



Photo Contest Winner

Barbara Ann Schoemaker

Welcome to the "Archipelago de San Blas" of NW Panama. This autonomous territory of Panama, formally called Kuna Yala, offers spectacular sailing and fabulous exploration both on land and underwater.

The Coral Reefs are some of the most pristine and vibrant we have ever visited.

Ships log: West Holandes Cay, Barometer 1013, Partly cloudy skies, wind NE5-10, Temp 31 °C Great Sailing all day... landfall West Holandes Cay in afternoon...wild island exploration...hot and sunny."



Currents

December 2023

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Beginners Making the Big Left Turn

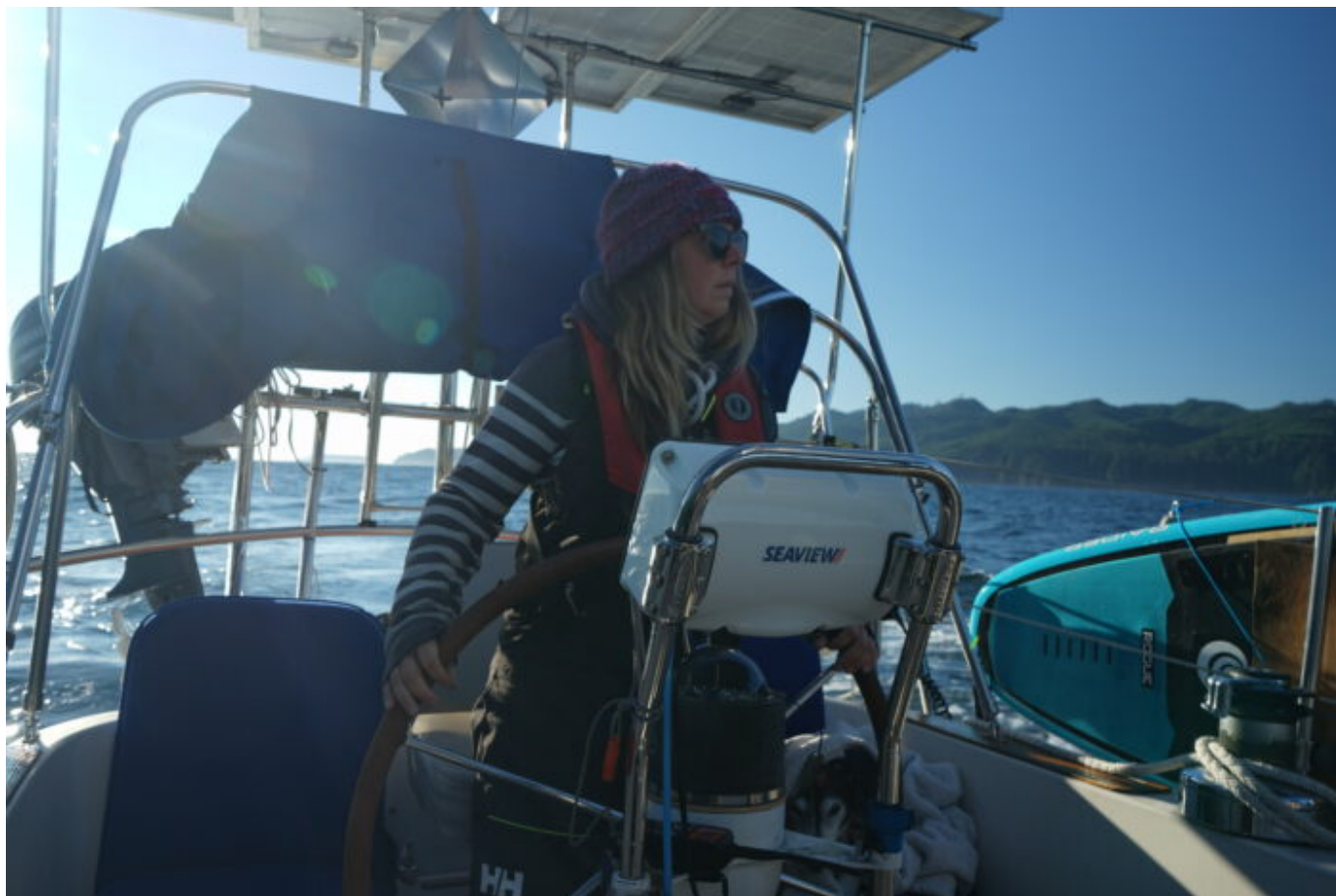
<https://currents.bluewatercruising.org/articles/beginners-making-the-big-left-turn/>



Let's back up a minute before I start our story about "making the Big Left Turn" and sailing into the Pacific Ocean and its gentle swells. The departure would have looked different if we had a Time Machine. Much different. Now that that's cleared up, on to the story.

