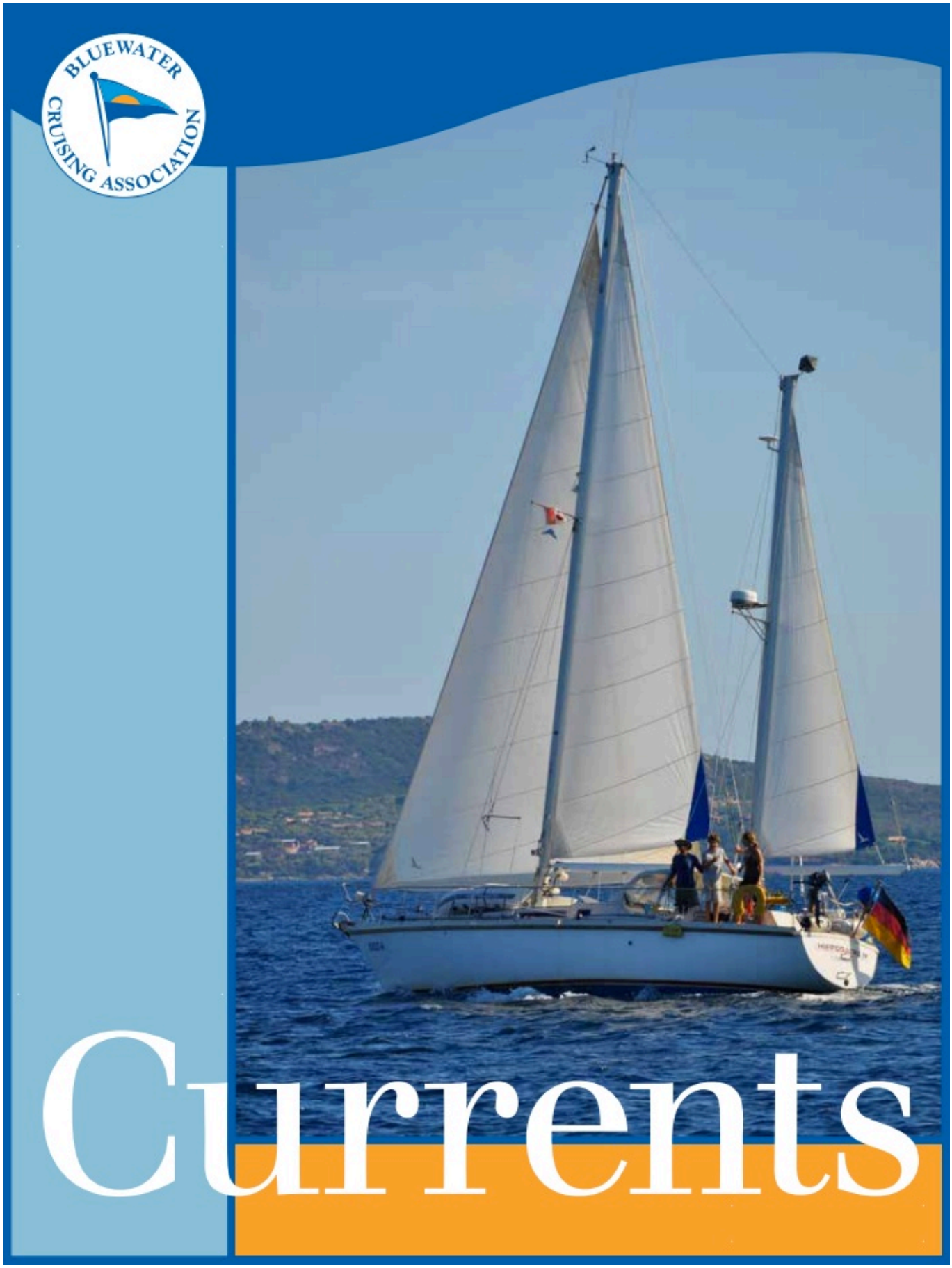
BLUEWATER
CRUISING ASSOCIATION
Currents

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Cruising through the USA: Our Experience with Homeland Security in 2014

http://currents.bluewatercruising.org/articles/cruising-through-the-usa-our-experience-with-homeland-security-in-2014/

When transiting the west coast of the US, foreign-flagged boats must travel under a cruising license. When checking into the US in the Pacific Northwest, ask Customs & Border Protection for a cruising license if they do not offer it when you tell them your plans, as it is not a requirement if you are staying in the PNW. Make sure you have your boat's registration papers and the passports of all crew members. We checked in at Roche Harbor in the San Juan Islands, where they were stern but helpful.

You must check in by phone with Homeland Security as soon as you arrive at each new port and we were told that we could receive a $5,000 dollar fine if we did not do so. We were given a list of phone numbers along with our cruising license but we have met boats that did not get this list of phone numbers. Ask for it as it is extremely helpful.

In Washington and Oregon, we phoned at each port we made, using the phone number of the nearest office on our list. If it was not the right place to call, they were helpful about giving us the right phone number. Sometimes we could only leave messages on their voice mail with our information and phone number; it seemed they were fine with that and did not call us back to confirm anything. Once we reached San Francisco the procedure changed slightly and we were only required to check in once in each jurisdictional area, e.g., San Francisco, Los Angeles, and San Diego. Ask them to clarify where the areas begin and end.

When you check out of San Diego, take your cruising license, boat registration papers, and passports to the Customs & Border Protection office at 1005-610 W. Ash Street, San Diego. You must surrender your cruising license and you will receive a clearance statement that should be presented to the Mexican Authorities upon arrival in Mexico. You will have 48 hours to depart the USA after surrendering your cruising license. If for some reason you stay longer, they require you to return to the Ash Street office to redo your paperwork.

All in all this was not onerous but having a cell phone made it much easier to check-in at each port in a timely manner.

Happy travels.

Lessons Learned... The Hard Way: Contaminated Fuel Tank

http://currents.bluewatercruising.org/articles/lessons-learned-hard-way-contaminated-fuel-tank/

Subject

Contaminated Fuel Tank

Location

Panama

Situation

I was single-handing from Golfito to Panama City. The first leg to Cabo Malo (‘bad cape’) was a three-day trip, followed by an overnighter along the coast to the anchorage at Cabo Malo. For the overnighter, I left at 1600h in hopes of arriving at Cabo Malo around noon the next day. All went reasonably well until the final 15 miles up to the Cabo Malo anchorage where I planned to wait for good Gulf of Panama crossing weather (another overnight passage in busy shipping routes) and to rest.

As I rounded the final turn into the 15-mile stretch to the anchorage, the wind picked up to 35 knots on the nose and the waves became extremely steep. There was no safe place to anchor so I powered into the swells. I was making reasonable headway at about 2 knots until eight miles before the anchorage, when the engine suddenly quit. I was in 125’ of water and had no choice but to drop anchor and hope for a grab on the bottom. Luckily, my 66-lb Bruce and 5/16? chain held in the wind and rocking/rolling sea while I made repairs.

Mistakes Made

I knew I had a contaminated main fuel tank (paper in the fuel). I had added two hand-hole clean-outs in my main tank in addition to the one I already had. Unfortunately, it was only when I cut into the tank that I realized the tank had 4 quadrants. When I installed the hand-hole clean-outs, I wasn’t near a fabricator to make a 4th hand-hole cover, so I was only able to thoroughly clean 3 of the 4 quadrants.

In general, I was diligent with my Baja filter and jerry jugs but not diligent enough. Somehow I allowed contaminated fuel into the main tank in Central America. But fuel problems had plagued the boat for 10 years before this incident. I had controlled this by annually pulling fuel from the bottom of the tank and filtering the sediment through my Baja filter.

Lessons Learned

1. Make sure your tanks are pristine clean before you leave your home port.
2. Have clean out holes in every quadrant of your tank(s).
3. Add biocide with every fuel fill.

4. Buy and use a Baja or funnel type fuel filter for every fuel fill. Make no exceptions even if you are in Canada or the US!
5. Know how to bleed your engine so that you can do it in your sleep. Like me, you may be called upon to bleed the engine in very difficult circumstances.
6. Have a good anchoring system, as your anchor and chain hanging in deep water are very heavy. You will need a strong windlass to lift this weight.

Repairs

1. Located the fuel blockage and removed the obstruction.
2. Removed and replaced all fuel filters
3. Bled the engine fuel system.
4. Switched to the auxiliary tank as the main tank could not be trusted to be completely free of contamination.
5. At first opportunity, I installed a 4th quadrant hand-hole in my main tank and thoroughly cleaned out all tank quadrants.

Have a Story?

