

Gunkholer Cruise -- Canadian West Coast

Late June, 2005

Dave Goodfellow

For years, I've wanted to cruise the Canadian San Juan Islands, Princess Louisa Inlet and Desolation sound. This June I finally got the chance to do it.

My original plan was to do it with my wife and daughter on a Hunter 27 to replace the Northwest 21 sailboat we had at the time, but life has a way of disrupting plans. Now I cruise alone on *Gunkholer*, a 19-foot Arima with a canvas top, a cuddy cabin with just enough room to sleep in, and twin 45 horsepower Honda outboards that push it comfortably at 20 knots — 30 if I'm really in a hurry.

The boat is perfect for a single person — fast, reasonably comfortable to camp in, economical to operate (about 5 nautical miles/gallon at 25 knots) and a range of about 200 nautical miles.



Launching *Gunkholer* at the Edmonds Marina. After launching, I take the truck and trailer home to avoid the \$5.00/day parking fee. My sister drives me back to the marina (a 5-minute drive) and I'm ready to go!

Sunday, June 19, 2005

Left Edmonds Marina at 10:00 a.m. Ran aground in Swinomish Slough while avoiding an oncoming (and speeding) boat whose skipper was looking elsewhere. He waved an apology but kept on going. Shifted to neutral before the props grounded, so there was minimal damage (starboard prop torn, and paint scraped off both lower units.) Shut down the starboard engine and tilted it out of the water. Tilted the port engine so the prop was barely in the water, and worked my way back into the channel. Took about 15 minutes to do this, as I was very cautious and gentle with the boat.

Arrived at LaConner about 12:30. Refueled, ate lunch, and continued on to Stuart Island. Tied up at Reid Harbor at 4:00 p.m., fixed spaghetti and meatballs for dinner and stayed the night.

Converting *Gunkholer* from cruising to camping is about a 10-minute job, which includes setting up a card table in the canvas-topped cabin, moving the large ice chest from the cuddy cabin to under the card table, charging the one-burner alcohol stove and putting it on the card table, and setting up the Coleman lantern on the card table. I also have a propane-powered catalytic heater available when needed. Then I unroll the sleeping bag and spread it out in the cuddy cabin, rearranging "other stuff" to make room.

Converting back to cruising takes longer, to make sure everything is stowed safely. I don't restuff the sleeping bag; I just put the ice chest on top of it, and hope the chest doesn't leak. So far, it hasn't.

Monday, June 20, 2005

Woke up at 6:00. Had leisurely breakfast of bacon and eggs, stowed my gear and left Reid Harbor about 7:30. Cruised the 5 miles to Canadian Customs at South Pender Island. Cleared Customs about 8:30 and headed for Nanaimo, near the north end of Vancouver Island. Went north through a narrow, shallow passage approaching Nanaimo, with at times less than 4 feet of water under the boat. A nervous time! Shallow water, strong current and narrow passage. When I got through that I still had about 5 miles to go, through seas heavy enough to keep me down to about 8 knots -- and even at that speed the ride was bumpy and plenty of water was hitting the windshield.



Headed for Nanaimo, but looking back toward American San Juans. Water is smooth, weather is beautiful, and all's right with the world!



Arrived Nanaimo about 2:00 p.m. Picked up a bottle of insulin at the local drug store. Learned that the Strait of Georgia was super rough that afternoon, so decided to hole up for the night and cross in the early morning. Had a hot chicken sandwich at a local restaurant, read a book until about 10:00, and went to bed. Dock fee for the night, \$23.00 Canadian.

Nanaimo waterfront -- ex mining town, presently existing on the Twin "T"s -- timber and tourists -- and probably on some other things I'm not aware of.

Tuesday, June 21, 2005

Woke up at 4:30, had a quick breakfast of hot cereal, coffee and orange juice and was on my way across the Georgia Strait at 5:30. It got very bumpy — roughest water I've ever been in so far. My most economical cruise speed is about 20 knots, but the boat pounded too much at that speed. The boat could take the pounding, but I could not. I had to slow down to 7 knots. With the boat not planing, fuel consumption went off the roof. I used twice as much fuel as planned, which became a problem later on. I arrived at the mouth of Jervis Inlet at 9:00 a.m. and found to my amazement that my cell phone worked fine for a call home to assure my sister that everything was ok. Not even roaming charges! I elected not to backtrack for fuel, as I figured I'd be back on plane for the trip on up the inlet. Big mistake. I often had to slow down for high wave action, and continued to use fuel at an alarming rate.