After sitting for days in Neah Bay, with nothing to do other than walk the same piece of road, we were antsy to leave. The weather didn't look bad, but it didn't look good either. We had a general sense of what to expect but wanted a second opinion. Cue advice from someone more experienced than us. We sent him the weather data and got, "Well, I wouldn't go, but I don't like rough conditions anymore." And something like "you won't die" (I'm paraphrasing). Sane people would stay and wait for a better window. Not us. Nope. We're going for it.

Armed with nerves and enthusiasm, we picked up the anchor and headed into the last bit of the Juan de Fuca. Wow. These swells were marginally big, but manageable. We saw the lighthouse and made the "Big Left Turn," pointing us down the coast. This turn marked what we felt was the start of our journey to Mexico.



Jaclyn helming the last of the Strait of Juan de Fuca

We blasted out into the ocean carried by the Juan de Fuca tide. It was a little bumpy, but we chalked it up to the Strait meeting the ocean swell. Our plan was to head out between 30 and 50 miles offshore: far enough to avoid the dreaded crab pots and fishing vessels, but close enough that we wouldn't spend an entire day going back into port. Our planned next stop was Newport, Oregon, about two days away.

We started our watches, and the winds began to build. But weirdly, so did the swell and wind waves. Hmmmm...this isn't exactly what we thought it would be. Almost immediately, the boat started rolling from side to side with awkward waves. There wasn't enough wind to keep the sails full, so as we rolled, we listened to the "Slam! Slam! Slam" of the sails. This was life for the next two days, except when it wasn't.

This is when we started to learn what people don't tell you about offshore sailing. In fact, most YouTubers paint a vastly different picture of offshore sailing in the Pacific Northwest, with shorts, sunshine, and fish just jumping on board. In reality, the boat moves constantly. This is not a little movement where you can still fumble around the boat. Oh no. Picture 'shooting-out-of-the-head-and-into-the-galley' type movement. Our world quickly shrunk to the cockpit, bed, and toilet. Making food was out of the question. We'd have to survive on crackers, Gatorade, and Clif Bars until we hit land again. No big deal, we'll just sleep when we're off watch. Nope. Apparently, sleeping while the boat is rolling takes a skill neither of us has learned yet. Everything just became more complicated. Everything. Even sailing. We learned that the forecast winds weren't enough to keep the sails full. When the wind grew to keep the sails full, so did the waves, thus repeating the cycle of big winds, bigger waves. Lovely.



So. Many. Waves. They never look as bad on camera as they are in real life.

After 24 hours on board, with little food and even less sleep, I'd had enough. I popped my head out of the companionway and said, "I think I'm going to throw up and just want this (expletive) boat to stop moving for five minutes," followed up with dry heaving and nothing coming out except tears from my eyes. I then declared my hate of all things ocean-related, and likened the trip to a carnival ride you couldn't get off. Mark patiently waited for my tantrum to cease and then offered to stay up longer so I could feel comfortable. "Nah. I'll be fine". Down he went to try and sleep.

Our day passed with brief exchanges as we changed shifts every four hours. The shifts went by relatively uneventfully, other than the waves. Our lives had just become waves, and trying to manage daily life with the waves. But at hour 36, Mark got seasick. Not just a little seasick, but dead/useless/zombie-style seasick. We lost a container of M&Ms to the seasickness (and will never look at Costco-sized M&Ms the same again). He poked his head out and said, "I'm going to need a little longer. I can't really function". And that was the last I saw of Mark until we got to Newport.



