



The Potter Yachter

Newsletter of the Potter Yachters

September / October 2011

MESSABOUT MAGIC

Messabout IX



By Dick Herman

Mary Metcalf, Tim Derry, Jim Kirwan raft-up Fossil Bay, Sucia Island. Photo: John Couch

The ninth annual Great Potter Yachter Northwest Escape and Messabout is in the books. Once again, a small contingent of stalwart and intrepid Potter Yachters, AKA All The Usual Suspects, trailered their sturdy microcruisers to Bellingham, Washington, to cruise the waters of the San Juan and Gulf Islands. On the face of it, hauling a small boat almost 900 miles one way with gas prices around \$4.00 a gallon is not exactly a rational thing. But Pottering is really a frame of mind, and a Messabout is about more than the boats.

By Labor Day, Sept 5, All the Usual Suspects had arrived and were in the water (the boats, not the Suspects). Jim Kirwan in Surprise, a Montgomery 15, had established contact, and, as usual, the kind folks at Squilicum Harbor had reserved one of the guest docks for us. They smile a lot when we show up, and we always hear a few comments about our “cute little boats.” Three P-15s were there along with Surprise: Jim Ferguson with Esmeralda; Don Person in Sarah Anne; and Rob Pettit in Snow Goose. The rest of the Potter fleet was represented by two P-19s: Don Hunter in NV US with Dan Phy as his first mate; and Tom Luque in the fully-equipped JoJoMa.

For some reason, the Suspects attract a mixed bag of boats. Newcomers John and Margie Couch in Sevilla,

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their pristine ComPac 23, joined the group. The veteran P-19 skippers Tim Derry and Mary Metcalf had switched to Chiquita, a 19-foot Cape Dory Typhoon that looked like it was going ten knots even when tied up at the dock. Dave and Francesca Kautz had wisely left their P-15 at home and brought Trailer Trash, a dashing O'Day 19 much better suited for cruising with two, especially if it rained.

Muddy Duck, a 17-foot ComPac Sun Cat, was there, skippered by Dick Herman, along with

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Messabout IX skippers and crews Left to right:

Top row: Jim Ferguson, Dan Phy, Don Hunter, Tom Luque, Francesca and Dave Kautz, John Wheeler **Middle row:** Tim Derry, Mary Metcalf, Rob Pettit, John Couch, Dick Herman **Front row:** Rob Sampson, Margie Couch, Jim Kirwan, Don Person, Rob Sampson

Rob Sampson in Mud Hen, a 21-foot Ranger tug. For the purist who wonders what the owner of a gunter-rigged P-14 is doing up there with a diesel-powered work boat when he could be sailing, let me offer this: Rob's call sign, Mud Hen, was quickly changed to Mother Hen as it is very reassuring to have Rob circling the fleet if things go south, which can happen.

Finally, John Wheeler was there, although it was hard to see him in his stealth boat, Khaki Duck, a ten-foot johnboat with a two-horsepower kicker. Now, this takes some explaining. John is an ex-West Wight Potter owner who has cycled through two P-15s and an IM-18, Old Number Two, along with an impressive fleet of other small boats. Being a minimalist, he was testing the basics of microcruising. With an ordinary skipper this would have been worrisome, but John has been on four previous Messabouts, and cruised the coast of Florida and the Erie Canal. In short, he is a very experienced small boat skipper, and if wanted to get wet and sleep that close to the water, that was his call.

After a day of rigging, fine-tuning the boats, shopping, and sampling the delights of Squalicum's restaurants, the Suspects were ready for the next day. Jim

Kirwan and Dick Herman checked the weather and currents, readying for the sail to Sucia Island. It was going to be warm, with little wind, and the possibility of fog.

Day One: Tuesday, Sept 6

Most of the skippers were up by 0500 for the nineteen-nautical mile sail to Fossil Bay on Sucia Island. The only formal skippers' meeting was convened at 0730, and the fleet was away by 0800. The weather prophets had it right and the weather was clear and warm with light and variable winds. Crossing Bellingham Bay turned into a pleasant motor-sail, which was a delightful contrast to the normal Bellingham Bash. The boats turned north into Hale Passage, retracing the route of the FOGs in "Caly's Island." (Okay, so this is shameless plug for the book.) More than one eye kept glancing at the fog bank in Rosario Strait on the other side of Lummi Island. The Suspects turned the northern tip of Lummi Island and headed west for Fossil Bay. The fog in Rosario Strait had lifted, and most were able to sail for at least half the time.