We have all made mistakes and learned valuable lessons the hard way. Do you have a story you want to share with BCA members so we can learn from your experience? If so, please submit it for publication in this column using the section headings ‘Submitted by’ through ‘Lesson Learned’ or ‘Repairs’. Thanks!

Send your story to **currents@bluewatercruising.org** with ‘OOPS!’ in the subject line.

La Paz, Mexico Cruisers' Rendezvous

http://currents.bluewatercruising.org/articles/la-paz-baja-california-burp/

A table of eleven, representing five BCA boats: ***Falcon VII***, Jim and Tricia, meandering; ***Good as Gold***, Malcolm and Dina with their daughter Heather, hanging around La Paz before doing the puddle jump; ***Kanilea***, Gord (Mags in Vancouver for Xmas), to Mazatlan in mid-January; ***Purusha***, David and crew, safely got to Marina Cortez from Marina Fonatur (hair-raising, very shallow waters!), planning on touring the Sea of Cortez; ***Spinnaker***, John and Jenny, just relaxing; and ***Avant***, Rob and Debra, planning on sailing up the Sea of Cortez. (Rob and David are not in the picture.)

Here's the Buzz about Currents!

http://currents.bluewatercruising.org/news/heres-buzz-currents/

Welcome to the first instalment to BCA's new online *Currents*. Content will continue to be streamed throughout the month.

We appreciate that this is a new experience for you, and that receiving content online, and in chunks is different from receiving the magazine as a whole, finished product. We have set initial subscriptions for all recipients to a weekly digest and a monthly newsletter, but you can change your subscription, depending on how much or how little you want to read in one sitting. You can change your subscription preferences, or unsubscribe, using the link at the bottom of every email you receive from *Currents*.

Adapting to this new process can take a little time, and we encourage you to explore with curiosity and patience as we publish content over the rest of the month. We welcome your feedback and invite you to download/share content with your friends and community.

2015 Ocean Cruising Adventures Series

http://currents.bluewatercruising.org/articles/2015-ocean-cruising-adventures-series/

For many years, the Ocean Cruising Adventures Speakers Series was run under the auspices of Vancouver Maritime Museum, sponsored by Pacific Yachting Magazine and held at the H.R. MacMillan Space Centre. In 2014, Bluewater Cruising Association took over the helm. This was actually very fitting, as it was one of BCA's founders, local writer and circumnavigator, Liv Kennedy, who took the initiative way back in 1976 to launch the series featuring local offshore sailors. It became known as 'Bluewater Cruising in Small Boats'.

Two years later, at one of the talks, which had become very popular, a clipboard was circulated in the audience to collect names of those interested in forming an offshore cruising association. A whopping 78 people signed up and hence Bluewater Cruising Association was born. So today, 39 years later, BCA has come full circle.This year, long-time BCA member, circumnavigator, and author of *9 Years on the 7 Seas*, OCA series Coordinator, Anne Brevig (www.norsiglar.com), has lined up another group of fascinating voyagers who will share their exciting stories and photos. In the January and February issues of *Currents*, you will find profiles of these four speakers, plus their answers to '5 Questions', which are sure to inspire you to come and see their respective adventures.The talks will be held on Friday nights, starting January 30th, at the H.R. MacMillan Space Centre. Advance tickets may be purchased on BCA's website, or at the door the night of the event.

January 30 ? Olive Odyssey: A Mediterranean Adventure

National Geographic adventurers of the year, Julie and Colin Angus, with their infant son, retrace the ancient maritime routes of the Phoenicians with searching for the secrets of the olive tree.

February 6 ? First to Finish without Really Trying

Peter Heiberg has raced three times to Hawaii, once with crew in the Pacific Cup and twice in the Single Handed Trans Pac Race. Learn how he challenged the ocean racing world on a tight budget.

February 20 ? Glaciers, Grizzlies, and Gumboots

Explore one of the most photogenic places on the planet with Tricia and Jim Bowen as they recount their several seasons of enjoying majestic Southeast Alaska's people, places, and wildlife.

February 27 ? Around the World in Seven Years

Giant tortoise and lemurs in Madagascar, millennium in Zanzibar, and 35 days adrift in the Indian Ocean are just a few highlights from Julie Salisbury's once-in-a-lifetime offshore adventure.

Tickets prices remain very reasonable at $10 for Bluewater Cruising Association members and $15 for the general public. The best deal is the series ticket that covers all four evenings. These are priced at $30

for Bluewater members and $50 for the general public. Advanced individual tickets and series tickets are available for purchase online from the Bluewater Cruising Association website. Tickets are also available for cash purchase at the door on the night of the event. For further information, contact vaneducation@bluewatercruising.org.

Currents' New Editing Team!

http://currents.bluewatercruising.org/news/currents-needs-new-editors-asap/

As you may have learned by now, I let my name stand at the 2014 AGM for the position of BCA Secretary and was elected by acclamation. Although *Currents* has been my 'baby' on and off since 2002, I have had to resign from the editor job, effective ASAP, because of my current commitment/work load.

We are all busy people, whether holding down jobs, and/or raising children, and/or preparing to go offshore, and/or giving back to our communities through volunteerism. To make it easier for members to give back to the BCA community, the Currents Committee opted to establish a *team* of editors, each with a discrete set of responsibilities. We have filled four of the five positions already!

1. Managing Editor: **Rosario Passos**, who has assumed responsibility for ensuring consistent formatting, final edits, writing editorials, and publishing content to the *Currents* site;
2. Member Submissions Editor: **June Lazenby**, who has assumed editing responsibility for letters, postcards, and articles;
3. Photo Editor: **Jean Baillargeon**, who is responsible for ensuring images are of a suitable quality and format for publication, and enhancing images as needed;
4. Copy Editor: **Sally Holland** has been our proofreader *par excellence* for several years and is continuing in the role.

Thank you, Rosario, June, Jean, and Sally!

We are still in need of a BCA News Editor, who will be responsible for editing Top Currents, Club Night items, Fleet reports, BCA 'Help Wanted' ads, and Education reports.

If you are a grammar hound, a good speller, and can spot a typo at 30 paces, you have the makings to be a great editor! If you are a blogger, you have skills and experience that are easily transferable to the job of *Currents* editor in our now-digital age! The editorial skills are essential; the digital skills can be learned as part of the orientation to the job. (Note: I'm not particularly technologically savvy but have had fun putting together this first digital *Currents*.)

And, good news for modern editors! These jobs can be done anywhere in the world, requiring only reliable Internet access.

I have enjoyed serving as editor from 2002 – 2003, 2005 – 2008, and from 2012 to the present. Now is an exciting time for the editorial team to take on the various roles and help shape *Currents* as a digital publication.

Please let me know if you are interested and available to assume the BCA News Editor position. You will have the e*Currents* Transition Team to support you in the technical aspects and you will have me to mentor and support you in the editorial aspects.

Contributors: Please check out the 'Story Ideas' page for content and photo guidelines. Thank you in

advance for your submissions, which you can send to the Editor.

Wishing you wonderful adventures in 2015!

Donna Sassaman

on behalf of the Currents Editorial Team

The Family Visits Fiji, Part I

http://currents.bluewatercruising.org/articles/family-visits-fiji-bula-fiji-part/

On July 2, 2014, a little Air Fiji Cessna airplane appears in the distance and then drops out of sight to the bottom of the grass strip to land uphill on the beautiful island of Vanua Balavu. Today is a special flight from Suva, the capital of Fiji. Out hop six passengers, four of whom are John, Camie, Blake, and Nolan Bentham from Victoria, BC – our family. They are carting their hand luggage, pillows (for sleeping on the plane), vegetables and fruit from the Suva farmer's market, a load of fishing lures, and a fishing rod!

The family arrived from Suva aboard a small Air Fiji Cessna airplane.

Whew, after traveling quite a distance, they have arrived safely from Canada to join ***Sea Whisper*** for two weeks in the Lau Island group. They're here to visit Fiji's wild frontier and to explore the remote villages of the northern Lau Island group, and the schools; to learn about the Fijian culture, to play rugby with the kids, to attend village feasts and have a lot of fun and just to hang out as they say! Add to the mix water sports, swimming, snorkeling, wakeboarding and fishing. The dance begins in the sunshine of the villages and the warm waters of the Lau!

Prior to their connecting flight to the Lau, the four of them had spent 1½ days in Suva, the multi-cultural capital of Fiji. There they were introduced to Fiji's two cultures – Fijian and Indo-Fijian; the students from the University of the South Pacific (comprising twelve Pacific Nations); and the grand municipal market with all its cabbages and kava, among a ton of other farm-market produce.

Say Bula!

‘Bula’ is the Fijian ‘hello’. It’s the best known word in the Fijian language.

