

sinister reputation it bears today. History does not record the many shipwrecks it caused before 1875, but in that year the USS *Saramac*, a side-wheel steamer of 2,150 tons, struck the reef in mid-channel and the Commander was forced to beach his vessel and save his crew before she slipped to the bottom, 60 fathoms below. Ripple Rock had claimed its first recorded victim.

From that day on the history of the Inside Passage has contained its share of disasters which have occurred along its 300-mile length, but of the many localities which test the nerve and skill of the navigator, none has taken such a tragic toll of ships and lives than the hidden menace at Seymour Narrows. Twenty large vessels have been lost or severely damaged, and at least 100 smaller craft sunk. A conservative estimate sets the tragic toll of life at 114.

Still, in spite of its dangers, ships large and small continued to make the passage, there being no practical alternative. Each year, 1,500 to 2,000 deep sea vessels sail past Ripple Rock, and about 5,000 smaller craft. They carry some 175,000 passengers and well over \$100 million in cargoes. Except at the brief slack water periods, only ships with sufficient speed to cope with the 12-15 knot tides, and manoeuvrability to overcome the tremendous eddies and cross-currents, could venture past the Rock. Frequently even larger ships preferred to wait for favorable tide conditions, and in this way thousands of man and sailing hours were lost each year.

The Federal Government, with its responsibility for the safety of Canada's navigable waterways, was keenly aware of the lethal hazard lying beneath the surface of Seymour Narrows. Government ships had been in trouble there too. HMS *Satellite* hit in 1884, and in 1944, the hydrographic survey ship *William J. Stewart* was heavily damaged while taking soundings at the Rock. Even the RCMP had difficulties there; in the fall of 1957, the RCMP *Nanaimo*, at that

time our newest Pacific Coast ship, suffered transmission failure while returning to Campbell River off patrol—of all places, in Seymour Narrows. Gripped by the powerful eddies, she spun in crazy circles, nearer and nearer the jagged shoreline. Apprised by radio of the impending disaster, the Campbell River Detachment NCO stood anxiously by the receiver, prepared for the worst. Fortunately the same swirling currents which edged our little craft to disaster's brink swung her back into midstream, and she slid through to the safety of a friendly tow.

Even as our ship drifted helpless in the Narrows a few months ago, far below them, in the bowels of Ripple Rock itself, men were working on a project designed to remove the dangerous pinnacles, and reduce the violent surgings of the confined waters above.

The first operation to remove the peaks of the Rock was undertaken in 1943. Anchored by heavy steel cables to huge sunken blocks of concrete, a barge was floated over the Rock and an attempt made to drill holes into the reef, which were to be loaded with explosive and blasted. So great was the vibration of the cables from the terrific force of the tidal currents that they snapped like threads, and this line of attack had to be abandoned. Two years later, the barge method was tried again, this time anchored by overhead cables spanning the 2,500-foot distance between Vancouver and Maud Islands. Successful drilling was found to be impossible, but before man again surrendered to the elements, nine workmen were drowned when their small boat was sucked under by the powerful eddies.

Several years passed, but shipping interests and mariners who must take their vessels through the hazardous Narrows, maintained their insistence that the Rock could and should be rendered harmless. In 1953, the National Research Council commenced a study on the feasibility of mining the Rock. With great difficulty a 2,500-foot drill core was obtained, and it was established that nothing but an