

SECTION 21: GULF ISLANDS

Monday, September 3, 2007 – Labour Day Gibsons to Pirate’s Cove, DeCourcy Island

We’re back in the Gulf Islands, earlier than planned. Also not planned is the fact that things don’t seem exactly as we remember them from 2005.

A little more than two hours after leaving the dock at Gibsons, we entered Gabriola Passage and passed by the narrowest part (Codero Point) just three minutes after slack water! Talk about timing! We don’t remember there being so many houses on Gabriola and wish we’d had time to contact Lynn and Oliver, whom we met in Alaska on their sailboat, Hannibal. They offered us an island tour. Degnen Bay, in particular, was filled with houses, boats on moorings and docks. Gabriola Passage seemed wider and less complex than we remember. In 2005 we passed a tug with log boom on the east side of the passage; this time, no tug but a lot of logs cluttering the water near Degnen Bay.

Gabriola Passage is the northern of about four passes allowing one to get from the Strait of Georgia to the shelter of the Gulf Islands, which lie off the eastern coast of Vancouver Island between Nanaimo and Sydney. All of these passes have strong currents which much be dealt with. Gabriola, Valdes, Galiano, Mayne and Saturna Islands make up the outer north/south barrier. Running west of those is the Trincomali Channel. At Prevost Island it splits into two channels, Plumper Sound and Swanson Channel. These empty into Haro Strait and the US/Canadian boundary.

We crossed Trincomali Channel and reached Pirate’s Cove on DeCourcy Island at 10:05, surprised to find it filled with boats. (We thought everyone went home on Labour Day.) The private dock near the entrance added to the sense of crowding, although actually, there were just about 15 boats anchored.



The entrance was as we remembered: very narrow. A cement beacon marks the end (almost) of a reef that sticks out from the west; the tide was high enough so that we couldn’t see the reef, but we remember seeing the beacon at low tide on land and about three feet inside the end of the rocky outcropping. There is also a rock on the north side

of the entrance, marked by a red buoy. The space between the two marks is just about 30 feet. To get in to Pirate's Cove one must align an arrow painted on a rock with an X nailed to a tree that it points to, then make a sharp turn to port when lined up with the beacon. It's actually deep (but narrow) water if this is done correctly; inside it quickly shallows to about 14 feet.



Like most of the others, we set the hook and ran a line to shore. In 2005 we were just learning. Mireille and Joe were on board and had to row ashore, scramble up some rocks, tie a series of lines together and around a tree and row back to the boat. This time, we opted for one of the rings imbedded in rock on the west side of the cove – and we have our spool of yellow line. There were about six rings between the private dock and the dinghy dock, each about 50 feet apart and well marked with a red X of paint and an arrow pointing to the ring. It was easy to row ashore after setting the anchor and climb onto a flat dry rock about four feet below the ring, run the line through and go back to the boat. Didn't even get my feet wet!

Sam and I went ashore and took the path towards the private dock. We came to a rustic split rail fence, ambled up a small hill – and found a packed-gravel road and a parking lot filled with a dozen or so cars! Fortunately, it is out of sight from our anchored boats, leaving our illusions of a pristine anchorage intact. A community bulletin board and map introduced us to DeCourcy Island. We learned that most of the island is private; popular Pirate's Cove Marine Park is at its southeast tip. There is a farm, and several private homes. Apparently people come in by boat, then use their cars to get to their island homes. The road is open to the public, but we opted to use it to loop back to the park trail instead of looking for the farm. Maybe later.

Sam found a stick – about two inches in diameter and as long as she is. Even as a puppy she rejected smaller “normal” sticks in favor of oversized logs and branches. We can look out on the sparkling channel and see lots of sailboats out sailing in a moderate NW wind.

Monday afternoon.

We're relaxing in the sun, and suddenly it is raining just when I was going to take Sam on another hike. So we are here, watching rain and listening to music – "I Left my Heart in San Francisco" – very appropriate. It's about time to go home, and a mellow way to spend Labour Day.



Tuesday, September 4

We spent the night listening to the rain and the slap of waves against the hull. Noisy, but a sound we won't hear too much in the future. Hopefully, this is the last time we will hear rain hitting the deck as well. Last night was our last barbecue, too, unless we do one with Sally and Donald; of course, it poured, making us grateful for the big Canadian umbrella we bought at Sullivan Bay. Likewise, I am grateful for the silly -- but warm -- crocheted slippers from Ocean Falls.

It is good that we crossed over yesterday. Winds this morning are from the northwest; it might be rougher in the Strait of Georgia than it was yesterday.

Tuesday afternoon

The wind came up this afternoon, causing lots of anchor drills and fiascos. Several boats tried to anchor but were scared away after failed attempts to tie up in the wind. Now, at 4:30, it's so quiet. The wind has diminished. We didn't realize how noisy the wind was (rigging noise, slapping of waves) until it stopped.