For the next two weeks, ***Sea Whisper*** will be our family home together. We are excited to plan our days and pack them with culture and adventure. We will explore the hidden villages and, with the single word ‘bula’, be adopted by the locals. Soaking up the Fijian friendliness and affection and the scenery that surrounds us will be a world class experience. Let’s get started!

Dalaconi, a Remote Village in Northern Lau

We are off the tourist track! Among 330 islands, most Fijians live in villages with their extended family or clan and a hereditary chief. Blake and Nolan look around and soon realize that life is pretty simple here in the village of Dalaconi. There are no stores, no TV, or recreation centre, only a supply ship stopping once a month with supplies from Suva. These people have so few material things, but they are rich in other ways. In the small village of Dalaconi, everyone helps each other and they share what they have with friends and family.

They are sustained by food sources from the land and the sea, living the lifestyle that their ancestors lived. The men, women, and children are happy enjoying their freedom in this Pacific paradise. When we approach them, their faces are calm, wide, and plain with a wee bit of curiosity as they intently gaze at us. And now after meeting Lionel and me, the villagers are very keen to get to know the family. We are interested in them; they in us. We soon become friends. Today in this small hidden village of Dalaconi on Vanua Balavu Island, we will perform our ‘sevusevu’ and be accepted into their family.

Sevusevu

We thought two boys, 11- and 13-years-old, would seem a bit shy and bewildered at the thought of wearing a wrap-around skirt, ‘sulu’, to meet the Chief and perform our ‘sevusevu’, the traditional ceremony for visitors to be accepted into a Fijian village. We give a little briefing on village protocol: no hats, sunglasses, never to touch a Fijian’s head, and sit with our legs crossed in front. We practice: ‘bula’ (hello), ‘vinaka’ (thank you), and ‘goodbye’ (moce).

John dons his sulu in preparation for the ceremony.

Off we go with our bundle of ‘waka’ (kava) in hand. The Chief is delighted to meet two smart young lads from Canada. He places them on each side of him in a hearty, warm embrace. But before we begin, John is invited to the back garden to pound the kava with the big steel mallet. The kava root is pounded into a fine powder to be mixed with rainwater and squeezed through a silk cloth.

The Chief welcomes the family to the village during a sevusevu ceremony.

Back to the ceremony and the silence, sitting cross-legged – boys in their sulus, girls in their sarongs. How smart we all look. The ‘mixer’ of the kava circles, the Tanoa (kava bowl), with his hands indicates the kava is ready to drink. The chants begin and the Chief receives the first offering in his personal ‘bilo’ (drinking bowl made from the coconut shell). Then the bilos are passed around in silence and we all take our turn sipping the muddy, chalky substance. The silence is broken with the ‘cobo’ claps. Everyone is smiling and we now have completed an age-old tradition. We introduce ourselves and talk (talanoa) about our travels. We have enjoyed this uncommon experience. ‘Pa’, the Chief’s sister, magically prepares a luncheon spread of grilled fish, fish with coconut, yams, spinach, and cassava for all of us. We are one family.

Pa provides an array of dishes at the post-sevusevu ceremony!

The School

We all walked to the school at the edge of the plantations. Here the boys found friendly teachers and the students in their crisp blue and white uniforms. I must say my grandsons also looked very smart in their sulus and Fijian shirts. This is a primary school – grades 1 to 7. Already we recognized Melanie from the village. She was smiling at us and welcomed us into her class. Melanie, who speaks impeccable English, is a very bright 12-year-old and wants to be a doctor someday.

The boys attend the primary school in the village.

The boys were eager to pass out the pencils, pens, flags, and Canada pins we had brought for the students, all 26 boys and girls. There were more boys than girls. Each student stood up from their simple wooden desk and bench-seat and told us their name and their age. Voila! We were making new friends and were told there would be rugby after school in the small field. Blake and Nolan chit-chatted with the students, making friendly connections. Kids of all ages played in the dirt, on a rough grass field, or the village beach. Even though life is different here, kids are kids and Blake and Nolan found out that there is a common bond between Fijian and Canadian kids.

The Plantations

Walking in the hot sun on the dirt road to the plantations, we notice a mass of vegetation. There are banana trees, coconut trees, papaya trees, mango trees, and lemons, limes, and oranges. The crops on the ground are casaba, yams, taro, and some spinach and pumpkin. And, of course, kava bushes.

Our eyes are dancing in all directions as we take it all in. All of us are genuinely curious about all that we see: The bare-footed male villagers, coming and going on the narrow dirt roads, brandishing their machetes, and the men and women packing large palm-grass baskets laden with fruits and vegetables that they will take back to their village. A horse passes by with the rider balancing a load of wood for the kitchen fires in the village. Our family is humbled by the everyday routine of gathering food from the land and the sea. An indescribable scene.

To be continued…

In Memoriam ? Ian Monsarrat

http://currents.bluewatercruising.org/news/memoriam-%e2%88%92-ian-monsarrat/

Ian was born in Montreal on September 9, 1934 and passed at 8 bells (End of Watch) at 0800h on 18 December, 2014. He and I were married in 1982 in St. John's, Newfoundland. Ian had four children from a previous marriage.

Ian was a photographer: commercial, industrial, CN, National Research Council, CIL. Since 1977, he was an Ophthalmic Photographer at UBC, Eye Care Centre, and Burnaby. He also took photos for fun!

Ian taught Power Squadron courses and sailing courses at Jib Set.

In 1979, Ian and I sailed our 26? Thunderbird, ***Tolowa***, up the inlets: Toba, Bute, Jervis, and Rivers, exploring the BC coast. We received an award from the Thunderbird Fleet 9 for going farthest afield in a T'bird that year! We also gave a talk at the Ocean Cruising Series at the Planetarium about our trip.

We bought ***Allegra***, a Spencer 42, in 1980, moved aboard and into Spruce Harbour, and are still there. That year, we sailed to the Queen Charlottes, as a shakedown cruise to learn about our boat. We spent the next eight years sailing the BC Coast extensively, inside and outside Vancouver Island, and Puget Sound.

We were not part of the BCA Fleet as Fleet did not exist in those days. We just talked to cruisers as they came back to find out a bit more.

From 1988 ? 1991, we sailed down to Mexico, across the Sea of Cortez to Acapulco, before heading to French Polynesia, Tonga, and New Zealand. When we returned, we received a BCA Offshore Award.

From 1999-2004 we travelled in our Volkswagen Westfalia in Mexico, the western American states, Alaska, BC, and Alberta.

Ian received a BCA Service Award in appreciation for his years spent on the Vancouver Chapter's concession as bartender from 2007-2009.

With a quick wit, Ian would tease, banter, and chat with folks, and was well-known for his sense of humour. He will be missed by the many who knew him.

Barb Angel

Vancouver, BC

Made it to Mazatlan!

http://currents.bluewatercruising.org/articles/made-mazatlan/

If You Want Something Done Right, Learn How, and Then Do It Yourself!

We figured we would likely have to wait in La Paz through much of October for hurricane season to end, so we planned to have some soft spots in the deck fixed and the exterior woodwork refinished. The estimate was for the work to take two weeks; we gave it three and planned to head for Mazatlan mid-late October. The deck work went sideways pretty quickly – we noticed cracks even before the finishing work was done. We discovered they had used the wrong materials and it had to be ripped up and redone. The ripping up was probably a bigger job than the initial project. Thanks to Rob and Kim at Cross Marine Works for stepping in and teaching our Mexican help (and us) how to do the job properly. The woodwork went well, with the exception that one of the combings just didn't want to take the Cetol and it had to be redone a few times. It does look pretty nice, though.

Curiositas' newly refinished bright work.

In the meantime, we were busy getting the sails, running rigging, canvas, etc. back up after having it all

off for hurricane season, and stocking up on spare bits and pieces, having heard that the mainland chandleries are not as good as those in La Paz. As we had had quite a bit of maintenance work done on the mechanical systems in September, we planned to stop on Espiritu Santo and check things out. If all went well, we would make the crossing to Mazatlan. In testing out the watermaker, the high pressure pump hose blew out, spewing salt water all over the engine room. We headed back to La Paz…

A couple of days later, Bill Lee, the 'Watermaker Guy', has us fixed up, but we had to wait for a 3 day northerly (blowing 30 knots) to go through. Finally, November 27, we were on our way again, no stops planned, straight to Mazatlan. A bit of the northerly was still blowing and we had excellent sailing for the first 24 hours or so, often going over 7 knots. The wind slowed after that, which was good because we did not want to arrive in Mazatlan during the night anyways. We sailed all the way, except the last couple of hours. Out one little hiccup in an otherwise perfect crossing was running aground in the mouth of the channel! Luckily it is a sandy bottom and we managed to back off it and moved closer to the middle of the channel. During the next week, several other boats went aground in the same spot and this week they have started dredging the channel. Apparently, it has not been dredged in over a year.

