At the close of the Cretaceous there was a long period of erosion resulting in peneplanation which is still evident on the eastern part of the islands.

During Tertiary time there was some volcanic activity, the Skonan sandstones, shales, and lignite were deposited, and the latter were overlain by the Massett basaltic flows.

The Northeastern Lowland of the Queen Charlottes is a great swampy area almost at sea level. This lowland appears to be slowly rising and it is probable that the environment, with the exception of the period of Massett volcanic activity, has changed little since the Miocene when the Skonan formation was laid down. The adjacent Hecate Strait is very shallow and at present we here have a facies change of contemporaneous sediments grading from continental in the lowland through brackish near the coast to the shallow marine environment of Hecate Strait.

The west coast of the Charlottes is unhabited and very rugged. The mountains dip steeply into the sea and a short distance from the shore there are 600 fathoms of water. The Islands are covered with a very dense forest growth and there are few outcrops except on the mountain tops and along the sea coasts. The forests are composed of spruce, hemlock, and alder with a dense undergrowth of small shrubs, devil’s club, and various other bushes. They are literally impenetrable. Trees with four and six foot stumps are common and the writer has heard that the record Sitka spruce had a fourteen foot stump. This is truly a rain forest; the minimum rain fall area being in the north-eastern lowland where the precipitation averages only forty inches a year. The maximum rainfall is at Lockport further south where the annual figure is in the order of two hundred and eighty inches.

The area is the storm centre of our northwestern coast and is subject to terrific gales; sixty miles an hour southeast gales being common. Foul as the weather is and little as the sun shines, strangely enough the climate is not unpleasant. Everyone goes about their business, rain or shine, regardless of the elements. Gales, of course, will drive fishing boats into shelter. It is probable that the fascination of the weather is the excitement inherent in it.

The natives of the Queen Charlottes are the Haidas, that word being a corruption of a word in their own language meaning “The Inlet People”. The Haidas have strong Polynesian aspect, the women, as is usually the case, seem to carry the racial characteristics. They are often auburn haired and rather fair skinned. The men are short and heavy set and have sometimes been described as having “canoe bodies”. Where there were once about 50,000 Haidas living in 31 separate villages, there are now less than 1500 not including a village at Wrangell, Alaska, populated by descendants of a group of Haidas who left the Queen Charlotte Islands to avoid warfare with their own people. They probably arrived in the Queen Charlottes not too long before our appearance on the coast, an event which arrested their great clockwise migration around the Pacific. Ethnologists indicate that they may have spent some time in the Japanese Islands as there is a trace of Japanese culture in evidence. Before our civilization smothered theirs, they were making raids as far south as San Francisco and there is no doubt that these raids were merely a function of their migration.

As is common with so many island groups, the fauna is limited and unique. There are the usual furbearers: mink, squirrel, martin, and three species of black bear; ‘possums are very common but the writer is not sure whether or not they were introduced. The small Pacific coast deer abounds in great numbers and is hunted all year round, either bucks or does being game. Elk have been introduced but have not taken hold successfully although in the fall of 1950 there was an open season on them. Some writers have discussed the existence of caribou in the remoter areas but although there

QUEEN CHARLOTTE ISLANDS
by W. B. Gallup

The Queen Charlottes were named in 1781 by Captain Dickson of the British Navy. They were, however, visited at a much earlier date by the Spanish, who possibly arrived there as early as 1639. Following the exploratory period, the natives of the Queen Charlottes were exposed to the rather dubious blessings of the fur trade which finally were withdrawn about the middle of the last century. The discovery of gold at Gold Harbor created a minor gold rush in about 1860 and there has been a certain amount of prospecting on the Island since that time although no commercial gold has ever been found. The economy of the Islands is now based on the timber and fishing industry.

The Queen Charlotte Islands are actually a partially submerged mountain range perched on the edge of the continental shelf. They are, for the most part, sinking although the northeastern lowland is presently rising. They are the same range of mountains which may be traced southward through Vancouver Island, the Olympic Range, and south as far as California where there they may be compared to Catalina Island and such features lying off the coast of California. Hecate Strait which separates the Charlottes from the mainland is probably one of the most northerly basins of the Pacific downwarp which may be traced southward through the Georgia Straits, the Willamet Valley, the Great Valley of California, the Salton sink, and the Gulf of California.

The core of the Queen Charlotte mountain range is composed of Jurassic intrusives of the coast range batholith. These rocks have intruded Jurassic shales and limestones, the Maude formation, the pyroclastics and flows of the middle Jurassic Yakoun formation which overlies the Maude. Following this intrusion there was considerable erosion and peneplanation during which period the upper Cretaceous, Haida, Honna, and Skidegate formations were laid down. These formations are composed mainly of sandstones and shales with some coal in the Skidegate and Haida groups.