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A Short Visit up North

Our intention was to take the boat north and meet up with several other Rhodies on the 14th of June. A series of “unfortunate events” precluded this and though the truck repairs were unexpected, it did give me time to repaint the the boat and inspect, replace and rebed all the hardware.



Anacortes and Mt. Baker

Finally, on July the 3rd 2009 my wife Alice and I trailered our Rhodes 22 north from Medford in SW Oregon to Anacortes in Washington State, about 50 miles south of the Canadian Border. We stopped for the night in Portland at my sister’s house and then continued on to Anacortes through the Seattle traffic, the total distance was about 425 miles.

There was no ramp but rather a lift that extended out over the water where the boat was lowered into the water. The next 3 hours were spent getting the motor to run. It would run at high speed but would stall at lower speed. All indications when the plugs were pulled pointed to flooding. Several weeks later when the carburetor was pulled at a repair shop a very fine sliver of plastic jammed the float causing the flooding at idle.



Hoisting the boat into the water

By now it was too late to cross the 5 miles over Rosario Strait to Decatur Island. Instead we picked up a free mooring less than a mile from the marina. It might as well have been 10 miles as it was totally deserted and only distant campers' fire could be seen on Burrows Island.



Early the next morning we headed south to Bowman Bay 5 miles away. This is a state park and protected by a headland with many trails and viewpoints. As soon as we anchored I headed ashore to explore and take some pictures. I wanted to see the tide roaring through Deception Pass just on the other side of the headland. There is a very cool bridge that connects the mainland to Whidbey Island. This is quite high and from the bridge you can look down at the boats that try to come through the narrows against the current; fun to watch.

The high bridge to Whidbey Island over Deception Pass

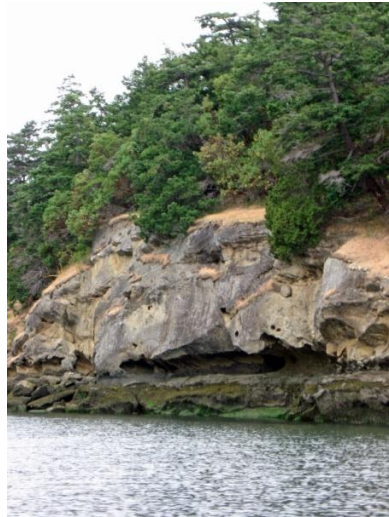
The weather turned that night and for much of the remaining time we sailed, it was in the low 50's, overcast with rain and drizzle. Still we enjoyed ourselves. We left mid morning so the current would not be against us and headed up the strait to our next destination, Sucia Island, 25 miles north. Though this may sound like a bit of a sail we had the current with us for 6 hours and for a couple of hours it was pushing us along at 2-3 knots. Even with the late start we had good light to anchor at our initial location. Our first spot was too exposed and as sunset neared we moved into Echo Bay for more protection from the southerlies.



Sunset over Bowman Bay S. tip of Fidalgo Island



Sucia Is. Cool rock form



Eroded sandstone Sucia Is.



Madrone trees Sucia Is.

It was too late to go ashore when we arrived so we just fired up the grill. The sunset was beautiful and though there were a lot of boats, it was quiet, for awhile anyway. The wind dropped off but the swell began to come around into the bay and we spent the late night rocking 'n rolling but without the music.



Heading out early for Canada, Orcas Is. in distance

through tiny islands or big rocks with summer homes perched on them. This was going to be a night of luxury since we were going to spend it at a real marina with hot showers and nice restaurants in the town of Sidney.

Next morning there was no wind, it was overcast with a light drizzle. This was the time to go international. We motored the 22 miles to Canoe Bay and cleared Canadian customs at the custom dock. It was done by phone and was hassle free. We then motored down along Vancouver Island for two miles threading our way



Even the utility boxes are colorful in the town of Sidney, Vancouver Is.



Gray day, bright colors, Sydney, B.C.



Colorful flowers and fat lady, Sydney B.C.

When sailing in this area departure depends on the tide and currents and so far we have been able to leave at reasonable times in the late morning. No good wind, but plenty of gentle rain and low temperatures.



