone in the darkness overhead, the pair knew he would not survive in the frigid waters. He stopped breathing within two hours.

"It was like he was falling asleep on his bed," says Englemark. "Then his body just quit. I held on to him for half an hour, but I got so weak that I had to just let him float away. And then I was really alone."

What Englemark recalls most vividly about the hours he drifted alone on the night of October 25, 2001, isn't the darkness or the cold or the dread that crept over him. It is the strange, almost comforting beauty of the storm.

"I was scared. But when the wind was screaming and those waves were lifting me 50 feet in the air, when they were crushing and carrying me, surging around me — it's hard to describe, but I just felt so small and so in awe. I hate to say it, but I felt a kind of peace. I remember thinking how awesome, how absolutely beautiful it all was."

SUCH IS THE CONFLICTED relationship between humans and the storms that slam into British Columbia's coast every year from October to April. Hundreds of mariners have met their death along these shores in the past two centuries. To dull the sting in the weather's tail, Canada has had to develop a complex weather-forecasting and search-and-rescue network. Yet there is something captivating about the destructive fury of wind and waves. Enticing, even. For while Englemark drifted alone in the darkness, as radios crackled with the chatter of his rescuers, hundreds of tourists were snuggled in hotel beds on the outer fringe of Vancouver Island, waiting to confront the tempest at daybreak.

In the past decade, Pacific Rim National Park Reserve has become to foul-weather junkies what Las Vegas is to gamblers. "Storm watchers" have revitalized the winter economy in the fishing and resort town of Tofino. Forget suntanning: when the weather turns nasty, visitors armed with sou'westers and gumboots — even surfboards — hit the beaches hoping for a close encounter. In the heart of monsoon season, photographer Patrice Halley and I don our rain gear and head west in search of the storm, its adversaries and its

Riding a bucking Zodiac in choppy waters (PREVIOUS PAGE) is never a dull exercise for Coast Guard ocean-swimmer and search-and-rescue-specialist Don Amos, who trains to stay physically and psychologically prepared for any emergency. The Coast Guard rescue vessel *Cape Calvert* trails behind Amos in a training exercise near Bamfield, B.C. Lightkeeper Norbert Brand (OPPOSITE TOP) has studied this storm-battered coast (MAP) from the lighthouse at Cape Beale for more than 25 years.

STEVEN FICK/CANADIAN GEOGRAPHIC


Kella-Lee (sunk October 25, 2001)
Pine Island
Scarlett Point
Cape Scott
Port Hardy
Pulteney Point
Port McNeill
Alert Bay
Quatsino
Port Alice
Chatham Point
COAST MOUNTAINS
BRITISH COLUMBIA
VANCOUVER ISLAND
Campbell River
Cape Mudge
Tahsis
Powell River
PACIFIC OCEAN
Comox
Courtenay
Nootka
Chrome Island
Merry Island
West Vancouver
Estevan Point
Strait of Georgia
Vancouver
0
50 km
Tofino
Nanaimo
Entrance Island
Lennard Island
PACIFIC RIM
NATIONAL PARK
CANADA
U.S.A.
Ucluelet
Barkley Sound
Bamfield
Cape Beale
RESERVE
Pachena Point
"Cheewhat Lake Cedar"
Sidney
Carmanah Point
Trail
Port Renfrew
VICTORIA
Sooke
Trial Island
Cape Flattery
Juan de Fuca Strait
WASHINGTON
Staffed lighthouse
Unstaffed lighthouse

THE TRAWLER WAS CAUGHT BY A WEATHER 'BOMB' THAT SLAMMED INTO THE COAST.

Crew members aboard the Coast Guard ship *Sir Wilfrid Laurier* (ABOVE) prepare to launch a buoy near La Peruse Bank, 40 kilometres off the British Columbia coast. Solar-powered equipment collects weather and wave data to make life a little safer for the legion of fishermen, sailors and surfers navigating these perilous waters.

admirers on the rain-forest coast.

"People come here to remember that Mother Nature is in charge," says Charles McDiarmid, the man frequently credited with launching Tofino's burgeoning storm economy. In 1996, McDiarmid and his family sank $8.6 million into a hotel on a surf-scoured rock near Tofino. The Wickaninnish Inn's restaurant hangs out over the barnacles, so at high tide, the floor vibrates with the impact of breakers.

