

Why doesn't Red Right Returning work for Discovery Passage? - Capt. Geoff

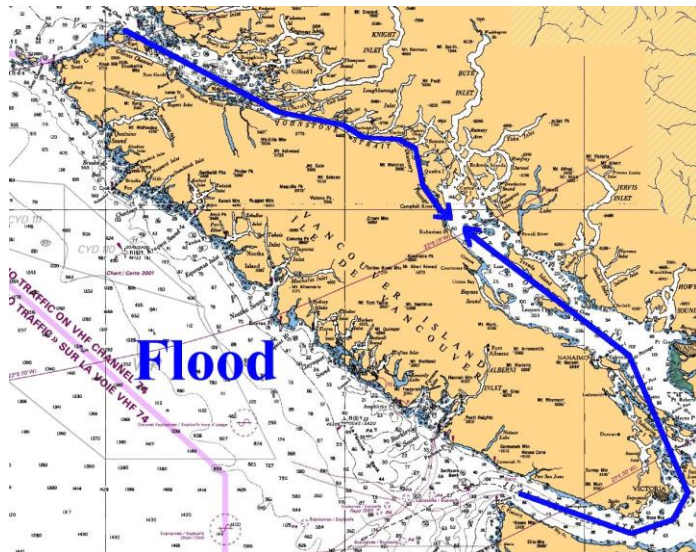
Under our buoyage system, you are supposed to keep red lateral buoys to starboard when proceeding "upstream" (for example heading up the Fraser river). In tidal waters, this is the same direction as the flood current, as the rising tide fills the harbour basin (heading you from seaward towards Vancouver, which in turn could lead to you heading up the Fraser). A common aid to memory is Red Right Returning.

When coming from seaward, through the Juan de Fuca Strait, and up through the Gulf Islands towards Georgia Strait, the lateral buoys follow the red right with the flood convention.

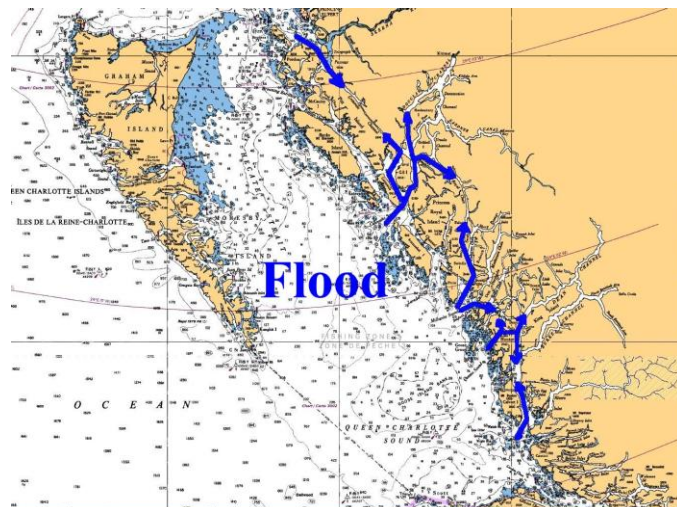
In Campbell River, beacons still follow this convention when entering harbour, as can be seen by the green beacon at the tip of the Government breakwater, Discovery Harbour, etc.

However with the Flood current running south past Cape Mudge, the Wilby Shoals buoy should be green, shouldn't it?

A problem arises because Vancouver Island is protecting our inshore waters (the Southern section of the "Inside Passage"). The flood current comes from the north and the south to fill Georgia Strait, and the two streams meet a little south of Campbell River.

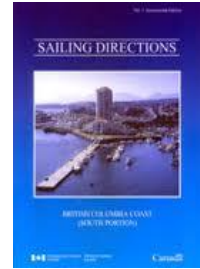


To the North of Vancouver Island, there are many smaller islands protecting the inshore waters (which makes up the Northern section of the "Inside Passage"), so the direction of the flood changes multiple times. If you are navigating from Victoria to Prince Rupert through the "Inside Passage", red and green would have to constantly switch sides to comply with red right when running with the flood.



