



B.C. Power Commission Photo

## Fangs of Ripple Rock

By SGT. E. SCOTT

**R**IPPLE Rock, that miniature mountain of basalt rising sheer from the ocean depths of Vancouver Island's Seymour Narrows, has been feared and respected by mariners for generations. A few months ago its fame, fostered by a surfeit of newspaper, radio and TV coverage, had become a household word in every coastal community—"Old Rip" was soon to have its fangs shortened.

Since the days of the early Spanish explorers and Capt. George Vancouver, ships plying the Pacific Coast to northern British Columbia and Alaska ports invariably chose the "inside passage", protected from Pacific Ocean swells and storms by the mass of Vancouver Island. Until it enters Discovery Passage the seaway averages some 30 miles in width and provides good sailing. Midway up the Passage, however, the shorelines of Quadra and

Vancouver Islands converge, and here the two-mile strip of channel places them almost within arrow-shot of each other. At the southern end, a scant nine and 19 feet below surface at low tide, lay the pinnacles of Ripple Rock.

Though the charts he compiled are remarkably accurate to this day, the chronicles of Captain Vancouver's explorations gave little hint of the fearsome menace to modern navigators that lay below the surface. He piloted his ship *Discovery* through on July 15, 1792, after his longboats had explored the "four-league" length of Discovery Passage and reported it safe for navigation to the north. On an ebb tide and with a favorable west wind, the *Discovery*, followed by some canoes from a nearby Indian settlement, sailed "through a very narrow pass with high rocky shores on both sides . . . and the Tide run very rapid".

Narrow and rapid indeed. The shores were less than half a mile apart, and the tide probably running at a good 14 knots!

Many years were to pass before the Rock in Seymour Narrows acquired the

**Top of page—Aerial view of Ripple Rock. In the foreground is construction camp, with main shaft tower seen toward left. A causeway connects Quadra Island with Maud Island on left.**