



# From the Wheelhouse: Tugboaters Tell Their Own Stories

*Doreen Armitage*

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Towboats have been a part of British Columbia's history since 1836, when the Hudson's Bay Company's ungainly sidewheeler *S.S. Beaver* made the first powered tow up the coast. Over the years, tugs and their crews have towed just about everything, including food, machinery, rocks, paper, oil, salt, lumber, oil rigs, deep-sea ships, cars and houses. The humble but admirable tug has kept BC's marine economy vital and industrious.

*From the Wheelhouse* captures the ins and outs of working in this often overlooked but important industry: relentless tides, wild weather, breakaway barges, the boredom, the practical jokes, superstitions, camaraderie and the agony of a failed rescue attempt.

Author and historian Doreen Armitage interviewed 16 old-time tugboat captains, engineers and deckhands to assemble this intimate and often hair-raising account of life aboard BC tugs. Tugs are called to emergencies on the water, working with the Coast Guard and fireboats to save lives and retrieve damaged vessels. Storms, fog, riptides and whirlpools, bridges, even other boats operated by inexperienced or careless hands can put a tug and its crew in jeopardy.

Beautifully illustrated with archival photos and images from the personal collections of the skippers who appear within its pages, *From the Wheelhouse* is both a lively, personal look at the history of towboating in BC and an engaging portrait of the famous coastal characters and vessels that have shaped this region's maritime history.

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