

MY POWELL LAKE FLOATING HOME

By Wayne Lutz

I live in a cabin that floats on a lake. In decades gone by, such floating homes were more common, located at logging camps and canneries in the coastal inlets of British Columbia. Today, Powell Lake is one of the few remaining havens for those who want to live loosely tethered to shore. Mostly summer retreats for local residents, float cabins provide a unique way to experience the lake environment. For me, it serves as my all-season home.

For twenty years, as a college aeronautics professor in Los Angeles, I took advantage of the opportunity to explore Canada's northern territories during the summer, camping under the wing of a small airplane. In the process, I visited some of the most beautiful places on earth, flying along the Arctic Ocean, tracking (carefully) musk oxen near Cambridge Bay, and exploring the Yukon. I've probably seen more of Canada than many Canadians.

But eight years ago, I discovered Powell Lake and the unique cabins that float on water. After that, I kept returning to British Columbia each summer, never again flying farther north. I fell in love with this part of the coast, where mountains drop into the sea and living focuses on self-reliance and a different sense of purpose. Cabins floating on a lake drew me in, quite a change in lifestyle for a city-dweller.



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Now I am one of the few year-round residents on the lake. My occupation changed from professor to author, and I immediately had something exciting to write about; a place to write that surpasses anywhere else I've known.

Other residents on the lake come and go in the off-season, mostly on weekends, but seldom does anyone stay overnight except in summer. Yet here I am, floating on Powell Lake, writing and weathering the storms. For someone who has lived most of his life in California, this is a place where the progression of the seasons can be appreciated.

When a storm moves in, the biggest danger is the wind, although my cabin is in a bay that is better protected than most places on the lake. Since a boat is needed to reach my floating home, the greatest self-imposed hazard is traveling on the lake in windy conditions. When in doubt, wait it out.

I ride out the storms. Steel cables anchor my cabin to the cliff, and a strong cedar float forms a skookum foundation for an all-season home. Powell Lake is wonderfully isolated in the winter. On many days, the only passing vessels are logging crew boats or tugs towing barges or booms of logs. The view out the big glass door of my cabin is like a continuous wide-screen, high-definition TV, with unlimited program content. The landscape remains fixed, but the weather and boats form an ever-changing drama.



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During windy conditions, the cabin travels outward to the full extent of the shoreline cables, bringing the cabin to a rather abrupt halt. The jarring thump doesn't rattle the dishes, but reminds me that I live on a mobile foundation. As soon as the cabin jerks to a stop, it starts back towards shore. The ride in that direction ends when the float foundation whacks against the stiff leg, a log that keeps the cabin away from the cliff – another mild thump. Back and forth I go, slowly and almost melodically, while the wind generator adds a whoosh as its blades spin up, momentarily adding a few amperes to my off-the-grid electrical system.

In summer, the lake is a more tranquil spot from the standpoint of weather, but more active when it comes to people and wildlife. I share the water with recreational boaters, logging equipment, cutthroat trout, and a few loons. To cool off, I can dive off my deck in all directions, usually into the natural swimming pool that lies between the cabin and the nearby cliff wall.

Summer days are long and warm, and the harshness of winter is nearly forgotten. But summer will end, and I will stay here warming myself next to the wood stove, in a home that floats on the lake.