A long way from home, Prevost Is. B.C.

Our destination was a lovely cove called Annette Inlet on the island of Prevost about 14 miles away. Arrgh, it was cold, Alice went below and fired up the propane heater, leaving the companion way hatch open and she was soon toasty warm. There were a number of summer homes on the many rocky islands we passed; some multi-million dollar homes, others a collection of flotsam and jetsam perched over the water displaying their nautical character.

We arrived in the afternoon to a deserted and picture perfect anchorage. It reminded us of the upper Chesapeake Bay. This impression was reinforced when a beautiful New England style powerboat with maybe lobster boat heritage came into the inlet and anchored. On its transom was the name *Bee Weems* with a home port of Annapolis MD. It seems this is the Weems & Plath "test platform" for their equipment and

one of the owners spent this last year to motor it up the NY canals to the Great lakes and then have it shipped to Anacortes from Duluth. This was their 2nd season of constant work and testing to find the best equipment available for us sailors in exotic locations. A tough job but somebody has to do it. A quiet evening with soft music and grilled salmon ended the day.



Alice with her hot coffee on a cold day



It got so hot I took of my hat, for a minute

Up very early at 0 dark thirty we headed south dodging very big BC ferries and retracing our route, finally anchoring in a bight of sand on the island of Sydney (just south and a mile or 2 offshore from Sydney town). This part of the island is a provincial park and we saw only a couple of boats and people. The island is quite unusual in that it is not rock but instead seems to be composed of sand and gravel from a glacier's lateral moraine. We spent a lot of time ashore walking on wooded paths and beach combing along the sandy shore.



Beach combing on Sidney Bight



A stroll along Sidney Island beach



It was apparent by mid afternoon that this was going to be a roly anchorage, and on impulse we motored the 12 miles across Haro Strait to Roche Harbor and U.S. Customs. Unfortunately check in is more strict, and to make matters worse we arrived after the office was closed. We called the office in Friday Harbor and were told to stay on the boat until an officer could come back to the dock to inspect us. I felt pretty bad about him having to come back then and offered to remain at the custom dock till the following morning, but no luck. He was a bit put out at first but after looking at the boat and admiring it, he mellowed out and was really nice. By now it was quite dark and we were not allowed to stay on the dock so we felt our way through lots of anchored boats and anchored among a group of small day sailors in 5 feet MLW. That's the weird thing with large tides of 8 feet or more you may think you have plenty of water until low tide, and then it is thump and bump.



Wake up call, Roche Harbor, San Juan Island

growing on them the biggest sea anemones that I have ever seen. They must have been a thick as my arm and a foot long with great spreading tentacles. They reminded me of a cross between boojum trees and spider mums.

Since Alice was to fly out of Seattle in two days, we spent the next day slowly motoring and sailing around the north end of the island and then south, just checking out the coast and the many small islands along the way. Stopped at one and had lunch and then ended the day at Bowman bay again. This was just 6 miles distance from the marina and we had to leave early the next day for Alice to catch her flight.

Roche Harbor is a busy place and the activity woke us, it was the seaplanes coming and going that convinced us we couldn't lay in the bunk anymore, it was time for breakfast. We watched a few take off and then took off ourselves. For a while I had to fight the current and was down to 1 or 2 knots over ground with the motor on full. Eventually we picked up a more favorable current and felt our way through a shallow channel into an old 50's style resort on Lopez Island on Fisherman Bay, a run of 12 miles. The sun came out and the heated pool was delightful. The small marina was nicely protected and the floating docks hardly moved. The docks had



Bowman Bay from a trail on Bowman Head

The weather was changing with predictions of high winds the next day so we set out 2 anchors and then went ashore to walk around the trails and see the sights. Our last day was a beautiful one and the dinner and the wine a perfect combination.

Up at six AM we motored and sailed the one hour to the marina, found a slip and off loaded Alice's things and then drove through the nasty traffic on I5 past Seattle to the airport. I then turned around and drove back to Anacortes a distance of 170 miles round trip. When I arrived at the gas station just outside the marina, I stopped to fill up. It was there that I saw a large passenger van with a "Departure to SeaTac airport on the hour" parked in a spot signed with "Airport Van". Now next time.....