After a brief detour back to Squalicum, Mud/Mother Hen surged ahead to Fossil Bay, which was rapidly filling up with boaters because of the good weather. The last of the Suspects arrived by 1500 (that's 3 PM for you non-nautical folks), and after some milling around in Echo Bay, six of the intrepid Suspects found space at the dock and six rafted up on mooring buoys in Fossil Bay. After a leisurely afternoon exploring Sucia and a quiet dinner on the boats, most were in bed early for an early departure the next morning. Currents were a factor and the fleet was going to split.

Day Two: Wednesday, Sept 7

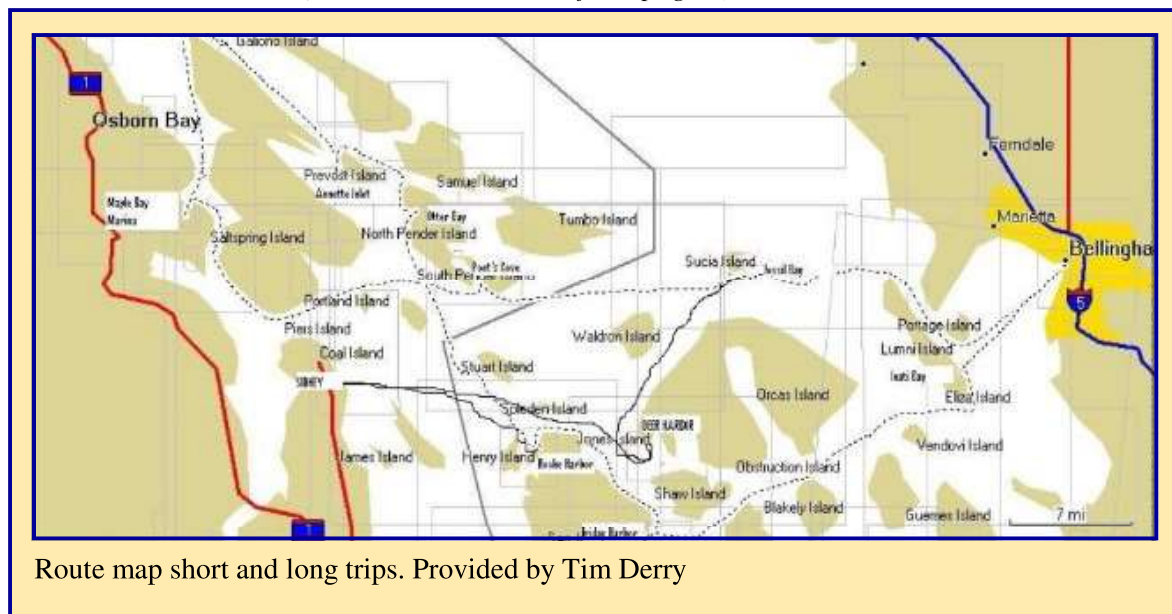
Jim Kirwan in Surprise joined four of the larger boats, Chiquita, Mud/Mother Hen, Sevilla, and Trailer Trash for an oh-dark-thirty departure for Bedwell Harbour on South Pender Island. Their game plan – circumnavigate Salt Spring Island in the Canadian Gulf Islands, but it was going to take some long



Minimalist John Wheeler in Khaki Duck at Deer harbor. Photo: Dan Phy

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Route map short and long trips. Provided by Tim Derry

days on the water and they needed an early departure to avoid counter-currents in Boundary Pass. The remainder of the Suspects were up and away by 0630, headed south for Deer Harbor on Orcas Island. Again, the weather was clear and warm, the winds calm, and it was an uneventful motor-sail down President

Channel and into Deer Harbor. Most of the skippers tried to keep track of John Wheeler in Khaki Duck, but he was truly in the stealth mode and hard to see.

Everyone reached port by 1030 and tied up at the fuel dock to wait for berth assignments. It was the last day of Deer Harbor’s annual wooden boat show and the Suspects walked the docks, enjoying the wooden wonders. Much to Dan Phy’s delight, Deer Leap, an 85-foot, converted wooden icebreaker once owned by a cousin, was there. Dan quickly introduced himself to the skipper and re-established contact with the old friend. It didn’t take much convincing for everyone to agree to spend two nights at Deer Harbor.

Meanwhile, the Long Trippers, hereafter referred to as the LTs, had reached Bedwell Harbour on South Pender Island and cleared Canadian immigration and customs by phone. It was an easy decision to spend the night at Poet’s Cove, one of the more posh marinas in that neck of the woods, and revel in the sybaritic delights of new showers, a beautiful pool, and excellent restaurants.