Sunset off Oregon

We'd been lucky to this point. We hadn't had the dreaded fog. Ha ha ha. Cue fog on night two. Fog so thick that visibility was limited to a small circle around the boat. We were lucky that we'd only seen a couple of fishing boats, and they were lit up like a city, so they were very hard to miss. But with the fog and the waves, I was in for a long night. A very long night. Exhaustion started seeping in around 4 am, and I thought I had steered us in a 180-degree turn. But I didn't. It was just a wind shift from behind to directly in front. Why wouldn't we have to finish the crappiest sail by going upwind?

As my mood plummeted, the sun started rising. The light of day was making things feel better. Then the wind died off, and the wind waves did too. We were down to just rolling swell, albeit still decently sized. And Newport was in sight. We just had to cross that pesky bar. That annoying bar had a small craft warning with restrictions for boats under 24 feet. OK. Seems fine. What does a bar crossing look like? What's a jetty tip, and what do 10-foot swells feel like? After several calls to the Coast Guard and one VHF call to a boat that had just exited, we crossed that bar. No matter what. We had fantasies of putting the anchor down and sleeping. One of us may have dreamed of getting off the boat and never returning.



Mark helming into Newport, Oregon

Mark expertly helmed us through the bar with ease. There was a small whirlpool, which Mark doesn't remember, and a couple of tense moments. But it was really non-eventful. We were so excited to have sailed our boat to Newport, and we snapped a million pictures up the river. We motored past the marina to the GPS coordinates another cruiser had given us. Thankfully, there was only one other boat. We did it! Our first offshore leg was done.

About The Author

Jaclyn Jeffrey

Raicilla - Fast Passage 39 Sloop

Jaclyn started sailing in 2021 when she and her husband, Mark, decided to start a 5-year plan to take a break from work and sail around the world. Two years and two boats later, she and Mark, with their dog Sprocket, set off from Vancouver in June 2023. After sailing around the Gulf Islands and Desolation, they turned the boat south and made their way to Mexico. Jaclyn has been a member of the BCA since 2022, and credits the courses and mentorship from the doners for helping prepare the crew and the boat for the voyage.

Wildlife Encounters – Sea to Sky

<https://currents.bluewatercruising.org/articles/wildlife-encounters-sea-to-sky/>



You just never know what you are going to see. That is an oft-heard sentence aboard *Hoku Pa'a*, usually said with wonder and joy as we reflect on the latest interesting sight, courtesy of Mother Nature.

This summer, we sailed from our home port in Esquimalt Harbour to the area around the Broughton Archipelago. Along the way, we enjoyed many surprising, fun, and awe-inspiring encounters with creatures of all sizes. Sometimes, we even learned something! From sea to sky, we'd like to share some of these experiences with you.

Aquatic

Anemone. We spent a fair amount of time paddling around in a kayak or on a stand-up paddle board, poking our noses into all sorts of nooks and crannies. At low tide, one can get up close and personal with a lot of sea life without having to jump into the often-chilly water. In the Broughtons, we were amused by an anemone clinging to the rock while most of its body sagged downward, as if straining toward the

receding sea. We could wax eloquently about it, but really, it kind of looked like a big burgundy booger.

Squid eggs. The hot dry summer this year, while not good for the Province's parched plants, meant more swimming than we expected. We especially took advantage of the opportunity to cool off and snorkel when rising tidewater had been heated by sun-warmed rocks – the less hardy of us doing her best to swim only in the top foot or so of water. In McIntosh Bay, a small bay within Simoom Sound, Bjarne chanced upon some mysterious (to us) masses of oblong white squishy-looking things; they seemed to be eggs, but what kind? One of the benefits of [BCA](#) is being part of a community where folks are willing to share their expertise. The brilliant and ever-enthusiastic Elaine Humphrey informed us that our white blobs were squid egg capsules (or candles) – neat! When I did a little research, I learned that several squid will lay their eggs in a mass and that each of the candles contains around 200 eggs.



