

AFTER ACTION REPORT

The Second Annual Great Potter Yachter Northwest Escape and Messabout
May 13 to May 24, 2004

By Dick Herman

Photos by Don Person unless otherwise noted.

<http://potter-yachters.org/news/SailingStories23.html>

They gathered slowly in the parking lot of the motel at Orland, California, on that early Thursday morning of May 13. Pat Brennan was there with Eaglet, Terry Gotcher with John B, Dave Lawson with Schatz, Don Person with the fabled Sarah Anne, and Dick Herman with Muddy Duck (one of the Potter Yachters non-Potters tolerated for the sake of political correctness) had just arrived.

Their faces were grim and the steely set of their eyes proof of their resolve.

The Northwest Potters had told them of the perils of Bellingham Bay and sailing in the San Juans, and they had taken heed. After all, the warnings had come from the spiritual descendants of the great Lewis

and Clark. They knew that Dan Phy with his intrepid (Don Person insists we use this word as much as possible) ASAP, along with Jim Kirwan and Lark, had gone ahead, blazing a path northward from Fort Bragg as the advanced party. After the ritual breakfast at the Berry Patch Restaurant was devoured, photos taken, and insurance policies compared, the five intrepid captains started their engines and trailered north, determined to honor Commodore McDevitt's command to Have Fun!

The second annual Northwest Escape and Messabout was underway.

Orland, California departure.



Dick Herman, Dave Lawson. Terry Gotcher, and Pat Brennan at a Oregon rest Stop.





Ashland Oregon cafe.

Arrival

One of the major lessons learned from the First Annual Messabout was that it is very helpful to know where you're going. Accordingly, and according to plan, all seven intrepid captains and their vessels arrived at Squalicum Harbor in Bellingham, Washington, by Friday, May 14, in good order. Not one ego had been stepped on in route nor a single Potterite lost for any appreciable length of time. Even better, two Northwest Potters were there to join the expedition. Bill McClure was impressive with the thoroughly outfitted Kitten, and John Purdy with the perky Perky was eager to go. On Saturday morning, Brennan and Shirley Jones also joined the group to sail with us for the weekend.

Bellingham, Washington launch preparation.



Bellingham Marina dock with Terry Gotcher, John Purdy, Bill McClure, Dick Herman, Jim Kirwan and Dan Phy.



Day One

Seven miles away on Lummi Island, Inati Bay beckoned. But first, the Potters had to brave the treacherous waters of Bellingham Bay. In what was to become known as the Bellingham Bash, the nine P-15s and one 17 foot catboat set out from Squalicum Harbor on that Saturday morning.

Those who did not have the foresight to reef quickly did so as the intrepid vessels challenged a short steep chop, headwinds, and an opposing ebb tide of one knot which reduced the VMG (that's velocity made good for us non techie types) to one knot.

While most captains tacked relentlessly towards Inati Bay, Sarah Anne and Lark took the northern route and sailed around Portage Island in what is now known as the overland route. Muddy Duck arrived at Inati first and anchored near the shore. ASAP arrived shortly thereafter and rafted up. One by one the Potters made safe harbor and Kitten could be seen tacking across the bay. But Sarah Anne and Lark were unaccounted for. Then Jim at the helm of Lark called in.

He and Don were coming down Hale Passage after rounding the mud flats of Portage Island.

Anchors were set and stern lines led ashore as Jim and Dan scooted around the fleet in their inflatables. Soon, boom tents and awnings were rigged which reminded Pat of scenes of the Aberdeen in Hong Kong. Everyone ate on board and were snuggled down for the night when a rain shower passed over, thoughtfully washing the boats down.

Inati Bay raft up.



Inati Bay.



Day Two

Sunday morning promised beautiful sailing conditions and the intrepid Potterites were eager to head north for Sucia Island. Unfortunately, Brennan and Shirley had to return to Bellingham and the real world. After breakfast, nine boats headed up Hale Passage with light following winds. It was interesting to see pickup trucks driving across the shingle on the northern side of Portage Island where Don and Jim had sailed the day before.