"This would be just another lousy day in Vancouver, but out here, a rainy day means 25-to-30-foot waves and winds blowing 80 miles an hour — it's Old Testament weather," McDiarmid enthuses. "We tell our guests to slap on their rain gear and get out in it, listen to the sound of trees rubbing together in the wind, get wet. Give themselves a good West Coast facial."

On this dark February weekend, all 46 of McDiarmid's $250 rooms are full. Meanwhile, Tofino's Chamber of Commerce has taken to advertising power outages and downed telephone lines as part of the romance of storm watching.

Bad weather is clearly good for business, and winter can almost always be relied upon to deliver it, thanks to the annual clash between the subtropical high-pressure zone that rings the globe between 30°N and 40°N — roughly the latitude of California — and the cold air that generally dominates north of the Alaska panhandle, north of 60°N.

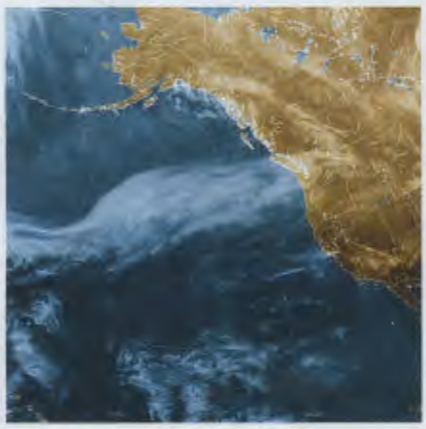
It's the same dynamic that wreaks havoc on Canada's East Coast each winter. But although the Pacific Rim doesn't experience the typhoons that strike the Maritime provinces each fall — or the East Coast's hail, snow and freezing rain — its monsoons are notoriously dependable. On the East Coast, you might wait days or weeks for a big storm to hit. Not here. Vancouver Island sits like a roadblock on a freeway of saturated marine air.

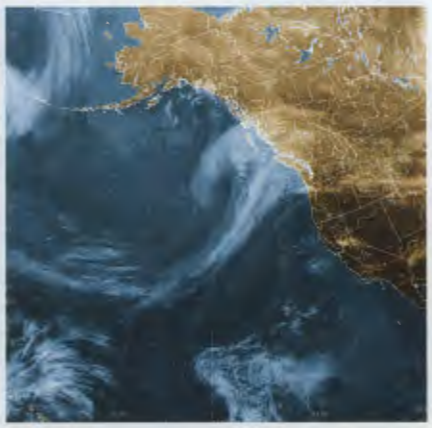
Every autumn, waves of cold northern air push south to form deep low-pressure troughs in the Gulf of Alaska. Warmer air gets sucked toward those troughs, then yanked counter-clockwise by the Earth's centrifugal force. The resulting maelstroms then drift east, whipping up the sea and throwing off fronts that collide into the Coast Mountains like wet sponges on concrete. In the winter, they hit every two or three days.

Most Gulf of Alaska lows live and die far out at sea. They spin powerful but fairly predictable fronts. That's not what hit the *Kella-Lee*. The trawler was caught by what forecasters call a weather "bomb": a low-pressure system that churned a tight knot in the atmosphere hundreds of kilometres from shore, then slammed into the coast too hard and fast for the trawler to seek shelter. By the time the storm reached the northern tip of Vancouver Island, it was producing gusts of up to 163 kilometres an hour and whipping the sea into eight-metre swells. Other storms here have gusted up to 176 kilometres an hour and stirred waves 30 metres high: enough to submerge a 10-storey building.

Then there's the rain. Pacific Rim National Park Reserve soaks up more than three metres of it every year, most of which falls from October to April. The mild, wet weather

Using "Tofino Traffic" as his call sign, marine communications officer Luc Chagnon (ABOVE) contacts one of dozens of foreign ships entering Juan de Fuca Strait daily. In addition to traffic control, the Marine Communications and Traffic Services Centre at Ucluelet, B.C., broadcasts weather and safety information and coordinates rescue resources. At midday on October 25, 2001 (BELOW LEFT), the storm that sank the *Kella-Lee* was a full-blown tempest over the open ocean. By 11 p.m., it was battering the coast (BELOW CENTRE), and by the next afternoon (BELOW RIGHT), its power dissipated, it stretched past the Rockies to northern Alberta.