Part two of A Short Visit up North



Driftwood covered Spencer Spit, Enosis at the end

That night the wind and rain blew about the mast, playing bad harmonics in the sail slot. It was, however, very nice to be in a protected slip with no anchor dragging worries.

Got up early the next morning to tidy up the boat and transfer some things out of the boat and into the parked pickup truck. I didn't even have to make breakfast, just walked up the road to the gas station where the Korean owner provided a hardy breakfast of homemade kimshee and a sausage biscuit.

My sister, her husband and a friend of hers arrived around noon from Portland. We crossed Rosario Strait and headed north to Thatcher pass between Decature and Blakely Island a distance of 10 miles. Blakely Island is all private and boaters can only land at a marina that is fenced in to keep the boating riffraff from getting on the island proper. Needless, we didn't stay there. We did stop for an hour or so at a state park called Spencer Spit about two miles past Thatcher pass. Spencer Spit is a long sand and gravel bar with a narrow but deep channel between it and tall rocky Frost Island. With the wind from the south we sailed through the



Spencer Spit, Enosis heading back in from the N.

channel and came about on the north side of the spit and beached the boat. My sister Greta, her husband Pat and their friend Barbara went ashore while I stayed on board and watched the small dingy anchor we put ashore drag off through the sand and disappear under the rapidly rising tide. I raised sail and had a nice time just tacking back and forth in the sheltered water behind the spit.



I came back in and picked up everyone and we then sailed northwestward around Lopez Island and over to Shaw Island and Blind Bay where we were to spend the night, a quick sail of six miles. By now the wind was a steady 15+ knots and we were reefed down to 100% jib and $\frac{3}{4}$ of a main. The entrance on the north side of Shaw Island is pretty easy going into Blind Bay. However it was made a bit more interesting with the presence of a docking ferry. We were able to scoot out of the way with the excellent wind we had. It was a great performance if I do say so myself, tacking through several large anchored sail and power boats, providing their guest with a bit of entertainment. We worked the boat up to the head of the bay and set two anchors under sail, without losing anyone overboard (that is another story for another time).

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The Ferry at Shaw Island, seen from a safe point

While sitting down with a bit of wine we could admire snow covered Mt. Baker in the distance. Along the shore we could see an old farmhouse, some green fields and an old orchard. Suddenly a short distance off the stern of the boat, a small head popped up, then another and another. Soon there were perhaps a dozen furry inquisitive heads poking out of the water. It was a gaggle, a school, a heard, well whatever you call a baker's dozen of otters. They sported



about the boat for a short time and were off in an instant disappearing under the dark water.

Sailing in to Blind Bay, Shaw Island, anchorage was upwind of these boats and close to the shore



Typical Island home



Between Crane & Shaw Is.



Not-so-typical island home



The Port of Friday Harbor

up at the docks and wandered about looking at a lot of “character” boats and having a really nice meal at a restaurant overlooking the harbor. Though I found Friday Harbor a bit crowded it has a charm of its own and I would recommend a visit if only to get out of KP for a meal or two.

Greta caught the 2:00 ferry and we headed north up the San Juan Channel often wing

Up the next morning we mostly sailed west along the north shore of Shaw Island weaving in and out of several small islands until we reached San Juan Channel five miles later. We then tacked down the channel heading SE to Friday Harbor just four miles down the channel. It was here that Greta would catch a ferry back to Anacortes to pick up her car and drive up to Vancouver B.C. for several days of business meetings. The company she works for is involved with a wind powered generation project in Ireland. Since we had time, we tied



Pat, Greta and I at Friday Harbor San Juan Is.



A comfy kitchen seat,



A comfy fishing boat,



A very blue house boat



Rusty pirate chest



Tiny European Spotted deer on Spieden Is

and wing for the next 7 miles to the southern tip of Spieden Island. It was a race to beat the tide change. With this change a strong tidal race is created along the channel by Spieden Island. We had to transit this on our way to Stuart Island five miles further along. With the help of the motor and sails were worked along the shore of the privately owned Spieden Island. To the northeast we could see a heard of tiny European spotted deer on the island and a short distance away to the southeast several



South side of Spieden Is.