Left: anemone exposed at low tide; Right: squid eggs

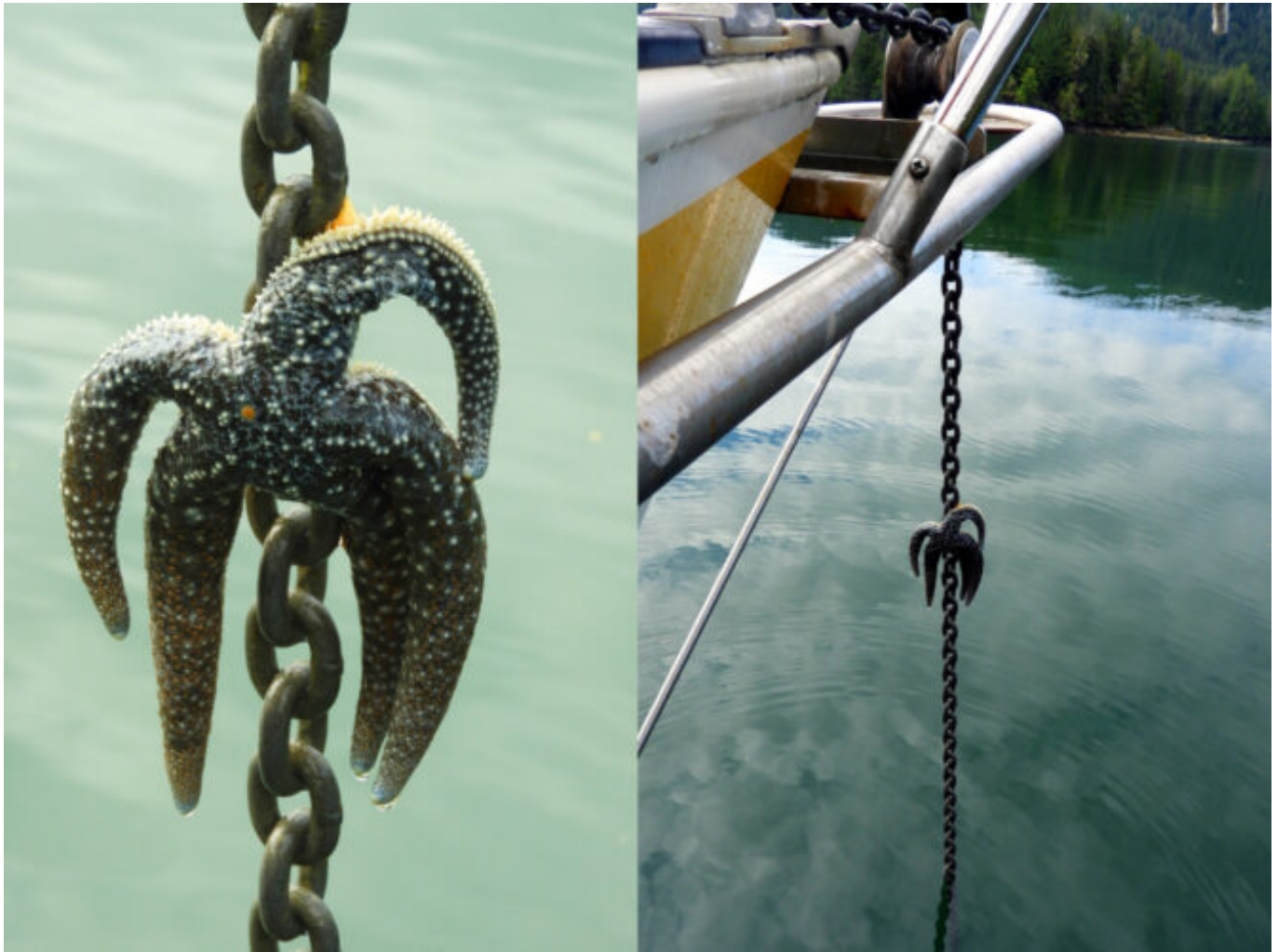
You might have had the pleasure of meeting Elaine at a May Rendezvous, where she has often brought microscopes and loupes for examining tiny sea life (mentioned in [Frolicking with BCA Last May](#)). You may also have had the pleasure of seeing her [Introduction to Bottomology](#), a fun presentation that provided a fascinating look at a strand of sea grass under an electron microscope – the diversity of life on that one piece of seaweed was incredible!