Arrived at the mouth of Princess Louisa Inlet at 11:30, and went through the Malibu Rapids as the tide was running out. Ran the rapids against an 8-knot current. At half throttle my ground speed was 1.5 knots. Lots of eddy currents and whirlpools, but I had power to spare for keeping in mid channel. Even so, it was an anxious few minutes. The 4 miles up the inlet to Chatterbox Falls was over dead calm water. Tied up at the dock at Chatterbox Falls at about 1:00 p.m. Checked my fuel with a dip stick. Only 10 gallons left — probably not enough to get me back to a fueling station. A sailboater was watching, and offered the contents of his 3-gallon “backup” can for his dinghy outboard. I bought that gratefully, and added the four gallons from MY backup can, giving me a total of 17 gallons. That should get me to the fuel dock at Egmont.

There were only two other boats at the dock when I came in, but by 4:00 p.m. more boats kept coming in. By dark there were 15 or 20 boats moored there.



Terry and Jess’s *New Rosa*, with Chatterbox Falls in the background. Diesel powered, it cruises at about 7 knots and has a range of about 1,000 miles. It’s roomy and comfortable inside, with the galley and living quarters on two different levels. They share the boat with Kelpy, a year-old miniature schnouser (sp) that has to be one of the happiest and enthusiastic dogs alive.



Just three boats at the dock when I came in. Here are *Gunkholer*, *New Rosa* and a sailboat whose name I missed.

Boaters are a friendly bunch! Mine was the smallest boat there, at 19 feet. The rest of the fleet consisted of 30- and 40-footers, sail and power. I think they were concerned about “... the poor old guy in the tiny boat, with a storm coming on ...” Whatever. I was invited to stay the night on another boat, as the rain was coming down by the bucket-full by early evening. I thanked them, and assured them that I’d be fine, whereupon Terry and Jess Hansen on *New Rosa* invited me for dinner the next night. I accepted gratefully, and the next night enjoyed good spaghetti and good company for an hour or so.

Spent a few hours reading, interrupted occasionally by the flash of lightning and roll of thunder. The rain on my canvas roof made a racket you wouldn’t believe, but I was warm and dry. Finally couldn’t keep my eyes open, so about midnight went to bed. I was really tired that night, and nothing could disturb my sleep. Not the thunder, nor the lightning, nor the rain on the roof.

Wednesday, June 22, 2005

Woke up at 5:30 this morning, with the rain still coming down by the bucket-full. Had bacon and eggs, coffee and orange juice for breakfast. Terry and Jess came over to see how I was doing. They had worried about me all night, with visions of me trying to sleep in a water-filled boat. They were surprised to see me warm and dry, making log entries on the computer. So much for their concern about the storm drowning me out!

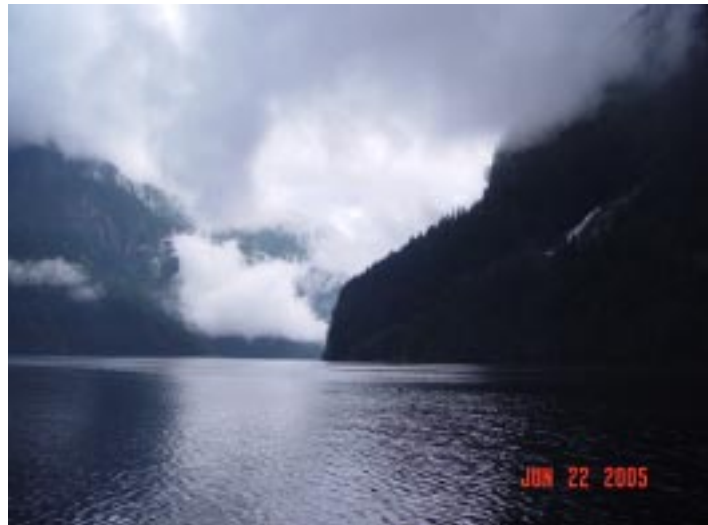
Had a spaghetti dinner with them on *New Rosa*. It was a welcome change!

Plotted a new course on the PC for the refueling station at Egmont and downloaded it to the GPS, so now I'm good to go. Aint technology grand? Probably will leave tomorrow.

I messed up. After the rains, new waterfalls emerged all around us. There must have been 100 of them in the mountains surrounding the inlet -- and I forgot to take a picture! Oh well, those that I did take were of pretty spectacular scenery.



Princess Louisa Inlet, Wednesday Afternoon



What a Difference a Day Makes!