Barbara was an interesting person who met Greta while Greta had a marine business in Granada in the Caribbean. Barbara works on a 129 foot luxury charter sailboat (50K a week rental). She then takes a vacation to see her friend and spends it on a 22 foot Rhodes with two guys, sans her friend. I would call that a real busman's holiday.

sea lions sunning themselves on the rocks of tiny sentential island.

We reached Stuart Island late in the afternoon and could not find space on the floating dock at the state park in Reid Harbor. We chose to anchor on the south shore of the harbor and spent the rest of the afternoon watching ospreys dive after fish. Based on their success rate, no wonder they were endangered. A nice meal and nicer sunset concluded a busy day.

We went ashore and used the facilities (hey no bucket!) and wandered about the trails. We could see Saturna and Pender Islands five miles away in Canada but couldn't go there because Greta's friend was from South Africa and would need a visa.



Sunset at anchor, Stuart Island



Barbara "hitchhiking" to Saturna Is. B.C.



Me & Enosis at the dock, Stuart Is.



Some interesting geology, Stuart Is.

The next morning we returned to the dock and walked around the many trails for a couple of hours. We were waiting for a favorable current to our next destination, that of Sucia Island.



The start of the walk, Sucia Island

We motored and sailed intermittently through Boundary Pass the 13 miles to Sucia Island arriving in early afternoon. At these latitudes it doesn't get dark until almost 10:30, so we had plenty of time to explore the island.

We started out together walking along the exposed beach and up over small hills. After a while Barbara went back to the official trail (where where she became last for a couple of hours) and Pat and I continued our trek along the southeast side of the island. Along the way we had beautiful views of nearby Little Sucia Island and the Gulf Islands and San Juans.



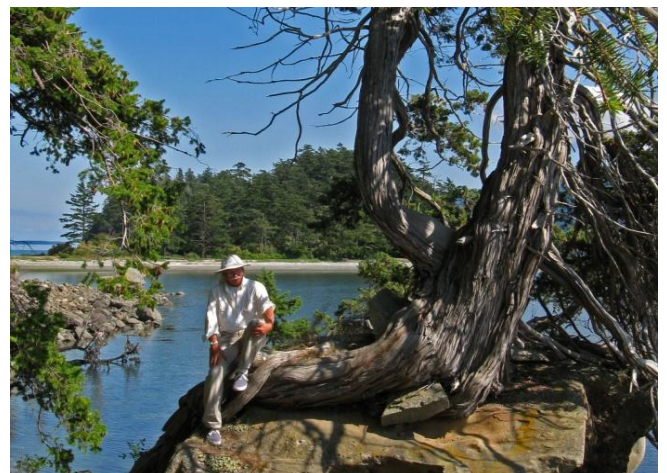
Sucia Island, Looking WNW



Interesting rock formations Sucia Is.