This would obviously be very confusing. So it was decided that for routes such as the inside passage, a coastwise system was needed for lateral aids.

The explanation can be found in the Sailing Directions. This is an official government publication, which as the name implies, provides information on proceeding through channels and into ports. Meant to be used in conjunction with charts, it gives information on hazards that might be encountered, such as around Seymour Narrows and Cape Mudge, as well as information about Port Facilities such as Campbell River. (While primarily developed for large Commercial ships, it also has aerial photos of some smaller marinas, such as Pacific Playgrounds and Salmon Point.)



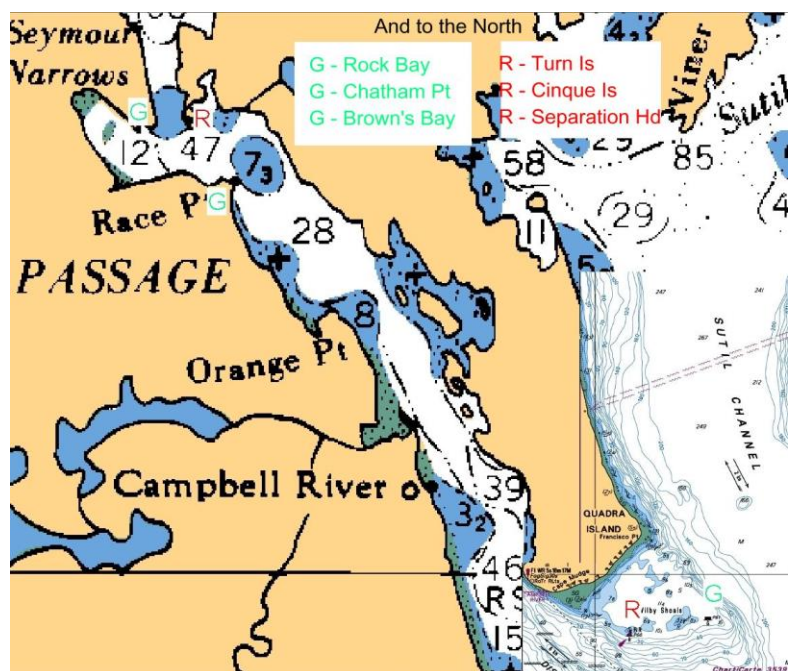
On Page 16 of the Vol. 1 (South Portion), Sixteenth Edition, page 16 it states:

The Lateral System indicates the course of a navigable waterway. The sides of the navigable waterway are indicated by buoys of a defined shape, colour or light characteristic in relation to the upstream direction. This upstream direction is in the direction from seaward, towards the headwaters, into a harbour, up a river or with the flood tide. In general, the upstream direction is in a northerly direction along the Pacific coast, in and an easterly direction along the Arctic coast and in a southerly direction along the Atlantic coast.

It should be noted that although the flood tides meet in the vicinity of Sentry Shoal (49 55N 125 00W) the fact has no effect on buoyage, which should be treated as though the flood tidal streams continue north beyond this point.

The result, as you can see while heading north through Discovery Passage, is that red is to starboard even though you are proceeding against the flood.

Once round Chatham Point (green), the imaginary flood runs westward, as can be seen by the colours used at Rock Point, Walkem Is., etc.



If you are heading up the inlets, any lateral aid to navigation should follow the red right returning convention (think of either the direction of the flood, or a harbour at the head of the inlet). However around the islands, the aids may conform to either the actual flood, or the imaginary northerly/westerly flood as used in Discovery Pass. The area around Stuart Island and Green Point are examples of using the imaginary flood.

Like all articles in this series, this was not written to scare people off of boating. This is a beautiful area for boating, with hundreds of miles of channels and many inlets and bays to explore. However, like driving on the road, you must know the rules, and Discovery passage can be akin to a busy road at times. To learn more about Collision Regulations and other subjects, including information on the in-depth courses that Ripple Rock Power & Sail Squadron offers, please visit www.riplerocksquadron.com