

SECTION 17: CROSSING THE SOUND

Tuesday, August 14, 2007

Fury Cove to Port Hardy, British Columbia

Route 104: 52.80 miles

Crossing Queen Charlotte Sound, the open ocean north of the top of Vancouver Island, marks the end of the “northern” part of our adventure. Now we expect to see more sunshine, more people. It’s time for a summer vacation.

Ocean Falls gave us a final “farewell” to steep fjord inlets and, we hope, to rain. Rain forests are pretty, but are they ever wet! No wonder the people at Ocean Falls call themselves “rain people.”

Our goal is to get to Port Hardy, the northernmost community on Vancouver Island. Our Waggoner Cruising Guide devotes an entire page to “How to Cross Queen Charlotte Sound” and suggests four possible routes. “Queen Charlotte Sound can be ugly,” it cautions, especially if gale force winds come up in late afternoon. We crossed in late afternoon going north, taking a course close to the B.C. mainland, but we were lucky – and the only boat out there.

This time we will choose the popular Pine Island Route and pass further out from Cape Caution, the point of land on the B.C. mainland that sticks out the farthest into Queen Charlotte Sound. First we will head southwest to get past Rivers Inlet and Smith Sound, where water from rivers on the Coast Mountains draining to sea can cause confused waves and current. Then we will head towards a series of islands at the top of Queen Charlotte Strait, the body of water between the mainland and northern Vancouver Island, and eventually to Port Hardy, about 30 miles from the top of Vancouver Island.

Bob wanted to set the alarm for 4:00 a.m. and leave at 5 a.m. We compromised on 4:30 but at 4:30 it was dark out, so we reset for 5:00. Still dark: 5:30 is the new wake-up time. Days are definitely getting shorter. I woke up last night about 2 a.m. and looked at the sky, just filled with stars. I cannot remember the last time we saw stars. Either it has been too light, (with the long summer days) or too overcast. When we started this journey, night barely existed, with light starting before 4 a.m. and ending after 10 p.m. in Alaska.

It’s 6:10 a.m. now. We raise the anchor and clear Fury Cove, finding flat, glassy seas and a faint tinge of pink on the horizon. One boat is ahead of us – we saw it come down FitzHugh Sound right outside the cove. We are just ahead of two others from Fury Cove. A few other boats are also out, fishing or transiting.

The seas are a little confused near Rivers Inlet, but not bad. The boat rolls a little, but it is not severe. As we approach Egg Island, seas seem to smooth out. Currents must be ebbing, as they are pushing us along – up to 10 knots SOG (speed over ground), adding about 2 knots to our boat speed.

We pass Cape Caution at 8:40 a.m. We are much further out than the last time, but as before it is calm near Cape Caution with just a long low swell, a foot or less. Unlike before, several boats are out, going or coming or just fishing. We are not alone.

We are entering a new stage of the trip, more vacation-like, surrounded by more boats, and by different kinds of boats, not the trawler cruisers prevalent in Alaska, but more sedan type, like Bayliners.

Northern Adventure, the BC Ferry, is coming at us – again. How many times we have crossed paths! Most recently it was on Seaforth Channel as we, feeling ill, approached Shearwater and I was at the helm. The biggest waves we’ve had on this crossing were from Northern Adventure, when she passed us just 400 yards away.

Approaching Pine Island there is stuff in the water -- “wooden bergy bits” -- that bring to mind our adventure at Tracy Arm with the cruise ship Empress of the North, our personal icebreaker.

We’re inside Storm Islands now and can see a string of small islands, at least ten, the outer island sparsely forested, others thicker. Swells are a bit bigger here as we enter Queen Charlotte Strait. We pass Pine Island at 10 a.m. The swells have calmed down, at least temporarily. Pine Island’s white buildings, about four of them with red roofs up on a cliff at the center of the island, stand out against the dark rock island. The bright green lawn, surrounded by the island’s dark rocks and dark trees, looks immaculate in the sunshine.



As we enter wide Gordon Channel the swells come back, about six-foot high following seas. This is not predicted, just normal. I would not like to be here when it is rough!