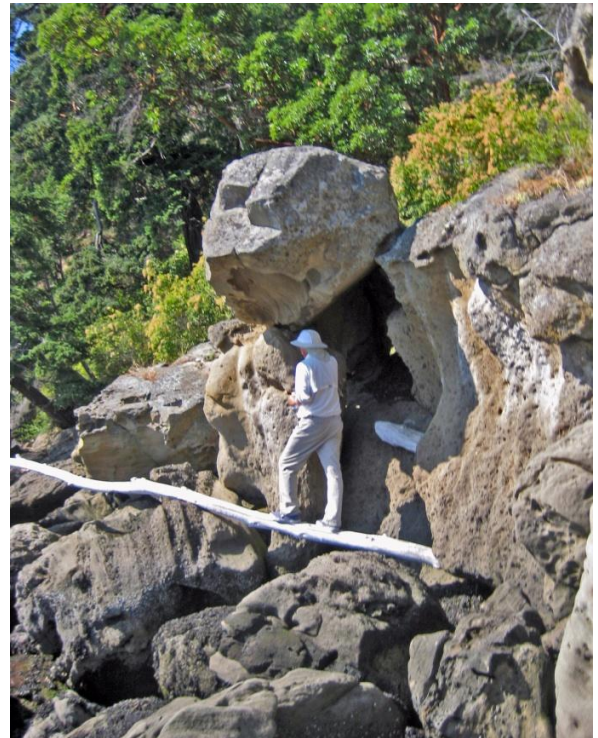
Little Sucia Island



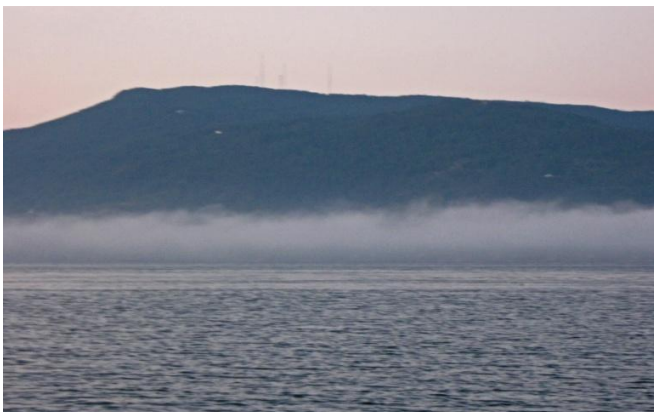
Nice seat, Little Sucia Island in background, Sucia Island

After much wandering around and scrambling along steep hillsides we finally arrived at our anticlimactic destination of Shallow Bay. Here we found a well maintained path back to the harbor and our boat. Waiting for us was poor Barbara who was scratched up from the brambles and trees, and was in great spirits after wandering around in the bush for a couple of hours. She got some great shots of Sucia Island and the San Juan Island in the distance.

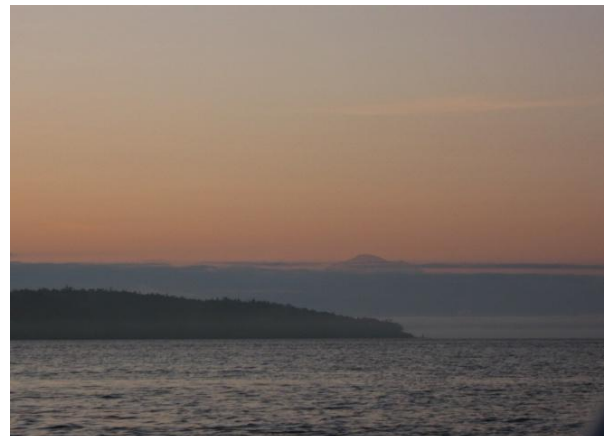
There was a small islet with a summer house about a hundred yards away and as the sun set multitudes of great blue herons came to roost in the trees of the islet. Each time one alighted there would be a great raucous chorus of complaint and comment from the birds. This amusing (almost) cacophony continued until well after sunset. We left at 5am in very light fog heading east and then south to pass Anacortes and to our final destination of where else, Bowman Bay. Things didn't work out quite as we planned.



No path here, Barbara gets lost, Sucia Is.



Fog to the south along Orcas Is.



Fog to the NE, Matia Is. and Mt Baker



We find our waypoint, but not much else

Within about an hour we could see a fog bank forming along Orcas Island to the south. No worries. There seemed to be one forming to the northeast also but we aren't going that direction so no worries. We could even see Mt. Baker rising above the clouds and fog in the east. Apparently the fog banks were going to a Bankers convention over our head. In about 15 minutes we went from 10 miles visibility to

50 feet. We were committed and I had my special expensive radar reflector up, and besides, we only had to cross a one mile shipping channel. Since we were already in another channel already, it seemed best to just cross it quickly and work down the coast of a series of islands. I think the phrase in out of the frying pan into the fire.



Northern point of fog bound Guemes Island.

By now the tide was changing against us and our progress slowed even more. The fog would occasionally lift for a minute and we could see a couple of hundred yards but it was hard to tell. Directly above us through thin fog we could see blue sky and sea birds. We made another jump across another channel to Guemes Island and were rewarded with a glimpse of the tip of the island and motored around a shoal then the island was lost in fog. By now we were pushing the motor as fast as it would go against a 3+ kn current.