ENVIRONMENT CANADA

Toppled and toppling Sitka spruces and piles of drift logs (ABOVE) mark the winter-storm boundary between ocean and land in Pacific Rim National Park Reserve. The Sitka is one of the few trees whose seedlings thrive in the salty magnesium-rich environment. Surf's up for ocean kayakers (BELOW) after a storm at the park's Long Beach.

shows in the endless rot and growth, the dripping, glistening hugeness of the temperate rain forest. Unlike in most of the rest of Canada, it rarely freezes here, so conifers keep photosynthesizing all winter. They also grow to Gothic proportions: it would take a minibus full of tree huggers to reach around the 18.34-metre base of the Cheewhat Lake Cedar, a western red cedar — and Canada's most voluminous tree — in the south end of the park.

Alkaline spray lashes the forest near the ocean where slopes are dominated by salt-tolerant Sitka spruce. Their trunks grow as wide as hot tubs, but their crowns are brushed back like hair in the wind. Sphagnum moss grows so thick, you can plunge your arm into the spongy carpet right up to the elbow. Salal bushes grasp at the sparse light, climbing as high as cherry trees.

Storm waves scatter shells, glass fishing floats and other flotsam deep into the forest shadows. They rip bull kelp from the ocean floor and heap their long stems like entrails along the beaches.

Those waves also attract some of the world's hardiest surfers; people like Dean Montgomery and his partner Jennifer Smith, who arrived in Ucluelet from their native Ontario in 1998. The couple were so smitten by the big trees, big weather and big surf of the coast that they bought a two-hectare swath of rain forest at the edge of Pacific Rim National Park Reserve. They built

'WE SURF ALL WINTER. THE WATER REALLY DOESN'T SINK BELOW EIGHT DEGREES.'

a clutch of bunkhouses beneath the dripping hemlocks and opened Canada's first permanent surf camp.

"We surf all winter. The water temperature really doesn't sink much below eight degrees," says Montgomery, who tracks incoming waves and wind on the Internet before choosing his beach for the day.

Today the waves are coming from the southeast, and Montgomery is half naked and shivering at the end of a logging road near Barkley Sound. As the wind drives fat drops of rain across the rutted road, he and two pals squeeze into five-millimetre neoprene wetsuits, hoods, gloves and booties.

"The water does leak into your suit," says one. "A few times, I have come out of the water and felt just nauseated with cold — I guess you'd call it mildly hypothermic. But if there's a strong current, you have to paddle hard. That keeps you warm."

The trio lug their boards down through a gap in the salal. They wade out through a field of boulders, slipping clumsily like beached seals in the froth of spent waves. Within minutes, they have paddled out through the breakers to where five black figures are already floating in the perfect grey swell. As sheets of rain sweep across the sound, the surfers drop like shadows across the slopes of breaking waves, ducking, turning, dancing over the marbled slopes.

Assistant lightkeeper Ivan Dubinsky (ABOVE) waits and watches for a Coast Guard helicopter bringing food and mail to the light station at Cape Beale. The red-tinted glass creates a unique signal that sailors can recognize.

Back on the beach, a worried collie paces and whines for her master. No wonder. The demographics of nautical disaster are changing. As British Columbia's independent fishing fleet dwindles, search-and-rescue crews are increasingly coming to the aid of recreationists caught in the weather's crossfire. Occasionally, Coast Guard crews in Tofino have to motor into the break zone to pluck exhausted surfers from the waves. They chase swamped pleasure boats, lost kayaks and, on a couple of occasions on the fringes of Pacific Rim National Park Reserve, storm watchers in trouble.

In the past 20 years, nine people have been dragged into the sea and drowned by what survivors call "rogue waves." Even on calm days, storms lurking just beyond the horizon create huge variations in the swells that arrive on the coast, explains Dan Vedova, the park's public-safety specialist. "The farther away the storm is, the wider the space can be between wave sets," Vedova says. "You can watch the sea for an hour, climb-

Beachum Englemark (ABOVE, with his wife Amy) survived when the fishing boat he was on capsized in a huge October storm last year. The Englemarks still live on a boat, and Beachum says he's not afraid of the rough waters he calls home — but he is more careful than ever.

ing closer and closer, then the first wave of a big set can arrive with no warning, like an avalanche, and you get smacked."