8:30 p.m. Is it nice out now! It's completely calm, absolutely quiet, just a little light in the sky. Only half a dozed boats are at anchor. This may be our last night out at anchor. We barbecued hamburgers and talked about the next trip north. It will be less intense, with more time to stop and process things, to "smell the roses."

We've been in touch with Nicole, and now we know our ending point: We'll re-enter the U.S, on Friday at Friday Harbor, ready for whale watching on Sunday with Tatum and friends.

Wednesday, September 5
Pirate's Cove to Silva Bay, Gabriola Island

We crossed back through Gabriola Passage this morning. Hadn't planned on it, but we reached Yorkshire Rose on the radio; Chris and Marilyn are in Silva Bay and the Wheelers are flying in to meet them. Would we like to cruise with our Palo Alto buddies? Of course!

We are out of Pirate's Cove at 11 o'clock and 22 minutes later passing Codero Point at Gabriola Passage amid swirls and whirls; a four-knot current takes our SOG (speed over ground) to 11.3 knots! Passing Shipyard Rock at the entrance to Silva Bay our SOG is down to 5.1 knots. At 11:50 we dock at Silva Bay Marina just one finger away from the seaplane float.



Soon the seaplane arrives. Out climb Marybeth and Bob Wheeler – and are they surprised to see us on the dock. Chris Ward arrives shortly thereafter by dink, to take them across the Bay to Tugboat Island, a Royal Vancouver Yacht Club outpost. Since we are not members, we can't stay there, but do get a tour. It's a beautiful facility with greens, a social building, dryers (there's no water on the island, so no washers, but many large boats have washing machines on board). We enjoy dinner on Yorkshire Rose and return to Apollo via Chris' dink.

Thursday, September 6
Silva Bay to Montague Harbour

We woke up to wind; big gusts that flipped up our stern name sign hung over the Avon and tossed it into the cockpit. Off the dock at 12:20, we were out of Silva Bay at 12:30 and passing Codero Point at 12:45. With the wind, we expected rough water on Trincomali Channel, but it is glassy and a calm, sheltered, I suppose, by DeCourcy and Ruxton Islands that border it to the west. At 3:00 we enter Montague Harbour at Gray Peninsula, near the southern end of Galiano Island, and are at the dock at the Marina at 3:15. Yorkshire Rose has taken a mooring buoy at Montague Harbour Marine Park, but we've chosen the dock for easier shore access.

“Have you been to the Hummingbird Inn Pub? No? Well, you're in for a treat.” We have much to learn about Montague, and Chris is a great tour guide. We meet at the road by the Marina. Soon our bus arrives – a painted hippie bus, driven by a crazy man with long white hair who sings, bangs on the dash with sticks and steers with his feet.

“Wheels on the bus go round and round...” he sings, looking like a mad scientist with his wild hair. “We'll have fun, fun, fun...” soon he has us all singing. We have a great meal at the Pub and survive the wild bus ride back.

We spent our first night in Canada on this trip at Montague Harbour, so it is fitting that it is also out last, spent with good friends and a crazy bus driver.

Friday, September 7

Montague Harbour to Friday Harbor

The Bakery Boat sits at anchor, not too far away but out of reach without a good dinghy. We look longingly at it. Intrigued by this classic boat and by the rumor of fresh-baked goodies. Maya, a 44-foot sailboat from Victoria is docked behind us. We give them our limes, as we think Customs will not allow citrus into the U.S. The people from Valkerie, originally from Sweden, offer to take me over to the bakery boat.





At 0950, fresh-baked rolls aboard, we are off the dock and at 1010 out of Montague Harbour and heading south, passing Prevost Island, North Pender Island, then South Pender Island.

A beautiful topsail schooner sails down the channel. A group of small fast boats are coming from behind, quickly. They pass very close, with big wakes, a group of six, then three more. We can't turn into the wake because we'd hit the next boat coming, so we hang on to stuff and roll. Welcome to civilization!



At 12:45 we cross the imaginary Boundary Line and enter U.S. waters. We remember when we crossed here in 2005, and received a call from Tracy, telling us Caitlin was to have a sister or brother.

Entering Friday Harbor, we tie up at the Custom Dock in front of a beautiful American-registered schooner reentering from Canada, a training ship filled with young people. By 2:20 we have cleared customs and are tied up at slip H-10 at huge Friday Harbor. We are delighted to see Makai! Drue is on his way to Anacortes, to sell the boat. It is good to visit again.



At Friday Harbor we can access voice mail. I have 15 messages, mainly from Mom, with news of all that we have missed..birthday parties, Kelsey's Bobby visiting, Ismail and Yee dropping by, dinner after Thursday night races, Alex's kids have started school...all the day-to-day things that have happened while we've been blissfully out of touch.