The Potters rounded Lummi Island at noon and headed west, across the main shipping channel in Rosario Strait. It was an easy beam reach across the channel on a port tack. The fleet arrived at Matia Island around two in the afternoon and called in at Rolfe Cove for a Potter potty break. The cove was the first of many gems the Potters would experience. An hour and half later, they cast off and made the short sail across to Fossil Bay on Sucia Island. The dock was deserted and the Potters soon made themselves at home.

Now packing a Potter Fifteen for a ten-day voyage is an art form. By common agreement, John Purdy in Perky took full honors when he unpacked his bicycle, with helmet, to tour the island. He headed down the dock in time to pull Dick out of the water after he failed Dockwalking 101A. But enough said about that incident which must await the requisite amount of beer to be properly told.

John Purdy ready to ride! Photo by Pat Brennan



Dick Herman in Muddy Duck in Hale Passage.



Dan Ply in ASAP and Dave Lawson in Schatz on Hale Passage.



Fleet in Hale Passage.



Roffe Cove, Matia Island.



Sucia Island, Fossil Bay Dock.



Jim Kirwan with Lark & Dan Ply with ASAP at Fossil Bay.

Day Three

Monday morning provided this writer with one of those rare images he will hold close forever. Again, the weather was magnificent and we left the dock under sail with just enough wind and current to maintain way. A light mist still hung along the shore as we ghosted silently out of the long bay, sails highlighted by the rising sun. Water lapped gently at the bow and a Bald Eagle soared overhead, creating a magical moment.

The sail down President Channel to Stuart Island was more of a drift with a following current than a proper sail. But what the heck, the sails were drawing and the motors off. Things got interesting when the fleet approached Johns Island and turned toward Reid Harbor on Stuart Island. There is this

phenomenon called "currents" in the San Juans that must be delt with. Terry and Jim chose New Channel while the intrepid majority rounded Ripple Island. Outboards raced as the Potters bucked the current, and for a few moments, Dave Lawson in Schatz appeared stalled. He later reported that he was maintaining about one knot over the ground. Don chose Johns Pass to the north, which could best be described as "sporting." But all made safe harbor and were soon tied to the dock in Reid Harbor.

Bill McClure rowing Kitten towards Reid Harbor.



Dick Herman awarded Fleet Captain's Flag for duration of expedition.



That evening, Pat produced a bottle of Bushmills, an Irish libation of sorts. But Dave, being a proper Englishman, decided that it had no place with the Potters and had to be properly disposed of. It was another wonderful evening full of stories about Dog Carts and bull sperm.

Toasted landfall at Reid Harbor.



Day Four

After another good night's sleep and a laid back morning, the Potters held a quick captain's meeting and headed for Deer Harbor on Orcas Island.

Early Morning at Reid Harbor.



As there was no breeze, the iron jennies were cranked. But Kitten's was acting squirrelish and took some disassembling and reassembling to get the impeller to work properly. It was an uneventful thirteen-mile motorsail.

The folks at Deer Harbor Marina were actually glad to see us and we tied up close to the small store at the end of the dock. The harbormaster, Philo Lund, was most helpful and after Pat negotiated a group rate with the exquisite Lee, the Potters decided to stay two nights. Dan quickly made friends with the dock dog, Percy, who introduced him to Ian, a liveboard professional diver of English extraction.

Percy, Bear and two sailors at Deer Harbor.



Convention Center at Deer Harbor.



John Purdy and Perky leaving Reid Harbor.



By now, certain personality traits were emerging. As a retired doctor, Don insisted that any treatment of a cut or abrasion must sting and it had to ache and itch to get well. Comments were heard about when he took his medical training. Jim proved to be a man of few words, but when he used them, the most intelligent thing we could do was to shut up and listen. John is possessed with a quiet but wickedly impish sense of humor, so all take warning.