Hooded Nudibranch. Nudibranchs are sea slugs, which, if you hadn't seen any, could lead you to be surprised that many of them are quite beautiful with brilliant colours, interesting patterns, and feathery gills in all sorts of shapes and sizes. The lovely nudis we've seen while diving and snorkeling in the tropics (see e.g. [here](#) or [here](#)) have generally been under 4 cm long. At Waddington Bay on Bronwick Island, we spotted a mysterious creature, about 15 cm long, near the water surface. We learned later that it was a hooded nudibranch, but it looked more like a translucent balloon-animal jellyfish. Canadian Geographic has a great [article](#) about marine gastropod molluscs, noting that in B.C. we grow our nudibranchs big!



Two images of a hooded nudibranch.

Starfish. Sea stars or starfish are another common sight while cruising in B.C. waters (and elsewhere), although the type varies from area to area. What we thought was fun about this particular starfish is the location it had glommed onto. I was pulling up our anchor with the manual windlass, enjoying the pleasant scenery of Hoy Bay, while the chain rattled down the hawsepipe. I glanced at the rode approaching the pulpit – whoa! Or, more properly, belay that! Clinging onto the links was a sea star, probably wondering why the tide had dropped so fast. It was a good reminder to focus on one's task – imagine if it had gone over the bow roller.



Left: close up of starfish attached to anchor chain; Right: phew, noticed the passenger before it got to the bow roller!

Clam Fountains. Clams are not an unusual sight and one might not associate them with much action. Even our terminology has them in beds. Nonetheless, we were quite entertained by this batch of clams exposed by low tide in the Burdwood Group at the mouth of Tribune Channel. These molluscs must have been having a great feast as the water they were projecting was prodigious. Like a hundred jack-in-the-boxes all being played at once, one never knew when or from where the next squirt would pop up and shoot across the shore. It seems like there should be a beautiful symphony to accompany the performance in this video, but instead we have a few crows.

Whales. Every sea tale needs the tail of a whale. We saw several cetaceans – humpbacks, orcas and even a blue whale. The latter had us stumped for a bit. We weren't very close, so at first it seemed we must be looking at two humpbacks (which also have a small dorsal fin) but their movements were strangely in tandem – something wasn't right. We realized later that we were seeing the very long back of just one blue whale – the size of them is quite impressive! The most exciting encounter occurred while we were paddling: a humpback surfaced vertically with its mouth open (lunge feeding) about 100 metres from Bjarne's kayak.



Our anchorage at Cartwright Bay looking across Sutej Channel was open to waves from passing traffic but gave us great views of the orcas and humpbacks traveling along this corridor.

Land-based

Bears. It was high on our list of hopes to see bears. Thus, we found ourselves sailing up Mackenzie Sound, having heard that grizzlies are common there. With binoculars glued to my eyes, I scanned the shoreline. “Hmm, what’s that dark blob? Is it a tree stump? No, it’s moving!” As we ghosted closer in the light wind, I could see that, yes, it was a grizzly – and even better, there were cubs! The bears were meandering in a meadow at the outlet of a stream. Still under sail, we eased into the bight and found ourselves gybing and tacking in tight circles as we balanced getting close enough for a good look with keeping enough distance to not scare them, or run aground, all the while snapping photos and continuing to gaze through the binoculars. One could argue the pictures might have been better had we dropped the sails and turned on the stink-pot, but where’s the fun in that?

Closer inspection of our ursine friends revealed that having three cubs was taking a lot out of the mama bear – her ribs are quite visible in the photos. We hoped she found more to eat, but weren’t willing to offer up ourselves as a dinner option.



Top Left: mama grizzly looking gaunt; Top right: three grizzly cubs; Bottom: mama bear eyeing the strangers

The next day we were anchored in Turnbull Cove, a large, unusually flat-bottomed, well-protected bay. One thing about the Broughton area is that the scenery is big – the hills and mountains are high, the trees are tall, the water often extremely deep, and the shores are frequently steep-too. We were enjoying, you could say, this largesse of nature as twilight descended, when Bjarne says he thinks there's a raccoon rustling on shore. The shape seemed a little dubious for that diagnosis, but the size appeared about right, so I grabbed the snoop-oculars – surprise! It was a black bear. The scale of the scenery had fooled us.