That's exactly what happened on an autumn day in 1997 on a rock shelf a short hike from the park's interpretive centre. A Scottish honeymooner turned his back on the sea just long enough for a wave to swat him off his perch. His limp body appeared in a wave-carved "surge channel" a few minutes later. On the heels of a receding wave, several of the man's companions scrambled down to retrieve the body. Before they could reach it, however, a second wall of whitewater roared up the channel and dragged two more tourists into the sea. By the time Vedova arrived, three people were dead.

Park officials, hotels and guides all warn tourists of the danger of rogue waves, says Vedova. But storm watchers seem to be drawn almost compulsively to the energy and power of the sea.

"Why do they do it, in spite of all the inherent danger?" Vedova asks. "Why do humans always venture to the edge of the precipice? What is it about our nature? Something about us is driven to the edge. Like moths to the flame."

FEW PEOPLE HAVE STOOD as close and as long next to the edge as has Norbert Brand, who has tended the lighthouse at Cape Beale for 26 years. The cape punches like a fist into the Pacific at the southern entrance to Barkley Sound. Storms, reefs and tides combine to make it ground zero for nautical disasters on Vancouver Island. Since 1856, more than 60 ships have been wrecked between the cape and Port Renfrew, leading mariners to dub the 56-kilometre stretch of rock and relics the "graveyard of the Pacific." The 1906 wrecking of the steamer *Valencia* near Pachena Point claimed 136 lives and spurred the construction of an escape route along the length of the graveyard coast (it's now the popular West Coast Trail).

Brand is not an easy man to reach. His lighthouse stands barely six kilometres from the fishing village of Bamfield, but in winter, the trail out to the light disappears into a maze of red rot, fallen cedar and flooded bogs.

We beg a ride from staff at the Bamfield Coast Guard Station, don helmets, goggles and overall-style life jackets, then climb into a Hurricane 733, an inflatable Zodiac designed for rough-water rescues. Instead of seats, the Hurricane has saddle-like consoles with handlebars. It all feels a bit like overkill until we leave the relative calm of Bamfield Harbour and our pilot, rescue specialist Steve Oakes, guns the boat's two 150-horsepower engines. Suddenly, we are skipping across Barkley Sound toward the open Pacific and the tail end of the storm that has been drenching the cape for 24 hours.

The sea shivers in the wind. As we move out of Barkley Sound, those ripples are lifted by a stampede of waves big enough to swamp a small boat. They, in turn, become wrinkles on the skin of the giants that rise beneath us, swells as high as houses, formed by storms hundreds, perhaps thousands of kilometres off the coast. We race up each swell until there is no water left beneath the Zodiac. Propellers spin and scream in the salty air, and we are momentarily weightless, white-knuckling our handlebars as the boat falls away beneath our feet and crashes with a shudder into each new trough.

Cape Beale is ringed by reefs that transform these swells into steep, breaking walls, forcing Oakes to zigzag through them like a skier through a field of impossible moguls. But he can't find a break in the gauntlet of rollers and refracted waves that blocks the harbour, and we have to return to Bamfield.

It takes us two days to find the right conditions to manage a landing. Finally, on a high tide, we surf into the cove on the back of an incoming roller. As we plow through the foam, I notice the rusted hull of a boat wedged into the side of a cliff above the sea.

Half an hour later, Norbert Brand and his assistant, Ivan Dubinsky, are serving us fresh-baked lemon loaf in Brand's kitchen. Rain spits across the window, beyond which the swells are growing, curling and exploding, one by one, into the reefs. The window vibrates. I mention the wrecked hull, and Brand shakes his head.

"The ocean, I call it the killer," he says with an emphatic lilt. Brand came to Canada from Germany in 1962 before

'THE WATER IS ALMOST SOOTHING. BUT IT WILL KILL YOU IF YOU'RE NOT CAREFUL.'

Writer Charles Montgomery (centre) takes an exhilarating ride aboard the Coast Guard cutter *Cape Calvert* in the treacherous waters of Cape Beale near Bamfield, B.C. For lifeboat coxswain Clay Evans (at helm) and rescue specialist Steve Oakes, this is a routine patrol.

serving in the Canadian Navy for less than two years. "Sometimes when storm fronts pass, the fishermen think they can squeeze in a few hours of fishing, but then the next front flies in and catches them."

And the wreck? Brand sighs. It's all that remains of the Bamfield-based trawler *Dalewood Provider*. He first spotted it through his window during a December storm in 1995. The trawler was bobbing upside down in the surf below his kitchen window. He scrambled down across the rocks to look for its crew.