Wayne and Judy have had squid on the deck before, but never on top of the dodger!

Mazatlan

While Mazatlan has a big industrial harbour, the marinas are located in an estuary on the north end of the city. It is a city of 500,000 people, but without a car, mostly what we see is the extensive tourist / hotel section. The *malecon* and main beach is 10 km long so you can understand why this became a tourist destination. We don't actually see tons of tourists, however; not sure if this is because they stay within the resort hotels or if the warnings about drug crime in the area have taken their toll.

Mazatlan's malecon, fronting the beach, is 10-kilometres long.

The first night we were here we took in the Festival of Lights, a fantastic fireworks display going off from various points all along the *malecon*. This was part of the weekend marathon, half marathon, and 10k races' celebrations.

The old town area has some fabulous architecture and restaurants and a huge market full of fresh everything that I found simply overwhelming. We also took in the 'Artwalk' (first Friday of each month), where a number of galleries and shops open in the evening to display their works.

Artwalk – Catrina statues.

Transportation is pretty easy in Mazatlan (especially if you have a kind friend with a truck). Lots of buses (7 – 10 pesos) and taxis, but unique (I think) to Mazatlan are the *polmonias* (souped-up cute golf carts with big stereo systems) and red trucks (I call them party cars because they fit 8 people sitting in the back and also have big stereo systems).

Party trucks accommodate up to 8 passengers in the back.

As we were only planning to spend about a week in Mazatlan, we decided to stay at the El Cid Resort Marina. We were pleasantly surprised when we pulled in to find our friends Jan and Kim on ***Remember Me*** just across the dock from us! Last we had heard, they were heading south but they like it so much in Mazatlan they decided to stay another season. They have a morning VHF net here and through this, we discovered a number of other boats we had met in La Paz were also in town. Trish and Jim on ***Falcon VII*** came through last week and generously arranged a Bluewater Cruising Association night out, so it was fun to meet some of our fellow Canadian cruisers.

There are two nice pools at El Cid and a little ferry takes you across the channel to a beach. We took our kayaks out a couple of times to explore the estuary and the other marinas and saw big iguanas sitting in the bushes, lots of birds, and really nice houses. Unfortunately, forgot to take the camera.

Nice as it is here, we do have plans to make our way south, so on December 7 we made our way back through the channel, heading to Isla Isabela. A couple of hours out, we noticed the system was over-charging. Not wanting to burn out the batteries, we decided to head back to Mazatlan to have it attended to. Unfortunately, there was a negative tide during the day, but if we wanted to get back in before dark, we had no choice. Kim and Jan very kindly agreed to greet us in their dinghy and guide us through with the aid of a lead-on-a-line depth sounder. Thanks, guys!

Jan and Kim guide Curiositas back into the Mazatlan Harbour.

So we have now had the alternator overhauled and all appears to be good to go. During the next few weeks we plan stops at Isla Isabela (dubbed the Mexican Galapagos), Matachen (San Blas), Chacala, and then La Cruz.

Update on Proposed East Pacific Offshore Waters Forecasts

http://currents.bluewatercruising.org/articles/update-proposed-east-pacific-offshore-waters-forecasts/

The Tropical Analysis and Forecast Branch (TAFB) of the National Hurricane Center understands that the northeast Pacific basin is a highly traversed area for cruise ships and recreational vessels. Major cruise lines embark at a number of ports-of-call along the coast of Central America, Mexico, and Baja California. Baja California and the surrounding waters (northeast Pacific and the Gulf of California) is host to a vast array of recreational boaters such as yourselves. Thanks to your efforts in contacting us, we are fully cognizant of the vast number of marine interests in the region, and the resulting need for more detailed maritime forecasts.

TAFB is committed to the eventual production of an offshore waters forecast for the East Pacific basin. Our previous correspondence with Mr. Mark Schneider and some of you described in great detail the plans for our offshore waters forecasts. TAFB operationally implemented gridded marine forecasts on April 3, 2012 for the Atlantic and East Pacific basin. For the Atlantic basin, the existing offshore waters zones were subdivided into 32 zones to allow text formatters to provide detailed forecasts for the southwest North Atlantic, Caribbean Sea and Gulf of Mexico. In is anticipated that the use of the text formatters will also be applied to the gridded database in the East Pacific to provide detailed zone forecasts for Baja California, Mexico and Central America.

There are a number of hurdles internally we must overcome before we can deliver the enhanced service to you. Two of the key hurdles are the acquisition of addition numerical model data sets in our Advanced Weather Interactive Processing System (AWIPS) Gridded Forecast Editor (GFE) and redistribution of the existing workflow on our East Pacific forecast desk to allow for the production of the offshore waters forecast for the basin. The proposed area for the new offshore waters forecast falls within METAREA XII of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) Marine Broadcast System for the Global Maritime Distress and Safety System (GMDSS).

Global Maritime Distress and Safety System.

Although the United States is recognized as the issuing service for METAREA XII, agreements may be required between the U.S., Mexico and Central American countries. The plan is to follow up with the NWS Office of International Affairs (IA) to determine the most efficient method of accomplishing this without incurring significant hurdles. Going forward, the plan is to acquire the necessary data sets in

AWIPS/GFE and review the existing workflow by the end of March 2015 and determine the feasibility of providing an experimental offshore waters forecast by the summer of 2015. It is anticipated the transition of the experimental product to an operational status would be achieved through efficiencies in the production of existing products and services. I sincerely thank you for your overwhelming enthusiasm for enhanced forecast services for the East pacific basin. Let me assure you, NHC/TAFB is committed to providing the best service to our marine customers and look forward to providing the enhanced services the offshore waters forecast will provide. On behalf of the staff here, I would like to extend best wishes for a Happy Holiday season.

Respectfully,

Hugh Cobb, Chief NHC/TAFB

NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE

National Hurricane Center

Become a Citizen Oceanographer: Help Scientists Close the Data Gap

http://currents.bluewatercruising.org/articles/become-citizen-oceanographer-help-scientists-close-data-gap/

Planning an open ocean cruise? If so, you are the key to helping scientists better understand the health of the world's oceans. When we look across the limitless horizon of a vast ocean, it's easy to believe that one little action can't possibly hurt or help something so large as the world's oceans. Dumping a small bucket of toxic cleaning product into the marina water, for example, or tossing some trash overboard, maybe even a plastic bottle. But the sum of all parts is turning out to be a staggering whole, when it comes to the faltering health of the world's oceans.

Why Do the Oceans Matter?

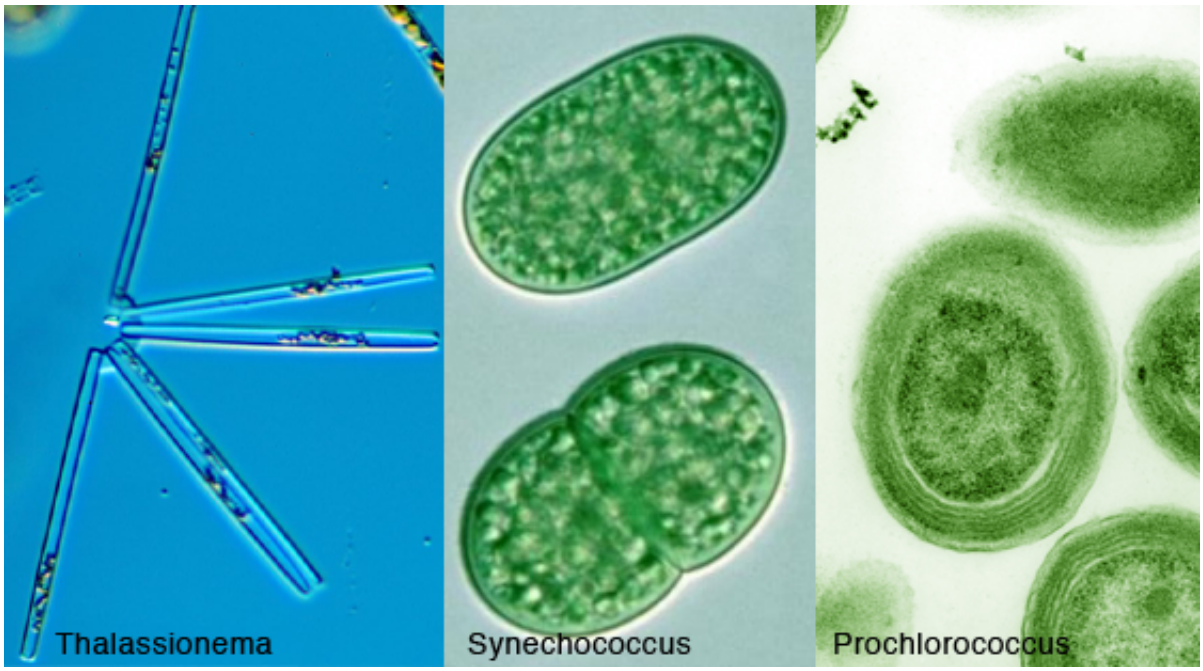
Oceans cover 71% of our planet and play a critical role in buffering the atmosphere, cycling nutrients through the food web and absorbing the massive release of CO2 since the industrial age. They also provide every other breath that we take. Taken in sum, the oceans serve as the backbone to sustaining habitable life on planet Earth.