Another Carnivore. From Turnbull Cove, one can walk a former logging trail to Huaskin Lake. Decades ago much logging occurred around the shores of this 10 mile-long lake; logs were gathered up, floated as close to saltwater as possible, then hauled over the hill and down into Turnbull Cove where a large logging camp existed. The remains of a steam donkey lie rusting at the start of the trail. At the other end of the trail, a solid dock with a ladder pokes into the lake, allowing one to easily enjoy a refreshing swim. We hadn't actually realized it was a lake (thinking it another arm of the ocean) until Bjarne spotted lily pads (not a salt-water thing). The other giveaway at the water edge was many small, bog-loving carnivorous round-leaf sundew plants; they lure insects into a sticky trap with their sweet-smelling nectar. Unfortunately, these insect-devouring plants didn't seem to be reducing the supply of horse flies!



Sundew carnivorous plants (*Drosera rotundifolia*) at Huaskin Lake.

Avian

Ducks. On another evening in the cockpit, while enjoying the lingering light, we espied a common merganser paddling near shore. To our delight, she had several ducklings, some of which were riding piggy-back. The little fuzz-balls were either taking turns or shoving each other off for the prime spot, but either way, the rides seemed to be at least somewhat distributed amongst the off-spring. Although we found this to be great entertainment, it was a little too dark for good photos.

Kingfisher. We were stern-tied in Laura Cove on Broughton Island with some noisy kingfishers flying about. As one of them settled on a branch, dangling a fish from its beak, we naturally expected the fish to be eaten. Well, apparently some meal preparation was needed first. Keeping a firm grip on its slippery dinner, the bird proceeded to whack that fish on the branch repeatedly and with vigor. Only after being tenderized to satisfaction was the meal consumed.



This kingfisher repeatedly smacked the fish against the branch before finally consuming dinner

Red-throated Loon. Another thing we learned this summer is that there are different kinds of loons (let's not get into politics, here). In Tugboat Harbour, a lovely waterfowl caught our attention and had us puzzling about it. While it did exhibit a loon-like appearance (reminding us of a common loon), we'd never seen one sporting a red patch on its throat. Well, as you might guess, it was called a red-throated loon. According to Wikipedia, that red patch is just there during breeding season.



Red-throated loon cruising around Turnbull Cove

Bald-headed Eagles. We had just navigated Yuculta Rapids and were tied up at Stuart Island's Big Bay public dock. Our last time passing this way we'd been super excited to see dozens of eagles feeding on the shore just before the rapids. This time through we weren't so lucky. The friendly manager and person-of-all-trades at the marina commented that we were coming near the tail-end of the season when eagles gathered in the area to fish for hake. Most of the eagles were elsewhere. While we enjoyed an ice-cream, she informed us of a short hike we could take while waiting for the current to change. The approximately 2.5 km walk through the woods took us to the very small aptly-named Eagle Lake. We have never seen so many baldies in one place! It was an awe-inspiring experience to swim and be able to see eagles in every direction you looked (except down, where we spotted orange newts). We counted 23 eagles within sight at one time – no doubt more were hiding in the trees.



Left: eagles everywhere you look! We counted 7 in this one photo. Top right: beautiful baldy looking over the well-named Eagle Lake; Bottom right: bath time for these avians.

As we noted, Eagle Lake was also full of adorable Pacific newts – OK, so that adjective might not be the best for a species that is particularly toxic, but really, they are quite cute. Alas, we had not brought our underwater camera with us so just have the memory of these orange salamanders floating spread-eagled (no pun intended), or swimming away with powerful strokes of their thick tails.

Home Again

We arrived home after 6 weeks on the water with many wonderful memories of unexpected, educational and delightful encounters with wildlife, leading us to marvel yet again that you just never know what you are going to see!