Then disaster struck. The prop became fouled in a patch of kelp drifting in the current. I had to drop the engine speed down to shift into neutral so I could get the prop cleared. With the drop in rpm's the engine stalled and would not restart. We did not want to sail away from the island into the busy Rosario Strait, on the other hand the bottom here was foul with rocks and kelp so anchoring was not a good options. We could just make out something in the fog coming up from astern as we ghosted along. It was a power boat throwing up a small bow wave and running along with no one in it! As it passed us by only 20 feet away we saw that it appeared to be pushing a big white ball on a stiff rope in front of it. Only then



Drifting down on the last buoy

did it dawn on us that the boat was on a mooring and we were moving backward toward the shoal! In a moment another empty ball appeared and swiftly left us in its “wake”. As we prepared to try our luck with an anchor another white ball appeared heading right for us. I headed up and Pat somehow managed to get a line on it and secure us.



First things first, pull the plugs then clean and dry them and dry the cylinders (sort of hard in the fog). What should one do in this grim situation? Make breakfast of course. Blueberry pancakes and maple syrup, bacon, and eggs; might as well enjoy the fix we are in.

After an hour or so the fog began to lift a bit and we could see that we were 50 yards off a beach with some shapes that could be summer homes. We put the motor back together and pressed the starter button and joy, it started. I revved it up and we were on our way once again feeling our way down a ghostly coast.

A thinning of the fog reveals the island

The next channel was a busy one that the ferry from Anacortes used. The fog of course became thicker but we could see just above it and could make out a ferry entering the channel. Thin fog, thick fog, high fog, low fog; I am driven to think of the Monty Python skit involving spam, but with fog. After a tense 20 minutes we are across the channel and heading through



The fog lifts, the sun shines



Clear sailing but the fog is still out there, waiting

patches of fog and clear area along Fidalgo Island. We soon pass the opening to the marina but we continue south to our final anchorage at Bowman Bay.

Well, after a very interesting 14 hours and 35 miles and one more close call when a lovely sailboat came charging out of the fog and swells, we drop anchor in Bowman Bay. We went ashore and enjoyed the facilities and took a walk to get rid of a bit of tension. I mentioned earlier that there were a lot of very scenic trails in the woods and along the cliffs of Bowman Head. The views were typical of this whole region.



Looking west from Bowman Head



Bowman Bay, fluorescent green plankton, at night it was phosphorescent



After hiking the trails on Bowman Head, Pat and I decided to hike up the hill to the bridge over Deception Pass. The hike was well worth it once we were on the bridge. It took a long time for our spit to hit the water.

Just after the sun went down, I decided to set another anchor so our bow would point into the swell that came around Bowman Head and we would rock less. I had failed to do this the last time Alice and I were here and it was not very comfortable, lesson learned. The fog lifted in the night and the stars shown in all their beauty, a perfect ending to a, if not perfect day, an eventful and instructive day.



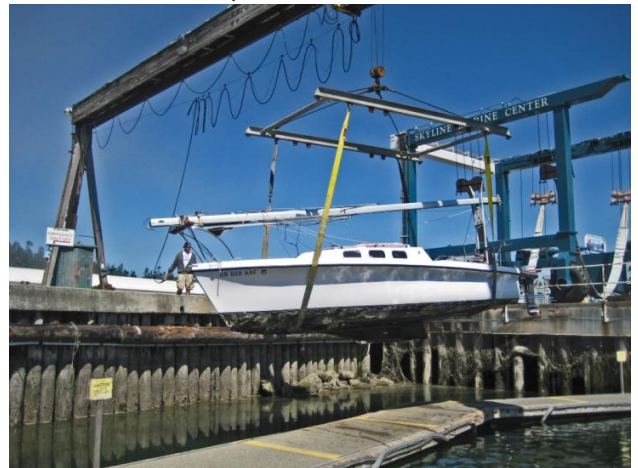
Sunset, Bowman Head



Unstep the mast and secure it well

Up the next day in what else fog, we headed the 6 miles north to the marina and after a few foggy surprises we arrived at the harbor entrance and could just make out the markers in the fog. We were soon tied up and watching the fog, lift, arrgh. A short time later after dropping and securing the mast, we were hoisted out and onto the trailer. This is a nice method as it allows perfect placement on the trailer and perfect tongue weight. The fee for in and out was only \$35, quite reasonable considering I didn't have to soak my trailer in salt water.