Yet our oceans are under unprecedented stress. Overfishing, ocean acidification, dumping, increased usage of oil pipelines and deep sea drilling all contributes the destabilization of this increasingly fragile ecosystem. As world population rises and our demands grow, the prognosis for the oceans is not good. While these effects can be readily seen and appreciated, the biggest threat is to the invisible majority: microbes.

What are Marine Microbes?

Though they may be tiny, marine microbes are *one hundred times more abundant in the ocean than there are stars in the galaxy* and make up 90% of the ocean's total biomass. They play critical roles in converting carbon dioxide to organic matter and in regulating nutrient cycling, which serves as the bedrock to the food web.

Without healthy functioning microbial communities, we would not have any air to breath and the food web would collapse. They are also the first to respond to changes in ocean chemistry effectively functioning as the proverbial 'canary in the coalmine.' With all the pressures our species places on the ocean, now more than ever, monitoring the health of these organisms is of urgent priority.



With names like Thalassionema, Synechococcus, and Prochlorococcus, these microscopic organisms are hard for people to connect with, but they are the foundation of life on our planet.

Data Collection Woes

Because the ocean is a dynamic and tremendously large ecosystem, millions of observation points are required to better understand the ocean environment. However, traditional oceanographic research vessels are unable to cover this vast space. Traditional oceanography is restricted to large and expensive research ships, where only a few samples may be taken at a time. A modern research vessel typically costs more than $30,000 per day to operate and research vessels only cover a fraction of the world's oceans.

The existing missing data limits our ability to predict ocean weather, determine the stability of the food web and better understand the impacts of ocean acidification. Without more data points, much about the true state of the ocean will remain largely unknown.

With global cutbacks in government research funds, citizen science (research conducted by nonprofessional scientists) offers an elegant solution to solving the lack of global data collection.

By putting data collection in the hands of world cruisers, we will dramatically reduce the cost per sample, which means more information can be gathered per research dollar spent.

Ocean Sailing Microbial Observatory (OSMO)

Last year, Indigo V Expeditions carried out a concept cruise aboard our flagship vessel, ***Indigo V***, a 61' Nautor Swan. We sailed from Cape Town, South Africa to Phuket, Thailand, covering over 5,800 NM, developing and testing instrumentation and defining the parameters needed to better understand ocean health.

INDIGO V is a 61’ Nautor Swan and the flagship of Indigo V Expeditions. (Photo Credit: Rachelle Lauro)

We developed the Ocean Sailing Microbial Observatory (OSMO), which is an auto-sampling device that collects meta-data such as temperature, pH and salinity. The OSMO records time, date and location of the vessel at the time of sampling. The raw data is sent to the Indigo lab via satellite SMS and we are able to put a time and location stamp on every sample. Microbial data is also collected via seawater filtration to be further analyzed onshore.

By harnessing modern technology and equipping as many ocean-going vessels as possible with small instrumentation, scientists will be able to collect invaluable and large-scale data sets about bacteria, plankton and the marine ecosystems that have never been possible before.

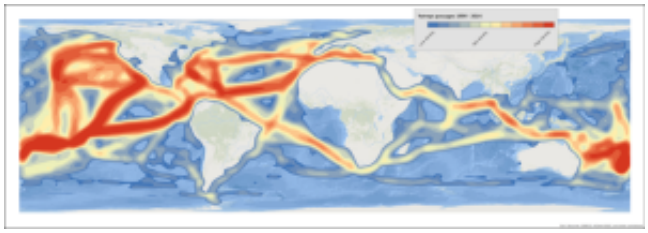
The Rise of Citizen Oceanographers – Participation is Easy and Free!

By using what’s known as ‘citizen science’, Indigo V Expeditions set out to prove that the concept of crowd-sourcing oceanography can solve the great data collection bottleneck. Joining cost-effective cutting edge technology with existing world cruiser routes, we can monitor microbial communities in the world’s oceans year after year in the same locations. This is crucial to building a baseline of ocean health that can be closely monitored for changes.

The data collected from citizen oceanographers will be released publicly and the models produced will be used to raise public awareness and assist policy-makers as they make better, scientifically based decisions that will lead to the protection of this very precious resource for generations to come.

Involvement for sailors is easy and free! OSMO will be attached to the stern pulpit, using sturdy integrated hard plastic brackets. It is fully automated, and supplies its own power. Sailors do not need to operate the OSMO and it does not slow sailing performance.

To lodge your interest in volunteering, please contact Rachelle Lauro with Indigo V Expeditions. Or visit www.indigovexpeditions.com for more information.



Everyday, thousands of vessels cruise the oceans. With the help of cruisers worldwide, we can collect vast amounts of data that will help us better understand ocean health. (World Cruising Routes. Data from: pangolin.co.nz, figure courtesy of Jacob Senstius.)

The oceans are in trouble, but hope exists to save them. Once we move to protect the fragile balance of the ecosystems, the oceans will recover and flourish. But if we make no changes, if we ignore the warning signs and continue to destroy ecosystems, we will destroy the very ‘organs’ put in place to support habitable life on the planet. Together, we can make a difference.

What Else Can You Do?

Every single person has the power to turn the tide, even if you aren’t planning an open ocean cruise any time soon.

Fore go single use plastics. Most immediately, we can all work to reduce the vast amount of plastics that finds its way into the oceans via waterways and storm water run-offs. Buy reusable grocery bags and fore go using single-use plastics in any capacity. It’s well documented that plastics are systematically poisoning our wildlife, but as it turns out plastics are poisoning people too. A recent study by Dr. Rochman et al, (Nature, Nov 2013) showed that plastic breaks down into ‘micro-plastics’ and are ingested by fish. The persistent organic pollutants (POPs) leech harmful chemicals into fish flesh that we, in turn, consume.

Participate in local citizen science projects. Professor Jay Cullen at the University of Victoria is heading up an initiative to measure for Fukushima-derived radionuclides in seawater and marine organisms, collected in Canada’s Pacific and Arctic Oceans. Participating is as easy as collecting a bucket of water at your local estuary. For more information, please visit www.fukushimainform.ca or email Professor Cullen directly.

OCA Series: Olive Odyssey — A Mediterranean Sailing Adventure

http://currents.bluewatercruising.org/articles/olive-odyssey-mediterranean-sailing-adventure/

National Geographic adventurers of the year, Julie and Colin Angus, retrace the ancient maritime routes of the Phoenicians with their infant son searching for the secrets of the olive tree.

Julie and Colin are presenting their journey as part of our Ocean Adventures Series – more details here.

Explore the Mediterranean with Julie, Colin, and their infant son in search of the secrets of the olive tree. Inspired by Julie's Syrian forebears' intimate relationship with the olive, Julie and Colin unlock the secrets of the fruit that meant so much to them. Travelling from Spain to Israel by sailboat and overland, they collect samples from ancient trees to determine where the first olive tree originated; feast on inky black tapenades and codfish drizzled with olive oil, among many other delights; witness the harvesting of olives in Greece; and visit perhaps the oldest olive tree in the world, on Crete. The result is a remarkable sailing journey and a fascinating history and biography of this most influential and irresistible fruit.

This National Geographic supported journey is detailed in the book Olive Odyssey: Searching for the Secrets of the Fruit that Seduced the World and which will be for sale at their show.

In addition to the above accomplishment, Julie and Colin have explored some of the most remote and inhospitable parts of the world and documented their adventures through books and films. Colin is the first person to circumnavigate the globe by human-power, a 43,000 kilometre journey across three continents and two oceans by foot, bicycle, ski, and rowboat. Julie was his teammate for much of the journey, including the five month row across the Atlantic Ocean, which made her the first woman to row across the Atlantic from mainland to mainland. For their achievement they jointly received the 2007 Adventurer of Year Award from National Geographic Adventure.