About The Author

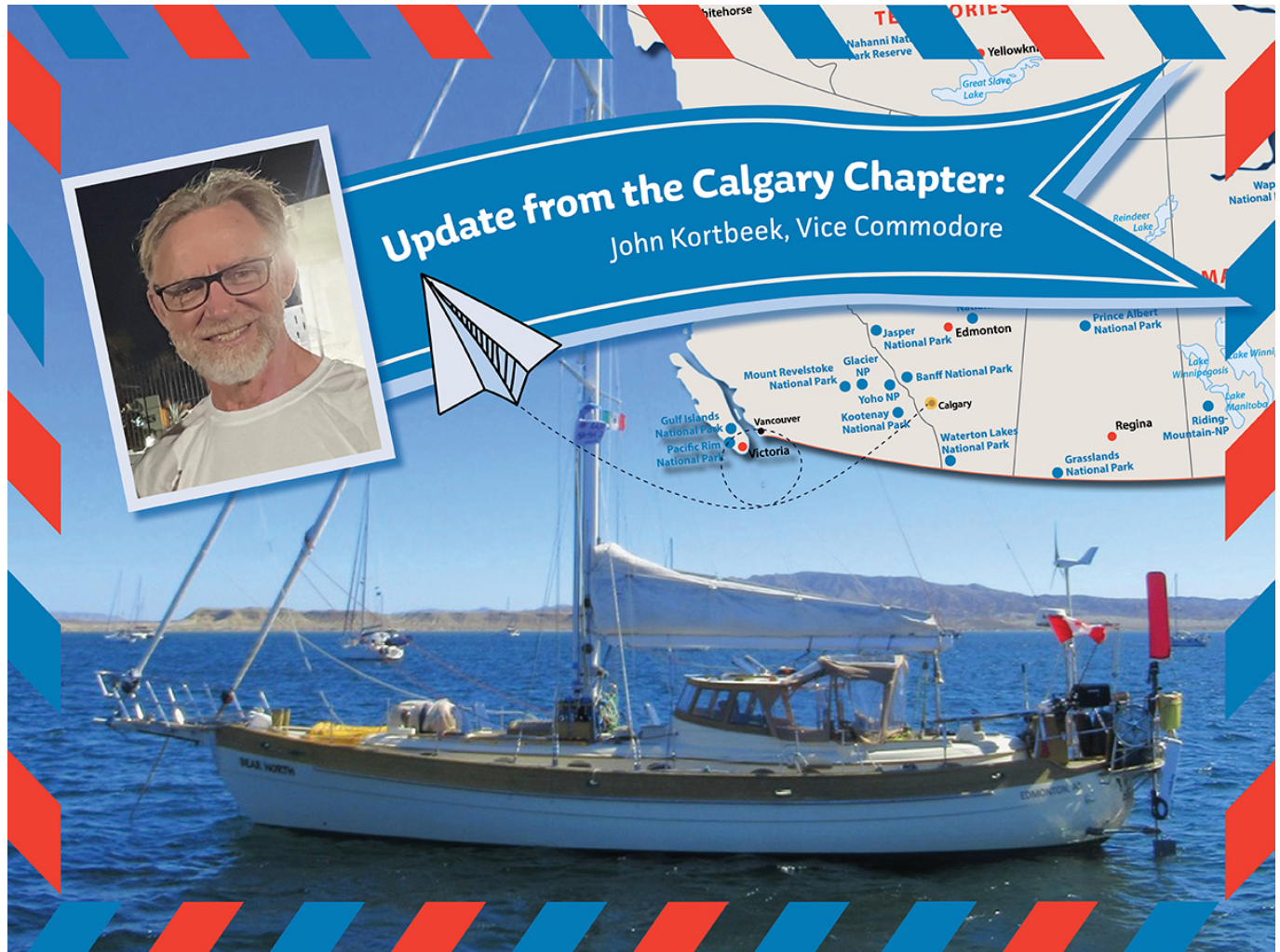
Barb Peck & Bjarne Hansen

Hoku Pa'a - Niagara 35

From 2004-2006 Barb and Bjarne sailed the South Pacific on Freya, their 30' Hunter-Vogel. Upon returning to Victoria they participated in the VI Watch and supported fleet members preparing to go offshore. After some wonderful local cruising they headed south again in 2015 on Hoku Pa'a, their Niagara 35. Once damage from an unfortunate encounter with Hurricane Newton was repaired, Barb and Bjarne continued their exploration of Mexico. Plans for French Polynesia were revised in response to the global pandemic; they sailed Hoku Pa'a back to Canada via the old clipper route and have been reconnecting with the beauty of BC.