"What a storm. Oh, it was rock 'n' rolling out there. It was like Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde* — you know, dum, dum, boom, boom!" Brand exclaims, waving his arms like an orchestra conductor. "I could smell the diesel fuel coming up in the wave spray. There were life jackets, hatches, a life ring, debris floating all over the place, but I couldn't see anyone in the water."

Brand radioed the Coast Guard, then spent the next 20 hours scouring the ragged coastline, calling out the names of the crew while helicopters buzzed beneath the low clouds with searchlights. The sky tore open at dawn to reveal one waterlogged body on the rocks, another lying broken among a heap of wave-burnished logs. A dazed survivor was found in a cranberry bog.

I scramble below the lighthouse, across a wave-carved arch to a rock thrusting from the sea like a weathered whale bone. Stunted hemlocks shake violently in the wind. Rain sweeps down from the murky sky. And the sea is like clam chowder on high boil.

Mounds of reflected slush collide with the incoming rollers, sprouting jagged cornices and giant bouquets of froth before collapsing and avalanching again toward the cape. Again and again, the swells pour over the edge of my rock and slam into the cliffs with great belches of mist and spray 10, now 20 metres high. The wind lifts bits of foam from the melee and sends them fluttering above me like white birds.

In the aftermath of an autumn storm, a Coast Guard helicopter approaches the Cape Beale lighthouse, carrying supplies on a run that takes it from Victoria to as far north as Langara Island. The wicked weather, powerful ocean currents and isolated, rocky shores conspire to make this coastline every sailor's nightmare.

The world is a thousand shades of grey, undulating, surging and exploding all at once. Even my rock seems to sway.

I am exhilarated and nauseated by the terrible fury of it all, not least by the strange impulse I have to climb down from my perch, get just a little closer. Touch the void.

It strikes me that so many of us are drawn to storms, as Vedova says, like moths to flames, for the same reason some people pray, meditate or take drugs. Here, in the roar of the surf, in the overwhelming fury of the tempest, there is a power which might be enough to obscure the petty problems of our daily lives, enough to overwhelm us and confirm that the universe is, indeed, beyond our control, that we are not gods, that we are almost transcendentally helpless in the face of it all. Perhaps that's what Englemark meant when he said that amid the cold and noise and confusion of the storm which swallowed the *Kella-Lee*, he felt strangely at peace.

I shiver and turn to see Brand watching me from the salal.

"The water hypnotizes you, doesn't it?" he says. "It's almost soothing, like a campfire. But it will kill you if you're not careful."

Later that night, Brand tells me that God is alive on the cape. A quarter century of storms and solitude have taught him that. But alive, too, are the ghosts of the storm victims, hundreds of souls who didn't stand a chance in the waves between their sinking vessels and the scoured cliffs.

"I feel their presence," he says, putting a hand on my shoulder. "Certain storms bring them out. I'll be watching the waves pound on the rocks, and out of it all, I will hear voices. I hear slams, bangs and crashes. It's almost overpowering."

That feeling comes strongest, like a knot in Brand's chest, near the wreck of the *Dalewood Provider*. He refuses to hike anywhere near it.

Lightkeepers like Brand have had to fight to keep their posts in recent years. By 1998, the Coast Guard had vacated 16 of British Columbia's lighthouses, leaving the work to automated beacons and weather recording devices. Public outcry helped keep 27 stations staffed, including Cape Beale. Human presence at Cape Beale has saved dozens of lives in the past decade, according to Bamfield Coast Guard staff.

Still, weather forecasters are increasingly relying on automated stations on land and sea. In 1981, the Coast Guard deactivated its two Pacific weather ships to save money. Three years later, a marine "bomb" like the one that hit the *Kella-Lee* sank seven fishing boats and claimed the lives of five mariners off the west coast of Vancouver Island. The resulting LeBlond Inquiry determined that Environment Canada just wasn't getting the information it needed to detect big storms in time to warn the ships.

One of the government's solutions was to strengthen its automated reporting network. Environment Canada now collects data from 16 weather buoys along the west coast and monitors wind direction and speed, barometric pressure, air and water temperature and wave height. Every

hour, data are beamed to a stationary satellite above the equator. The signal then bounces through a station in Virginia and at the Canadian Meteorological Centre in Montréal before arriving in Vancouver. Meteorologists at the Pacific Weather Centre crunch the data and stir the information together with satellite images and reports from private vessels, other automated stations and lighthouses to come up with their forecasts.