That evening, the Potters meandered up the road to the Deer Harbor Inn for dinner where Dan charmed the waitress. After an excellent dinner, we wandered back to the dock and talked to the aforementioned diver, Ian. Now there were some interesting stories with photographs. Everyone bedded down early but, unfortunately, Terry and Pat were tied up across the end of the slip, abeam of the wind and current when a front came through, and spent an uncomfortable night. The other seven were sound asleep and totally oblivious to the problem, another charming Potter trait.

Day Five

After coffee on the boats Wednesday morning, most of the Potters had breakfast at the store on the dock and plotted the day's activities. Some went hiking or rented bicycles, while Sarah Anne, Perky, and Muddy Duck, with Bill on board as crew, went for a day sail - destination: Little Portion Store on Shaw Island which is run by Franciscan Nuns.

It was great sailing as the three shot Pole Pass and entered Harney Channel for the six mile run to Shaw Island. The intrepid Potterites soon discovered that ferries have an unusual attraction for Sarah Anne and Don was hooted at as the three boats made their way into the little harbor next to the ferry landing.

Dick herman and Bill McClure in Muddy Duck on way to Shaw Island. Photo by John Purdy



Don Person taking a photo of John Purdy as John take one of Don. Photo by John Purdy



Little Portion Store defines the word "quaint," and was well stocked with food and snacks. After eating lunch on the benches in front of the Post Office just like "good old boys," they raised sail and headed back for Deer Harbor. Rather than shoot Pole Pass against the current, the three headed around the southern side of Crane Island.

Again, the currents proved to be sporting where they merged on the southeast tip of Crane Island. But the Potters were up to it and, after a few minor unintended course changes, soon rounded Crane Island and made the run into Deer Harbor.

A well-rested and happy group made their way back to the Deer Harbor Inn for dinner that night. Back at the dock, Don produced a most intrepid 100 proof, dusky, Bowmores Scotch to toast the day's activities. Now that was good stuff.

Day Six

The weather Thursday morning was perfect with one small exception - no wind. Again, motors were started and the intrepid gang of nine headed for Friday Harbor, six miles away. Sails were up and served as excellent VDSs, vertical Dacron stabilizers.

Fleet leaving Deer Harbor for Friday Harbor.



Inlet on way to Friday Harbor.



Fleet passing island on way to Friday harbor.



Bill McClure challenges ferry!



After tying up at the Friday Harbor visitor's dock, the Potters checked in with the Harbormaster. She moved us to the commercial dock beside the main pier and right under the Harbormasters office. No one is sure if this was because she wanted to keep an eye on us or thought we were "were cute little boats" that were good for publicity. At least we were close to the restrooms and showers. We did draw attention and answered a lot of questions. At least two men expressed a deep envy with far away looks in their eyes. Old clichés work in situations like this and we told them that "Duty is a terrible burden and someone has to do it." We're not sure if we made any friends or not.

Friday Harbor.



Most wondered around town that afternoon and visited Nordstrom's for Men, often mistakenly referred to as West Marine. Dan and Jim, being of the cultured class, visited the Whaling museum and toured the island with an old friend. Four Potterites were headed back for the marina when they were dragged into Herb's, the oldest pub in town, for lessons in remedial beer drinking with Dick, Dave, and Pat. Most of them have recollections of eating dinner that night at the Downrigger but can't be sure as no mention was made on the police blotter.

Nice Pub at Friday Harbor.



Day Seven

Friday was another layover and the Potters went their different ways. Terry discovered he could ride the ferries for free and made a circuit of the islands. He was offered gainful employment along the way but being a true and stalwart Potterite, refused.

Four boats headed for Fisherman Bay on Lopez Island, five miles away. Don in Sarah Anne led the way out of the harbor followed by Dan and Jim in ASAP, Pat in Eaglet, and Dick and Dave in Muddy Duck. The wind was perfect, out of the south and right up San Juan Channel for a beam reach. They made the passage in 80 minutes and were buzzed by a landing floatplane when they entered the bay. Now that got everyone's attention and closed a few sphincter muscles. Dan and Jim headed back after a short walk while the rest had a leisurely lunch at the Lopez Island Motel. They made the sail back in 90 minutes.

