

An Impromptu Small Boat Cruise

August 2023

by Martin Herbert and Lawrence Stuart

First, from Martin's point of view...

The seed for this cruise was planted when Mark Wallace called me looking for a ride home. He was hitchhiking from his summer place on Hardy Island back to his boatyard in Fulford, and had landed at Carol Haigh's cottage at Southey Point. I jumped at a chance to pick him up there, as I had heard stories of Carol's Mower Dory and the famous trimaran that had gone around the world twice before being beached and becoming Carol's home. I was lucky enough to get a tour of the Tri and see her dory on the mooring in Southey Bay.



Mark was returning home to launch his 21' Herreshoff cat ketch in advance of sailing her up to Hardy Island for the summer. Lawrence Stuart and I helped him launch her at the crane in Fulford but that is another story. I floated an idea that Lawrence and I could join Mark sailing North for the first part of the trip in our row/sail boats and perhaps we could rendezvous with Carol and her Dory at Southey Point. Everyone was up for it and Mark suggested we have a feast to end the day of sailing, before anchoring out in Southey Bay.

So on a fine Tuesday morning we set out from the club and were soon under sail. After a gentle beat out of the harbour we used the flood to help push us into Trincomali Channel with the occasional splash of oars to get us to the next finger of wind. A beautiful wind filled in from behind and we majestically romped down the channel.



Lawrence at the helm of his Arctic Tern



Mark running wing on wing off Wallace Island



Martin lounging in the stern of his Delaware Duck-boat.



Carol tacking up to join the fleet.



View of the fleet from the cockpit of the Mower Dory

As the tide was high and the beach small, we packed our feast up to Carol's yard for a lovely evening of shared food and conversation. Just before dusk, Lawrence set up his tent and Mark and I returned to our boats for the night. Mark was on bailing duty as Descant was still "taking up" and needed to be pumped on a regular basis. I had to convert my boat from sailing to sleeping mode so, once anchored, I moved the rowing seat aft and laid out my sleeping mat. The sails, mast, oars and gear filled the sides and stopped me from getting too far off centre, and the cockpit coaming framed the evening sky. The full moon accompanied me all night making it easy to check my position in that quiet bay.

I slept well, not disturbed by frequent pumping, and was up at dawn. I was planning an early return as I wanted to race in the Wednesday Night Race, which starts at 5.00. The wind was predicted light but the tide was with me in the morning so by 6.35 I was under weigh. This was the scene as I rowed out of the bay.



It was calm so I proceeded under oars. I can row a steady pace of about 2.7 knots in flat water and just over 3 knots if I am in sprint mode. But with the tide assist I was cruising at 3.7 and got to 4.2 in some of the current swirls at Southey Point. By Fernwood Dock, a head wind had sprung up so I stopped to rig my sail. A passing cyclist, who turned out to be Philip Grange, helped out, which greatly sped up the process of threading the sail over the windsurfer mast and I was soon tacking up wind. It was slower than rowing but a bit less strain on my back. When the wind slacked off I started to “motor sail”, which is rowing and using the apparent wind generated to assist. This is surprisingly effective and I hit almost 5 knots, sticking close to shore and roaring past Grappler Rock on the inside.

Just before the Passage I encountered, for the second time, a 60’ powerboat towing a 25’ powerboat. You can hear these BUP’s coming from a long way off so you have time to prepare for what you are about to receive. You have to turn head to the waves, or close to it dependent on how far they are apart, and ride them out. The first three or four are like being on a bucking bronco with the bow slamming down and spray everywhere, but the last two break over the bow and flood water into the boat. That is the most dangerous part of boating in small boats and why all my clothes and bedding are in plastic bags. I am convinced that most people who drive boats like that never look back to see what havoc they are creating.

Then I was being swept through Captains Passage and a 37' Nordic Tug from Bellingham slipped by me at slow speed and a friendly wave, which I returned with pleasure. He waited until his wake was past me to accelerate, restoring my faith in humanity. Ahead a good wind giving me a run into the club, an excellent finish to my part of the cruise.

Lawrence sailed to the beach near Walker's Hook and set up camp for the night. Here is his report:

A pleasant two hour downwind sail in light air to the the Hook yesterday. The wind died off the Fernwood dock, so rowed for half an hour or so until it managed to wake itself up again. So many big power boat wakes to contend with! After unloading all my gear, the wind was so nice I pulled up the anchor and reached over to Montague and back again, just for kicks.

Walker's Hook is a great place to camp. No crowds, in fact pretty much no one at all, save for two pairs of paddlers. Oh, and some remarkably respectful teenagers who drove in to see the beautiful moonrise.

Had a long row from Walker's Hook to Nose Point in a flat calm late this morning into the afternoon. There must be some kind of eddy action going on along the Saltspring shore, as I had a favourable current most of the way despite of the flood tide.

The wind picked up from the South as I rounded Nose Point, and with my centre board being unfortunately jammed in the up position (beach happy?) I decided to head for home, lest I should find myself tomorrow trying to beat to windward with no foil. Back up on the dock by 3:30 or so.

Thanks so much to all for the companionship and conversation, and thanks especially to Carol for the hospitality. I'm looking forward to another trip before August is out.