Chatterbox Falls after the Rains



Leaving Princess Louisa Inlet

Thursday, June 23, 2005

Got up at 5:00 a.m., had breakfast, stowed my gear and was on my way at 6:45. Went through the rapids at 7:00, at slack high tide. Smooth passage. Arrived Egmont at 9:00 and refueled. Bought some canned goods, then went to a resort overlooking the water, took some pictures and then had ANOTHER breakfast — banana bread French toast, at a resort/restaurant about 100 yards up the hill from the dock. Gunkholer is a hungry boat.



View from the Resort/Restaurant at Egmont They have a rather elegant menu. Breakfast was great; I'd like to try dinner there sometime.



Gunkholer from the Resort/Restaurant As always, I'm dwarfed by the boats around me. Then I think about all the expenses they involve, and I smile.

Continued on to Desolation Sound and found a tiny gunkhole with no name on the chart. Anchored near a 30-foot sailboat whose only occupant — Lee Ash, on *Maluhia* — was glad for the company. He picked me up in his dinghy and took me to his boat, where we had some cheese and crackers and pop, and shot the bull for a while. He showed me on a chart where there's a fuel dock just 6 miles away, and a grocery store a few miles beyond that. The first order of business tomorrow will be refueling and restocking. Then I'm good to go for exploring the sound.

Am I having a good time? You bet!

Lee Ash's boat *Maluhia* tied up at what turned out to be my favorite gunkhole on the trip.



The other side of my favorite gunkhole

Friday, June 24, 2005

Got up at 7:00, had breakfast and was on my way by 9:00 for the 6-mile trip to Refuge Cove for refueling. From there I went another 4 miles to Squirrel Cove for groceries. While on the way I heard a distress call from *Me Two*, a 66-foot yacht whose transmission failed at the entrance to Squirrel Cove; they were about to drift onto the rocks. I hurried up to see if I could help with a tow. Canadian Coast Guard got there first with an inflatable and towed them to an anchorage. I stayed 100 yards off, "just in case." Darn! I was all set to be a hero and I wasn't needed! They eventually got their transmission fixed, and were on their way.

After getting groceries I headed north past Stewart Island to Frederick Reach. The trip up the west side of Stewart Island was worrisome, as the tidal currents made the water look more like river rapids. I was tossed around pretty good for about 20 minutes. After using nearly a half tank of gas without finding a good gunkhole, I came back to last night's anchorage. That northern part of the sound doesn't interest me much. I think tomorrow I'll start home. It will take me a couple of days.

Saturday, June 25, 2005

Up at 6:00 and on my way at 8:00. Went back to Refuge Cove to refuel, then South to Jervis Inlet. A little farther South to Egmont for refueling before crossing the Strait of Georgia. Considering the amount of fuel I used on the first crossing (because of reduced speed due to large waves) I thought a full tank would be prudent. I needn't have worried; the sea was pretty calm, and I went at 21 knots the whole way. Reversed my Jervis Inlet route on the GPS, and let it guide me across the strait to Nanaimo. Arrived Nanaimo at 3:30 p.m., and moored for the night. Had fish and chips for dinner at a local tourist trap.

Tomorrow I'll go to Roche Harbor in the American San Juans, and go through Customs there. That should be an experience, as I understand things have really tightened up since 9/11.

Sunday, June 26, 2005

Got up at 5:00 a.m., and was on my way at 6:30, headed for U.S. Customs at Roche Harbor. Got there at 9:00, but had to search for 1/2 hour to find the Customs dock. Clearing Customs was a breeze. The key was having my passport. (This will be required first of the year. For now, a birth certificate and photo i.d. will do the trick.) Before 9/11, all we had to do was declare that we were U.S. citizens. Note that the Customs House at Roche Harbor has a note on the door to the effect that it has no "set" hours. If they are not open, boaters must go to Friday Harbor to re-enter the U.S.

The day was dreary and cold, and the weather report said it would get worse before it got better. I didn't look forward to being cooped up on the boat for a day or two while waiting for the weather to clear, so I made the long run on home. Nanaimo to Edmonds, even at 20 knots, is a long day's run -- especially when your boat's pounding through uncomfortably heavy sea. At times I had to reduce speed to 7 knots; the boat could take the pounding, but I could not!

Arrived Edmonds about 4:00 p.m.; called my sister at the haul-out dock, and she came to take me to my truck. Marina staff put the boat back on the trailer, and I was home by 4:30.

According to my GPS, the trip totalled 753.3 nautical miles. I await my fuel bill with fear and trepidation!