Loaded up we headed into Anacortes town for lunch. I parked at the West Marine and bought a few things and then we had a nice Italian lunch. Checking the straps I saw it was chaffing and needed some chafe pads. I had just passed a Goodwill store and walked



Up, up, and away



Colorful and effective chaff gear

back to it. Out back was a dumpster and a person sorting donations, she was a sailor and when I explained my need she said she had the perfect chafe pad. It worked great, though every time a car passed us with little kids in it they had the most distressed expression, hmm I wonder why. A night at my sisters in Portland, then a quick trip home and the vacation was over.

I had previously chartered a 32 footer in the San Juans with my wife. We both felt that we really enjoyed the smaller Rhodes, but inclement weather has more of an impact on the experience of a week on the water on such a boat. The pop top enclosure was a lifesaver and for the time Alice and I were aboard it was up for much of the time. That combined with the Bimini gave us a surprising amount of shelter. The little propane heater was a lifesaver during the day, but we weren't comfortable using it at night, a couple of good sleeping bags and fleece blankets did the trick. Though we had a two burner gas stove that we would set up in the cockpit on a special table under the protection of the Bimini, we also should have brought a single burner butane stove. With this we could make a quick cup of coffee or coco without all the hassle of setting up the big stove.

Food wasn't much of a problem (see attached list). We could always buy food (sometimes a bit expensive) at the numerous marinas and at several of the towns we visited. Keeping perishables and drinks cold wasn't too hard as sometimes it felt warmer in the icebox than outside. Ice was available pretty much everywhere. Also available were many nice restaurants in the larger towns and marinas.

Because we did a fair amount of motoring the alternator served to keep the batteries charged even though I ran a machine all night that help me breathe because of severe sleep apnea. On those days we did sail the skies were mostly sunny, only partly cloudy or bright overcast, so the 55 watt solar panel helped to keep things charged. We never did hook up to shore power during the entire vacation and we never had a dead battery. The 16 hours of light and the fact that we would not stay up late reading probably helped too.



We had a simple GPS but I found that sometimes the accuracy was questionable. I think I may be in the market for a better one. We used two Waterproof Charts titled "San Juan Islands #43" and "Gulf Island British Columbia #86", they are printed by *WATERPROOF CHARTS INC. Punta Gorda, Florida*. These charts were just what we needed in the wet cockpit of the Rhodes. They stowed just aft of the ice box on a little shelf and held up very well to the abuse they received. We also had a couple of publications. *A Cruising Guide to Puget Sound and the San Juan Islands, Olympia to Port Angeles*. Second Edition by Migael Scherer and published by McGraw Hill. This spiral bound guide has great information and history about each island; we really enjoyed reading and using it. Another is the *Cruising Atlas for Northwest Waters* published by Evergreen Pacific Publishing. This spiral bound chart book was very useful. The final publication, and this was of great use is *A Current Atlas, Juan de Fuca Strait to Strait of Georgia* and included with this publication is a small booklet entitled *Washburne's Tables 2009*. This shows the direction of currents and flows on

an hourly basis around all the islands. Many of these currents are counter intuitive but these books help make sense of the complicated tidal flows in this area.

Having a *reliable* motor is a must, and I made a big mistake in not testing the motor thoroughly after I had it serviced prior to taking the trip. Because the winds were unpredictable in this area it is wise to carry a lot of fuel. We carried two five gallon and one two and a half gallon tanks. I am not sure how many gallons of fuel I burned but I did fill them all up at least twice.

I would eagerly recommend sailing in this area with a well founded small boat. The challenges are many, but none that can't be overcome with careful planning, a good boat and crew, and oh yes, some dumb luck too. I've had such a good time I intend to return to the San Juans and the Gulf Islands next summer, maybe just a bit later in the summer when the weather is supposed to be better.



Last anchorage, the end of the voyage, Bowman Bay