Colin is also the first person to raft the entire length of the Amazon River, as well as the first to descend the world's fifth longest river, the Yenisei. With Julie, he rowed thousands of kilometres across Europe and explored the North and Black Seas by rowboat. Julie is a molecular biologist and uses her scientific training to understand and share the unique circumstances of the environmental habitats they travel through. Collectively they have written six books and produced four documentaries. For more about their various adventures, visit www.angusadventures.com.

Ancient olive tree in Sicily

We have asked five questions of all of our OCA Speakers. Here are Julie and Colin’s answers.

1. When and how did you get into sailing?

Colin decided he wanted to go offshore cruising at the age of 12 after reading the book Dove. With no knowledge of the sea, and no mentors to guide him through the process, he relied on books to gain the appropriate knowledge. In Grade 11 he bought an Enterprise sailing dinghy with paper route savings to put some of that knowledge into practice. Shortly after graduating from school, Colin purchased a 27’ cruising sailboat with which he spent five years sailing the South Pacific.

For me, sailing came at a much later age, and was an evolution from smaller human-powered craft. I’d embarked on several long distance voyages by rowboat, including rowing 7,000km from Scotland to Syria and rowing across the Atlantic Ocean from Portugal to Costa Rica. The Atlantic crossing in particular provided me with skills that crossed into the realm of offshore sailing. The first major sailing trip that I did was with Olive Odyssey, when we were uncovering the story of the olive. Colin and I

purchased a 27’ boat in Spain and spent several months sailing it in the Mediterranean with our baby son as we explored ancient Phoenician ports.

2. If you could share a couple of your very best memories from your offshore cruising experience, what would they be?

Colin: My most memorable moment was arriving in Hiva Oa, French Polynesia after spending 33 days sailing from Mexico. For me, the jagged volcanic spires, rich tropical smells, and Polynesian people were the realization of a dream I’d had from when I was a kid.

Julie: Some of my favourite moments on the Mediterranean were anchoring in picturesque locations, and enjoying delicious meals and good wine while surrounded by spectacular scenery. I especially loved the rugged coast of Sardinia and Corsica.

3. What was the most frightening or unusual experience you had during your adventure?

Julie: Undoubtedly, it was riding out Hurricane Vince when we were crossing the Atlantic Ocean in our rowboat. There’s nothing quite like being in a quarter-inch plywood boat, with a storm that has the power to decimate a city bearing down on you.

4. Of all the places you have sailed, is there one in particular that you would name as your favourite destination?

That’s a tough one – so many beautiful and unique places! The Mani Peninsula in Greece was one of our favourite places. Unfortunately, we weren’t sailing at that point, as it seemed a perfect place to explore by boat.

5. If you could give one piece of advice to people who are starting out cruising, what would it be?

I think a great way to learn how to sail, and to get a feel for life on a boat is to get a $2,000-$3,000 second-hand trailer sailor. Spend a couple of months cruising our beautiful (and forgiving) backyard here in the NW getting comfortable with the whole process. This is a very inexpensive way to gain a huge amount of knowledge and have fun at the same time. Too many people jump in the deep end, and then decide it isn’t their cup of tea, after wasting large amounts of money and time.

Vimeo Video

Olive Odyssey Trailer from julie on Vimeo.

2014 New Year's Eve at Poet's Cove

http://currents.bluewatercruising.org/articles/2014-new-years-eve-poets-cove/

A large number of BCA members met at Poet’s Cove on South Pender for New Year’s Eve.

There were 10 boats and 34 people attended the dinner and dance at the Syrens Pub. Rita had organized this get together and managed to get a great rate for docking for all the boats. Most people stayed for three nights.

Ian and Barb on Lolani joined the party.

Besides the party on New Year’s Eve we had a great time visiting each others’ boats and getting together for appies or potlucks. The resort closed for the winter the day after we left and will re-open in April.

Celebrating the New Year with Bruce and Marina and friends, from Amritha

There was quite a large contingent from Calgary: Dave and Kate, with guests Jim and Margaret-Ann on ***Segue II***, Barb and Ian on ***Lolani***, Bruce and Marina with four guests on ***Amritha*** and Bob and Heather on ***Escargot***.

Glen, Chris, Jacquie, Ron, Leanne and Judy

The BCA members from Vancouver Island attending were: Barb and Bjarne on ***Hoku Pa'a***, Chris and Jacquie on ***Inceptus***, VI Commodore Glen Wilson with his canine buddy Russell on ***Moon Shadow VI*** , Peter and Connie on ***Cookie Cutter*** and Vaughan and Rita on ***Baraka Bashad***.

Vaughan, Rita, Peter, Connie, Barb and Bjarne

There were a few other boats in our party from non-BCA members. A great time was had by all. We drank and danced the New Year in. See you all at the Vancouver Island Rendez-vous on the May long weekend at Poet’s Cove.

VICE 2015

http://currents.bluewatercruising.org/news/vice-2015/

There is no preparation for going offshore quite like being offshore. You can do this by joining VICE 2015 (**V**ancouver **I**sland **C**ruising **E**xperience).

Each year BCA vessels from all three chapters get together online to plan a multi-day offshore trip, usually in late June/early July. They wait for a weather window on the West Coast of Vancouver Island before sailing out to sea. The idea is to leave in reasonable weather that is similar to what you will be experiencing on your offshore voyage. The boats head out into the Pacific for two or three days, sailing towards a selected GPS destination before turning back. This shakedown cruise will give you a chance to test your boats and yourselves – cooking, eating, sleeping, using offshore systems, communicating and keeping watch at sea – the skills you will need when you leave on your real voyage. VICE also gives you the opportunity to practice manoeuvres like heaving to and deploying a drogue or storm anchor – best practiced before Mother Nature puts you to the test!
Boats that participate in VICE are often looking for crew. This is a golden opportunity for boatless dreamers to experience life on board prior to buying and equipping a boat.

If you are interested in participating in VICE 2015 (no commitment necessary), please e-mail Don Hutchison. We will help you get in touch with the VICE 2015 fleet so that you can join in the planning.

If you are a member of BCA, you can read about previous VICE trips in these past copies of Currents (*you will be asked to login to the BCA website when you click on the links below*):

- December 2007
- December 2008
- December 2009
- November 2010
- October 2011
- October 2012

OCA Series: First to Finish without Really Trying

http://currents.bluewatercruising.org/articles/oca-series-first-finish-without-really-trying/

“Peter Heiberg has raced three times to Hawaii; once with crew in the Pacific Cup and twice in the Single Handed Trans Pac Race. Learn how he challenged the Ocean Racing World on a tight budget.”

After a lifetime of working and cruising on various oceans of the world, and finding himself in possession of a beautiful old former race boat, Peter Heiberg thought he would give ocean racing a shot. Although earning only $30 an hour at the time, he entered the Pacific Cup from San Francisco to Kaneohe Bay in Oahu. “We joked that we were the only boat in the race that had a drill press in the foc’s’le but, in fact, we did have a drill press in the foc’s’le”. His crew of mostly non-sailors had a great time but didn’t exactly light the world on fire. Returning to the PNW with a couple of strangers who turned out to be the bottom feeders from hell suggested to Peter that single-handing must be easier than being trapped in a small space for a long time with two total shipwrecks of human beings.

When Peter heard that the Single Handed Trans Pac was called ‘the bug light for weirdoes’, he knew he had found the ocean race for him. So in 2012 he again headed south to San Francisco to make his first attempt at the SHTP. Again his result was disappointing. As he describes it, “The race was like teenage sex — I was really proud I did it, but a little embarrassed by my performance.”

Swearing he would never ever do it again, in late 2013 he again found himself preparing for the SHTP. Not because he hoped to do well but only to feel that he had “shot his best shot.” Again he sailed to SF and again raced to Hawaii. “*Latitude 38* reported that I read eight books during the race, which is a complete lie. I read *eleven* books. Do they think I move my lips when I read?”

Much to everyone’s surprise — especially Peter’s — he was first to finish. Peter will be talking about the three races and the 18,000 miles of sailing involved. There will be a short film taken during the last SHTP and a question period.

Peter’s newly published book, *Lee Shore Blues, Sex, Drugs, and Bluewater Sailing*, will be available for purchase at his Ocean Cruising Adventures presentation, Friday, February 6, 2015, 1930h. H.R. MacMillan Space Centre. Advance tickets may be purchased on BCA’s website or at the door the night of the event.

Scaramouche anchored in Hanalei Bay, Hawaii

We have asked five questions of all of our OCA Speakers. Here are Peter's answers.