Day sail to Fisherman's Bay.



Island taxi, Fisherman's Bay.



The group descended that evening on Hallie's Bait Shop for dinner. Our guest was the legendary Jim Devaney who lived aboard a Potter Fifteen for a few years in Friday Harbor before upgrading to an eighteen-foot Glasspar. Later that night, the loyal traditionalists gathered on Muddy Duck to again

partake of Don's scotch. It rained that night after all were bedded down, a taste of things to come.

Day Eight

It was raining Saturday morning when the Potters finally stirred. After breakfast at the Front Street Café and a quick skippers meeting, the day's destination was changed from Spencer Spit to Blakely Harbor Marina. Sails were set and engines running when we motored out of Friday Harbor. It was a miserable, wet, nine mile motor across San Juan Channel, up Upright Channel, and across to Blakely Harbor.

Blakely is a gem of a marina with a very friendly manager, and it didn't take long to decide to spend the day and night there. The rain tapered off and the sun came out in the afternoon. Hors d'oeuvres and dinner were held on the dock and again, a bottle of scotch, this time Johnny Walker Black, appeared. For you who may be thinking we're a drinking club with a sailing problem, I must clarify the situation. It's strictly for medicinal purposes (the scotch, not the sailing) to help us sleep better.

Bill McClure resting after wet sail to Blakely Island. Kitten was hands down the best equipped P-15.



Beautiful Blakely Harbor.



Day Nine

The intrepid Potterites were up before dawn Sunday morning to catch the early morning current to Inati Bay. While the currents cooperated, there was no wind and again, we had to motor for the twelve miles. Muddy Duck seems to have an affinity for Inati and again was the first to arrive at ten a.m. Slowly, the Potters trudged in and rafted up, truly a majestic sight. Seven miles across Bellingham Bay, Squalicum Harbor was calling. When the wind picked up in the afternoon, the Potters were on their way, eager to partake of the sybaritic pleasures of a full-service marina. It was an easy three-hour sail across the now calm waters of Bellingham Bay and a perfect way to end the voyage.

Jim Kirwan and Dan Ply departure for Blakely Marina.



Jim Kirwan and Bill McClure leaving Blakely Marina in the rising sun.



Pat Brennan in Eaglet leaving Blakely and Obstruction Island.



The Fleet on the way to Inati Bay.



Lunch raft up at Inati Bay.



Last day broad reaching to Bellingham.



We gathered on the dock for a toast to the voyage and chorused the three fabled words "Cheated death again" as last photos were taken.

Standing on the dock from left to right: Dick Herman, Dave Lawson, John Purdy & Terry Gotcher. Setting on the dock: Dan Ply & Jim Kirwan. In the P-15 Sarah Anne: Pat Brennan & Don Person. Sailor laying supine on the deck is Bill McClure. Photo by John Purdy with enhancement by Jennifer Person, Don Person's daughter.



Bill McClure left for home while the rest of us settled for dinner in the Bay Café where we were well known. It was a quiet and thoughtful group that bedded down that last evening.

Dick Herman and Dave Lawson comparing notes at the Bellingham dock.



Day Ten

Most were up early to pull their boats out and ready them for the long haul home. By eight, we were in the Bay Café for breakfast and the requisite jolt of caffeine. By 9:30 we were on the road and headed south. Everyone made it safely home in time for Memorial Day festivities.

Going home! Dave Lawson and Terry Gotcher at the Mt Shasta Rest Stop.



Dave Lawson's Schatz, Don Person's Sarah Anne, and Terry Gotcher's John B. at the last stop. Home tomorrow!



Lessons Learned

On the face of it, and like the first Annual Northwest Messabout, it was a silly thing, driving 900 miles one way to spend nine days to sail 110 nautical miles and get rained on. This time, thanks to showers at the marinas, we avoided smelling like old rubber boots. But would we do it again?

Oh, I think so.