Scarlett Point offers another red-roofed welcome, this one on an exposed bluff, the greenery sloping down its sides, appearing more mosslike and less like a mowed lawn. Looking east from Scarlett Point (aptly named with the red roofs) we can see shadowy mountains far in the distance on the mainland.

We pass God's Pocket, a popular jumping off spot for crossing Queen Charlotte Sound. It's a tiny inlet and not what I expected. Somehow I had envisioned this on an island way out, off the end of Vancouver Island, but it turns out it is on Hurst Island, on Christie Pass, which seems very close to "civilization" to us, coming in from crossing Queen Charlotte Sound. It's much closer to Vancouver Island than I had envisioned. It has been a long time -- nine weeks -- since we last saw Vancouver Island. Now Vancouver Island is back to our west -- and will be the rest of the trip.

We are following a fish boat in towards Port Hardy. The season north has ended. Going down Goletas Channel, we see what looks like a big fish farm or some kind of aquaculture near Duncan Island. Canadians have a lot of fish farms. Alaskans disagree, proclaiming on T-shirts and posters that: "Friends Don't Let Friends Eat Farmed Fish."

Traffic control changes at Cape Caution from Prince Rupert to Comox. Commercial boats all check in and get briefing on other traffic (ferries, cruise ships etc), including "large group of fishing boats west side of Calvert Island."



Hardy Bay is really a large V-shaped inlet ending with shallows and town. Low hills form the sides of the V, many showing new growth after logging. A couple of significant rock shoals extend out so you have to go to the far south side of the bay to avoid them. Lots of small fishing boats crowd Duval Point as we enter the bay at noon; half an hour later, we reach the marina.

There are advantages to being small. The Quarterdeck Inn & Marina, nearly full, has space for us to wiggle into, but none when 36-foot Tahoma calls in soon after. (We met them at Glacier Bay,. Punchbowl and Shearwater.) The marina also has sunshine, a cell phone signal and an internet connection! (It's \$10 a day, but who's complaining?) It's these little things that brighten our day: A cell phone that works, today's newspaper today (after 10 a.m. but today, not tomorrow), and, of course, email.

With this wonderful sunshine, it's time for the crew to have a bath. Our solar shower bag has been on the roof, warming up. Bob gets the Buddy Wash and brings Sam into the

cockpit. We prefer to use the showers ashore, but soon all of us are clean and refreshed, and ready for dinner.



At I.V.'s Quarterdeck Pub we chat with the people at the next table. They live on an island in Ballet Bay, at the entrance to Jervis Inlet, the waterway farther south in British Columbia that eventually leads to Princess Louisa Falls. It's fascinating. They have high speed internet, satellite TV and power (off the grid), but getting water was tricky. They had to run a weighted PVC pipe underwater to an adjacent island with a stream, then triple-filter the water. We told them about our adventures and how well the little MacBook has worked for navigation. They are on a sailboat, heading north but not too far, just to the FitzHugh Sound area near Fury Cove; we didn't explore that area much.

We had originally planned to go directly to the Broughtons and bypass Port Hardy on the way south, but we needed to get fuel and changed plans. As it turned out, it was a fortuitous decision.

Wednesday, August 15, 2007
Port Hardy, Vancouver Island, British Columbia

So many times I have written: "We couldn't have done that if not for our chart plotter..." Well, now we will find out. Bob's wonderful MacBook took us to Alaska and back across Queen Charlotte Sound...and now is rebelling. Like HAL, the disobedient computer in 2001:Space Odyssey, we are allowed to venture out but not return. The computer, which holds our only electronic Canadian charts, has died, or at best gone on vacation. We had intended to head east to the Broughtons today, but instead must solve this equipment problem.

Right now, at 9:45 p.m., my computer, the back up one, which has most but not all charts, will not talk to the GPS satellites. Bob is working on trouble-shooting his computer, the one that crashed. He has been doing this for the last four hours. Each time, the "repair"

mode gets a little farther along before reporting an error. At dinner just last night he was telling people how reliable the Mac was and that it has not been turned off for something like eight weeks...Perhaps it heard and rebelled.