An Update From the Calgary Chapter and What's Ahead in 2024

<https://currents.bluewatercruising.org/news/an-update-from-the-calgary-chapter-and-whats-ahead-in-2024/>



Season's Greetings and Happy New Year from the Calgary Chapter!

At the beginning of December we had a fun-filled quiz night and potluck to close the 2023 season. Important nautical facts such as who was Calico Jack, and why was Gilligan's boat named the Minnow were tested.

Aiden and Elaine hosted another wonderful Pre-Thanksgiving Rendezvous at Montague Harbour Provincial Marine Park. The foil cook-off entrees were delicious, as were the all-important desserts!

Our Education Watchkeeper, Steve Colleaux ran a very thorough and informative offshore navigation course this fall, courtesy of Canadian Power Squadron.

Looking Ahead

Calgary club nights will continue next year with evenings at Shaganappi Community Hall, scheduled for Tuesday Feb 6 and Tuesday March 5. Watch for details in Currents and on the [BCA website calendar](#).

BCA has received a very kind invite from the Nanaimo Power Squadron to participate in: **West Coast Weather Seminar**. The Nanaimo Power Squadron's West Coast Weather Seminar provides boaters with a basic background in meteorology tailored to BC's south coast. It begins with a review of basic weather theory then moves to specific regional weather information. This three-week seminar will be presented by Robin Lines, Weather Services Specialist / Met Inspector, Environment Canada (retired) – via Zoom, on Tuesdays, Jan 23, 30 and Feb 6. Please [email me](#), or Steve Colleaux for a registration form. Cost is \$75 for BCA members.

A special thank-you to Vancouver Island Chapter for offering to include Alberta Sailors in their Fleet activities. If you are planning to go offshore in the next couple of years and would like to join the Fleet, please contact [Campbell Good, VI Fleet coordinator](#).

John Kortbeek
Calgary Vice Commodore

Vancouver Hybrid Club Night - PAN PAN... PAN PAN

<https://currents.bluewatercruising.org/events/vancouver-hybrid-club-night-pan-pan-pan-pan/>



Dr. Jeanne LeBlanc and her husband have been sailing and cruising for decades aboard their boat ***Lucky Dog***. In April 2023, they experienced their entire rudder snapping off in the middle of the Pacific Ocean as they crossed from Mexico to Marquesas, ultimately necessitating their rescue by a following cruiser going to Hiva Oa. Weeks later, they sailed hundreds of miles with a hired boat and captain to successfully find and rescue ***Lucky Dog***, install a newly built emergency rudder, and sail her back through big seas and dangerous conditions nineteen days later.

The presentation will discuss immediate and later psychological impacts of this type of large-scale event in order to help sailors understand what are the normal and expected emotional responses to disasters at sea; the cognitive and practical implications—both immediately and longer term—as well as various methods to help optimize coping and effectiveness throughout. Finally, tips for supporting your fellow cruisers who have experienced devastating events will be provided, in order to help us all continue to be the supportive community we aspire to be.

Note: Payment is now required for virtual attendance via Zoom – see below

Hybrid Meeting Format

In-Person Attendees:

- Doors open at 7:00 and meeting starts at 7:30pm
- Cost: \$5/Members, \$10/Non-Members

Virtual Attendees:

- Click [here](#) to register for and purchase your virtual meeting ticket and receive the Zoom meeting invitation.
- Please note that you must be signed in to the BCA website to get the member price.
- Cost: Members – \$5.00 per connected device; Non-Members, \$10 per connected device.

Note: Due to the minimal cost of virtual tickets, and an equal or greater cost to BCA when issuing refunds, no refunds will be issued unless the Vancouver Chapter is unable to deliver the Club Night via Zoom.

About The Author

Heather Marshall

Mischief - Catalina 27

Bluewater BCA member Heather Marshall first fell in love with sailing as a teenager. She sailed to the Mediterranean and back aboard a Bavaria 38 sloop, 'Sea Otter of Canada', with her former husband. Heather single-hands 'Mischief' to destinations in the Salish Sea.

Currents Bluewater Cruising

The Bluewater Cruising Association

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