1. When and how did you get into sailing?

My father was a very keen sailor (an Olympic medallist in the 1936 Munich games) and so I suppose I can say that I was sailing before I could walk. Really got back into sailing after a hiatus in the very early '70s when I sailed aboard the wooden schooner, ***Buccaneer Prince****, from Puerto Rico to Bermuda.*

2. If you could share a couple of your very best memories from your offshore cruising experience, what would they be?

I know there are people who just love being at sea. I'm not one of them. I love arriving. I love the sound of the anchor chain tearing out through the spurling pipe, knowing that I will finally get a night's sleep without a surge of adrenalin at every strange noise or lurch of the boat. Probably the best arrival I ever had was after a 49-day passage from Panama to Hilo, Hawaii in an 80-year-old, 30-ton, engineless pilot cutter. Great sleep that night.

3. What was the most frightening or unusual experience you had during your adventure?

After a lifetime at sea both professionally and for pleasure (?), that's a difficult question. I spent a night

embayed off the world's worst reef in Haiti in the late seventies, knowing for about 12 hours that if anything failed, rescuers would have to sweep up enough to burn. Losing the rig just off La Perouse reef on the west coast of the Charlottes in a hard westerly in the late '80s was not a ton of fun. What a terrible question to ask. Why not ask about the drop-dead-gorgeous French woman who took me home to her waterfront cottage on Baie St. Jean in St. Barts, or…

4. Of all the places you have sailed, is there one in particular that you would name as your favourite destination?

If I had to pick just one I would have to say the Perlas Islands in Panama. Although now that I think about it, the Marquesas weren't all that bad, either.

5. If you could give one piece of advice to people who are starting out cruising, what would it be?

Oh, jeeesh, I don't know. Keep your fingernails short.

OCA Series: First Presentation Was a Success!

http://currents.bluewatercruising.org/articles/oca-series-first-presentation-success/

The first OCA Series presentation was a resounding success last Friday! Colin Angus entertained a record crowd of 147 at the MacMillan Space Centre auditorium in Vancouver.

Through his engaging presentation Olive Odyssey – A Mediterranean Sailing Adventure, Colin kept the audience on the edge of their seats!

Next presentation is this coming Friday. Don’t miss what looks like an irreverent presentation by Peter Heiberg: First to Finish Without Really Trying.

Cruising with Your Dog? Please Read On…

http://currents.bluewatercruising.org/articles/cruising-dog-please-read/

You would think that after three years of cruising in Mexico with our dog, we would be pretty immune to vulnerability in a street-wise sense of the word. You would think. So listen up, you dog lovers who, like us, insist on sailing with our incredible mutts and sharing every bit of the adventure with them. Please listen up and hear our story; we're writing it for you.

Sophie is a sailing dog. She's sailed with us since she was a puppy and she sailed with us down most of the coast of North America in 2011, from Victoria, BC to La Paz, Mexico and locations around the southern Sea of Cortez. She's also a camping, driving, and adventuring dog and she's accompanied us each year for the past three as we've driven to the boat, from Vancouver Island to La Paz, and to Mazatlan and, most recently, to San Carlos.

We've always been vigilant when it comes to her safety; you have to be. Everyone knows there are vicious dogs all over, but there do seem to be more per capita in the streets of Mexican villages and towns. We know that, and we're always checking before taking her out of the truck. We keep her close to us, even on apparently vacant beaches. There are coyotes and stray dogs in abundance. There are dogs that aren't really homeless but they wander afar and forage for themselves. We keep her on a leash for her own protection and in the belief we will be able to pull her to safety should something dangerous suddenly appear in our path. And so it was on the morning of October 11, 2014 when we stopped for a quick coffee at the Pemex/Oxxo 25 miles south of Nogales, Mexico.

We'd crossed the border into Mexico early and it was only about 7:30 in the morning when we hankered for a cup of coffee. It was also time for Sophie to have a 'nature break' and so we stopped at a good-sized Pemex/ Oxxo complex for both. For those of you who haven't driven in Mexico yet, the Pemex is a very common and well-run gas station and the Oxxo is like our 7-Eleven. The two are often housed on the same property and also offer sanitarios (washrooms) for a 5-pesos 'donation'. We didn't need fuel so I parked near the door to the store and went in to get the coffee. Kathy prepared to take Sophie for a short walk. She leashed Sophie, lifted her out of the truck, placed her on the ground and had taken only two steps when Sophie was jumped from behind by a medium-sized black dog. The dog came from nowhere and attacked from behind. There was no warning.

The battle was horrifying and at one point Kathy, hanging on to Sophie for dear life, having grabbed her off the ground, was yanked off her feet and dragged, by the attacking dog that was, at that point, latched onto Sophie's back. The battle raged and was very nearly lost. Luckily, some staff members finally came to assist and the attacking dog was driven off. Little Sophie suffered a severe injury to her back where a butter-plate size piece of flesh was ripped nearly completely off. As well, she suffered puncture wounds to her back end and the ligaments in her right knee were completely severed. Kathy suffered severely scraped knees (flesh completely off) and some bites to her left forearm. Needless to say, both Sophie and Kathy were shocked and traumatized by the attack. With the help of some staff and a passing woman and her daughters (who spoke a little English), we were able to identify a vet in Nogales (25 miles north). We bundled both patients into the truck and headed north again, back to Nogales, to the only vet we knew of.

Dr. Teresa Dorantes Ramirez, of the Hospital Animal in Nogales, Son., Mexico is a fantastic vet. Thank goodness, because that is what Sophie needed. Dr. Ramirez took us in, and while she tended to Sophie, her assistant vets attended to Kathy's knees. Sophie's injuries were and are serious. I write this on October 22nd and she remains in Nogales, with Dr. Teresa. Kathy was released.

We're still waiting for Sophie to be stable enough to travel. She developed some infection in her back wound and the vet had to open it up for treatment. All going well, she will be released in about a week. Her leg remains in need of specialized surgery and, once she is stable enough to travel, we will be picking her up and heading home to Canada for the surgery and a recovery that will take several months.

And so, dog lovers and friends, I tell you this story… not so you can feel sorry for us… no, we're doing okay. What we do hope is that, by telling our story, we will remind all of you to be careful out there. We've heard some awful stories of similar events where the dog did not survive. We never expected to be the victims in something like this. We've always taken great care to be safe. But it happened. And, if it happened to us, it could happen to you.

All going well, Sophie will sail again. She will run (or at least walk) on beaches and she will continue to enjoy sitting in her camp chair and hanging out with friends. She is a sailor, an old track star, an adventurer, and a comic. If nothing else good can come of it, let her experience save your canine pal from having the same. Thanks for listening.

The Adventures of Katie M II and Her Crew in Vanuatu

http://currents.bluewatercruising.org/articles/adventures-katie-m-ii-crew-vanuatu/

We call our sailing experiences ‘adventures’ and mostly they are, but occasionally we get one that is more ordeal than adventure.

I was recently quoted the following: “The difference between adventure and ordeal is attitude.” At the time, Martin and I, along with two fellow cruisers we recently met here in Vanuatu, were in the back of a utility vehicle, heading out on a great adventure to see the volcano on the island of Tanna, which is the second island up in the Vanuatu chain of islands.

We had all expected to be riding to our destination in a 4-wheel-drive truck, sitting on cushioned seats supported by springs and 21st century automobile suspension. Instead we found ourselves sitting on a 6-inch-wide piece of crude lumber supported at each end with equally crude and wobbly legs. This lumber ‘bench’, if you can describe it as such, ran the length of the flat bed and was barely wide enough to support our well-fed North American butts in any degree of comfort, even without the bumps and swaying of the ‘yute’ (utility truck) as it made its way along the main transporta- tion route across Tanna, headed for Mt. Yasur. I can only describe this major transportation route as a rough track, as road would be a gross exaggeration. It was literally a track carved through the bush, just wide enough for one vehicle in most places. I have seen river beds with a smoother terrain!

The yute had a cage built around and over the flatbed and the reason for this soon became apparent as we bounced and jostled our way along the track and up the mountain. The side bars were to keep you from being flung out of the flatbed and the overhead bars provided much-needed handholds.

It was as we were bemoaning our situation, and I had made a comment about the cushions must have been an extra charge, that Yvonne, one of our new cruising buddies, shared the above quote with us. It rang all too true for the four of us and served as a reminder on this particular occasion that it was all part of the adventure. So we laughed and joked even when our vertebrae collided with the metal support bars and our butts lost circulation.

On the way, we picked up locals hitching a ride to their villages. None of the locals seemed concerned that they shared their island paradise with an active volcano. Apparently, it has been spewing ash and molten rocks high into the air for many generations. One of the islanders says, for some unknown reason, it seems more active during planting season. I could only hope the practice of human sacrifice to the volcano god for a good harvest, if such a practise ever existed, was as defunct as cannibalism!