My computer has all the U.S. charts and is intended to be a back up computer as well as missive recorder. But Canadian charts, unlike U.S. ones, have stringent copyright protections and cannot be copied. Using an Apple computer instead of the more common Microsoft-dominated PC also complicates things.

This is a well-equipped marina, with a yard, travel lift and marine store. We tried to buy a disk of Canadian charts, but they do not carry them at the marina store. We did buy paper charts for the Broughtons – at a cost of more than \$100. We can get there without electronic chats --- people even as “young” as we are have done it for years – but it is harder, more stressful and less reliable. We jokingly call electronic charts “cheating” – but it is. Instead of talking bearings and plotting positions onto a paper chart, we just watch as the GPS talking to a satellite tracks our progress, showing us precisely where we are on the computer screen. Like too many other things, it’s too easy. At least things failed after Cape Caution and at port instead of underway. We’ve made some calls to try to solve the problem.

Since we are temporarily stranded, we borrowed a truck from the marina and made a grocery run. They just handed us the keys, never asking for any driver’s license or proof of insurance. Of course, they have our boat, should we skip town.



Today is a sunny, balmy, warm day and people are enjoying the weather break. Port Hardy is a small town and we quickly finished our errands, then toured. A city park was filled with people, just picnicking and enjoying the great weather. I suspect this balmy weather is the exception, not the rule; the town map even shows a curling rink for winter enjoyment.

Thursday, August 16

The marina people have been helpful. After a few phone calls we discovered that one of the few places on Vancouver Island that sells electronic Canadian charts is located in Port Hardy – in fact, it’s just across the street. So we call Stryker Marine and for \$276 CDN we are back in business – sort of. They suggest we bring the computer in to install the software and it’s a good thing. Bob and their tech person try for hours to get the verification codes. We remember now why my computer does not have this software...the distribution company changed last spring and they still do not know how to deal with an Apple computer, so we were unable to use the original disk (which we left at home) to install the charts on my computer. Eventually, the tech guy takes my computer, goes in the backroom, does something and comes out with a nav system that works.

Friday, August 17, 2007

Port Hardy, Vancouver Island, to Sullivan Bay, the Broughtons, British Columbia Route 1: 30.19 miles

We are finally back in business with electronic charts and ready to head out to cross Queen Charlotte Strait – only a weather front is predicted to pass through. We have decided to let it pass and then cross when winds lighten. Bob has gone to borrow the marina’s truck again, to go buy blank CDs so we can back up our Alaska photos. We were putting them on both computers – good thing, since the ones on his may all be lost.

About 11 o’clock he comes back in a rush: “We have to leave NOW!” Turns out he talked to the marina owner to get local knowledge about the weather, and the word was go now or stay the night...this front is going to hover.

We’re off the dock at 11:30 and half an hour later are out of Hardy Bay and turning southeast to cross Queen Charlotte Strait and go to the BC mainland. Lots of little fishing boats are out.

We are on Route 1 – the first course plotted on my computer! There is some wind and wind waves – it’s a little bouncy and water splashes on the windows, but it’s not too bad. We reach Numas Island at 1:30, taking it to starboard instead of port so that when we turn into Wells Passage we will turn south not north and not be broadside to the waves. Water has calmed down quite a bit, probably due to the effect of an ebbing tide going the same way as the easterly wind.

As we approach Numas Island, a sightseeing plane – a DeHavilland Beaver – startles us by passing in front; it’s at least 100 feet up, but it seems close.

The rain comes about the time we reach Wells Passage, but without the expected wind (up to 25 knots was predicted). Wells Passage is the main entrance into the Broughtons, a huge area of islands, inlets and sounds that form the western edge of mainland British Columbia north of Johnstone Strait. Indians have lived there for thousands of years. In

the late 1800s and early 1900s farmers homesteaded the area, *rowing* (!) across Queen Charlotte Strait or even south to Victoria to trade. The forest has reclaimed most of the homesteads. The Broughtons are now a destination for cruisers. It's more sparsely treed than further north, with lots of small low islands, giving a more open feeling.

We've heard a lot about the Broughtons and got very close – but not close enough – on our trip two years ago. We've heard that they are pretty and very sociable, with potlucks and dockside happy hours. We are ready!