The Coast Guard broadcasts general marine forecasts by radio. But Skipper George Newson often called the weather centre directly, looking for a window in which he might grab a few extra hours of work. Newson called twice on the evening the *Kella-Lee* went down, remembers marine forecaster Owen Lange. The centre's computer models were predicting storm-force winds off the north end of Vancouver Island. Both men thought the trawler had her weather window, that she could sidestep the worst of the incoming coastal low.

Newson dropped his halibut lines one last time.

"Then the weather came in with a real bang," says Lange, who had interviewed Newson for a book he is writing about marine weather. "It went from nothing to mega, mega winds, a very concentric low — up to hurricane force at one point. I was listening to the search-and-rescue radio channel when the first mayday came in. My jaw just dropped. The Coast Guard wasn't sure who it was at first, but I knew it must be George."

Lange listened helplessly as the coast's search-and-rescue network swung into action. Radios hissed with communication between the Department of National Defence's Joint Rescue Coordination Centre in Victoria, Coast Guard bases on Vancouver Island, the marine communications and traffic services centre in Ucluelet, Buffalo aircraft dispatched from CFB Comox, a handful of private vessels and the CCGS *John P. Tully*, a 69-metre Coast Guard vessel on patrol near Queen Charlotte Sound.

Just before dawn, nearly seven hours after the *Kella-Lee* went down, Englemark saw a light on the horizon. He waved his flashlight and tried to swim toward the light, which reappeared every time he reached the crest of a swell. The light grew, then split into the red and green port and starboard lights of a ship. Englemark was overwhelmed with exhaustion, sadness and then joy as he was bathed in the glare of a spotlight from the deck of the *Tully*.

Later that day, the *Tully* picked up the bodies of Jan VandenDries and Skipper George Newson. In the afternoon, a Labrador helicopter rescued Paul Sport, one of Englemark's crewmates, who was alive and drifting in the *Kella-Lee*'s life raft.

The *Kella-Lee*'s emergency beacon was never found. Newson's mayday saved Englemark — that and the darkness which turned his flashlight into a perfect, flickering star on the black canvas of the sea.

I MEET ENGLEMARK on the calm side of Vancouver Island, where he now lives with his wife Amy on a 36-foot cabin cruiser at Comox Bay Marina. It was here that he first spotted George Newson loading bait back in September 2001 and asked whether the skipper needed an extra pair of strong hands. Englemark does have a mariner's handshake: rough, strong and calloused. He still works on the sea, but now as a deckhand on the BC Ferries run to Powell River.

I tell Englemark about storm watchers, about their attraction to big weather. Like moths to a flame. He just laughs. It wasn't adventure or philosophy and certainly not a need to experience nature's anger that led him to the *Kella-Lee* and his hours alone in the water. But something of the storm did rub off on him that night. His hazel-green eyes are striking for their assuredness, a sense of calm so unusual in a young man. He can hold your gaze. This is someone who has indeed touched the void.

'YOU CAN'T BLAME YOURSELF. YOU ARE THE WEATHERMAN. YOU'RE NOT THE WEATHER.'

Englemark admits he still dreams of the *Kella-Lee*, of dark seas and a deck forever heaped with wide-eyed halibut. He remembers George Newson's funeral and the stranger who reached, tentatively, to shake his hand. It was weather forecaster Owen Lange.

"He was hurting badly," Englemark says. "He seemed to be holding so much blame, as though it was his fault. I remember saying to him, 'You can't blame yourself. You are the weatherman. You're not the weather.'

"After all, none of us really knows what is going on up there in the clouds. We can try to make an educated, scientific guess about the weather, and forecasters do a good job of that, but we don't have control over it. We can never really know exactly what a storm is thinking. If it decides to blow up, it can do so in an instant. "But the storm isn't trying to do you in. It isn't trying to do anything. It just is."

Now a southwesterly wind is building off the Strait of Georgia and whistling through the riggings of the sailboats and trawlers that crowd the marina. Halyards thump against masts in an unnerving, insistent rhythm. The dark belly of an approaching storm has mounted the forested spine of Vancouver Island and is now bubbling across the bay, pushing down toward the dock.

Englemark rubs his hands together and checks the mooring on his boat. Halley and I jump into our trucks and join the stream of minivans and SUVs heading west to Tofino and the heart of the approaching storm. ◇

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