Our hitchhikers got on and off at several stops along the way, and for some strange reason, at some of these stops, our driver and guide got out, too, and disappeared inside a hut or building for several minutes. No explanation was given and none asked for. After a while, we just accepted it as part of the experience and sat patiently; after all, we are on island time! There is no such thing as haste here in the South Pacific.

The volcano is only about 8 kilometres from the anchorage, Port Resolution, but it took an hour to reach the car park at the base of the ash-covered section of Mt Yasur.

We stepped from the yute onto a moon-like landscape of black volcanic ash strewn with boulders of differing sizes, which had been thrown out of the crater on previous eruptions. I stupidly asked if any tourists had ever been hit by one. The answer wasn't reassuring! We were advised to keep an eye out for molten missiles heading in our direction once at the top.

The black slope leading up to the crater loomed above and would have made a difficult climb to the top, but a man-made path made the trek much easier. At the top, we could look down into one of two craters. The volcano is shaped like a figure-eight with two craters and two lava tubes in each crater. At the bottom of the crater, we could see steam and smoke issuing forth and a more concentrated deposit of boulders.

We were told the best viewpoint of the lava tubes was higher up on the ridge. There was no man-made path for this section, so we clambered up the black sandy slope until we stood on a ridge overlooking the crater. Suddenly there was a roar and the ground shook beneath our feet. The roar became a huge explosion and red hot boulders and molten rock shot high into the air. The noise and spectacle was almost frightening, but as this was repeated more and more, we started to relax and enjoy the spectacle, still keeping an eye out for burning hot projectiles heading our way!

I finally secured myself a spot overlooking the cauldron itself; a round lava tube glowed yellow and red, reaching down into the bowels of the earth. Every now and then the tube would glow redder and another explosion would send up more red hot boulders high into the air and up the sides of the crater, where some would roll back down into the crater again. Then a cloud of sulphurous smoke would rise from the crater.

It was still daylight but dusk was close at hand. We had been told to make sure we stayed to see the eruptions in the dark so we patiently waited for the sun to disappear behind the surrounding peaks. As the sun sank lower, the volcanic activity seemed to increase in both frequency and intensity. As darkness came upon us, the explosions and ‘fireworks’ display intensified against the backdrop of black sky. It seemed the cauldron glowed hotter still, the explosions were louder, and molten lava and boulders shot higher into the air in greater concentrations and travelled even further up the slopes of the crater. It was a truly magnificent and awe-inspiring spectacle.

I could hardly credit that we were standing on the rim of this volcano, looking down into the abyss of the cauldron, and witnessing the raw energy and fury of this beast. It was hard to tear ourselves away from the spectacle, but as darkness came, so did a squall and it brought with it cold wind and rain. Although the rain had lasted only a short while, it cooled the night and we were all chilled, despite the heat radiating up from below.

Our guide had already returned to the truck, probably to get out of the wind and rain so now we had to make our way back along the crater rim and down the black sandy slopes to the path and car park below. Not an easy task as we were to find out, even with head lamps and flashlights. A couple of fellow tourists stopped suddenly ahead of us, having come to a sudden drop off on the crater rim. Obviously we had missed the sandy slope down, so we backtracked and Martin went ahead to scout out the way. Where was our guide, I asked myself?

Can you imagine this situation happening in North America? Even if we were allowed to experience an active volcano, which I somehow doubt, the path would be well marked and roped off. Guides would be expected to stay with their group. However, safety is not viewed with the same degree of concern here. Our guide did eventually appear out of the darkness and we made our way safely to the car park.

Now, as a concession to the rain and cold wind, our yute is covered with a tarp. It’s dark under the tarp and there are now about eight of us in the back, clinging to the bars for support, as we wind our way back down the bumpy track.

What an adventure!

As cruisers we may complain about rolly anchorages, too much wind, too little wind, sitting out a storm for 21?2 days at Minerva reef in 30 to 35 knots of wind with gusts of 50 knots (yes that did happen), but I hope I remember in future it’s all part of the big adventure called cruising!

Safety at Sea – Prevention and Preparedness

http://currents.bluewatercruising.org/articles/safety-sea-prevention-preparedness/

I recall a number of emergency situations while sailing, both with and without students on board. When I was 18, the Quebec Provincial Police rescued two of us from our capsized dinghy when the mast became stuck in the muddy lake bottom. We had become hypothermic and recovered in hospital.

Sailing a dinghy requires constant attention and quick responses.

I still get a sick feeling in my stomach when I think about the grinding sound that the keel of a 38’ teaching boat made, as it slowed from 7 knots to a standstill, when encountering a shoal that was known to us. I had been distracted by another not-so-important task, at the same time that the students on watch apparently had their own distraction. They had lost focus of the reducing depth and found ourselves heeled over in 5’ of water in a vessel with 7’ of draft. The boat pounded on its keel for an hour in the 25-knot winds and five-foot seas. We managed to free the boat from the shoal as the Coast Guard cutter stood by and their helicopter hovered overhead. We lost a huge piece of the rudder, but all else was fine other than our rattled nerves.

Momentary inattention resulted in a damaged rudder.

I have sailed over 60,000 miles and taught on a multitude of boats, of various states of seaworthiness, and with students who were quite often being pushed to their limits. The list of incidents we have encountered are numerous; ones that happened to us, and ones to which we responded and provided assistance. All these incidences occurred as a result of a long chain of seemingly harmless events (decisions, mistakes, mechanical malfunctions, weather). This chain of events usually starts with something done or not done prior to leaving the dock. If we remove any one of these links or change their order of occurrence, the outcome would be totally different (better or worse).

Fortunately the outcomes in all our incidents have been positive. This can be attributed to being prepared to deal with emergency situations on the water. Preparedness is not just having the right equipment on board, but also having set action plans to deal with various emergencies and maintaining a proper frame of mind when they happen.

Having the right safety equipment and knowing how to use it means being prepared.

Out of all these incidents, and researching others that have been investigated by authorities, most would have been prevented, or the outcomes may have been less costly, had proper safety procedures been adhered to and/or proper boat inspections and maintenance completed.

As owners and masters of vessels, we must do everything possible to ensure the safety of crew and vessel during the voyage. The key to safety is prevention and preparedness . . . doing everything we can to prevent an incident from happening and being prepared in case an incident happens. I owned a construction company for 25 years, dealing with volumes of books on rules and regulations governing safety procedures on construction sites, yet most operators of pleasure craft head out on the water, a much more dynamic environment than a construction site, with little if any formal safety procedures in place.

The procedure for preventing emergencies on our vessels starts at the dock prior to casting off the lines, by creating a safety first attitude among the crew and creating a safe environment on and around the vessel.

We accomplish this by establishing an effective safety management system on the vessel. Start by

completing a vessel audit that will identify unsafe conditions and practices on board the vessel. Note deficiencies so that modifications and repairs can be made as necessary. Then formalize safety and operational guidelines for all crew and the vessel. This doesn't need not be too extensive but it should be written out and include when and where policies for lifejackets/PFD's, and tethers are used and when alcohol is consumed. It should also address the frequency and extent of boat checks and maintenance.

Boating, as most other sports, has certain inherent risks associated with it. As masters we need to reduce these risks to a level that is acceptable to us in order to have a fun and safe time on the water. We can reduce the risks by, a) reducing the likelihood of having an occurrence and b) reducing the costs or consequences in the event that and one happens.

Take for example a crew-overboard-emergency. If there was a rule enforced to clip onto a tether when leaving the cockpit, the chances of the COB occurrence would be reduced. Likewise, if the crewmember is wearing a lifejacket or retrieval equipment is at hand, the cost or consequences of having a person in the water would be greatly reduced.

We sail in a dynamic and volatile environment where risks are ever changing. There are many factors that interplay to determine the success of each of our sailing excursions. As skippers our task is to evaluate the following factors; the crew's mental, physical and emotional condition, the seaworthiness of the vessel and the condition of its systems and equipment. We also deal with the ever changing weather and sea conditions. Essentially, we are performing a risk analysis.

We identify the particular risks, assess them and decide whether the rewards are worth the risks. As situations change the increase or decrease in risk will be re-evaluated. As master of the vessel we will make decisions to accept the risk reward relationship or make an effort to reduce the risks to an acceptable level.

The first step in your safety at sea policy should be based on PREVENTION and PREPAREDNESS. If we set our boat and crew up for safe passages, before we leave the dock, we can confidently cast off our lines knowing that we have done everything we can to make our adventure safe and pleasurable.

Currents

The Bluewater Cruising Association

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