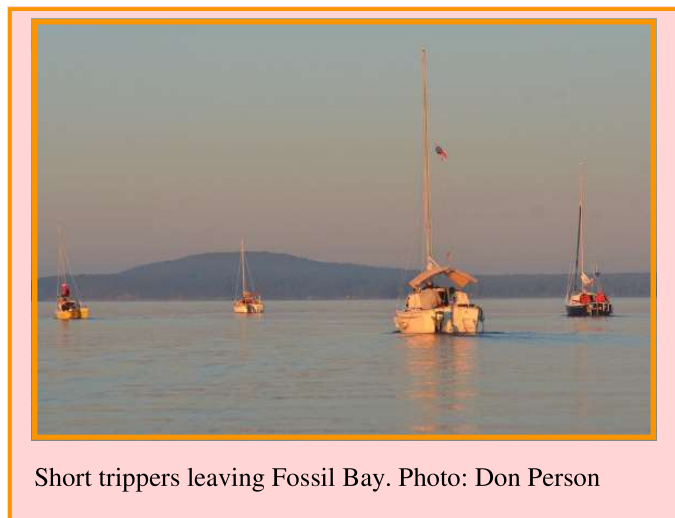
Day Three: Thursday, Sept 8

Currents were still a problem for the LTs at Poet’s Cove, and they were away early for the twenty-one nautical mile run to Maple Bay on the western side of Sansum Narrows, opposite Salt Spring Island. The currents and weather were not a problem, but the long days on the water were tough on the skippers. They tied up at Maple Bay Marina, a funky, but nice family-owned establishment with a great pub, The Shipdock. The LTs had their priorities right.

Meanwhile at Deer Harbor, the rest of the Suspects spent a laid-back day talking, walking, and watching the wooden boats depart. Three boats; Muddy Duck, NV US, and Sarah Anne day sailed to Shaw Island for lunch at the small store overlooking the ferry dock and Harney Channel. Sarah Anne proved to be a “ferry magnet” and it was easy to find Don – just look for the nearest ferry. There was enough wind to sail back and Muddy Duck and Sarah Anne challenged the wind and currents to transit Pole Pass, a very narrow passage opening into Deer Harbor. Muddy Duck gave up on the second try and motored through. But the skipper of Sarah Anne is a stubborn geezer and he almost made it on the third try. He finally gave up after the fourth attempt and started his outboard.

Day Four: Friday, Sept 9

The LTs at Maple Bay were away early for another long day on the water. Tim Derry recalls it as one of best days of light air sailing he has experienced. They finally turned



Short trippers leaving Fossil Bay. Photo: Don Person

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Don Hunter and Dan Phy. Deer Harbor to Shaw Island day sail. Photo: Don Person

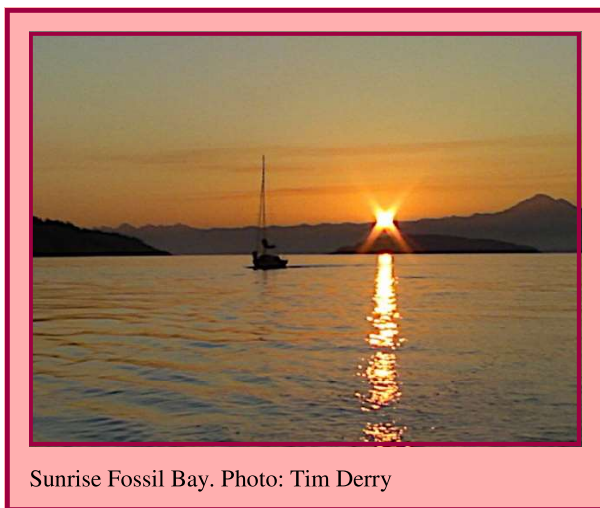
Southy Point on the northern end of Salt Spring Island, entered Trincomaly Channel, and sailed south. The anchorage at Princess Cove on Wallace Island was full, so they pressed ahead to Annette Inlet on Prevost Island, which is on the south side of Salt Spring Island. Once again, the anchorage was surprisingly full, probably because of the great weekend weather, but there was room for them to drop their hooks. It had been a long day and they had sailed over twenty nautical miles. Tough folks, the LTs.

Back at Deer Harbor, seven boats were away by 0800 – destination, Port Sidney Marina on Vancouver Island, B.C. Again, it was lovely weather; warm, seas calm, and winds very light. NV US ran over a sinker log entering Spieden Channel and radioed a warning. Fortunately, there was no damage to NV US and no one else encountered the sinker. John Wheeler decided he was pushing his luck, and rather than brave the open waters of Haro Strait and assorted freighters in the shipping channel, peeled off and headed for Roche Harbor. John may be a minimalist, but he knows a safe thing when he sees it.

The remaining six boats pulled into the immigration dock at Port Sidney Marina a little after noon. It was a long and frustrating wait as the Suspects slowly cleared customs, calling in one at a time on the only phone.

Because of the excellent, and very warm weather, the lone lady in the harbor master’s office was very busy finding spots for arriving boats, but she found berths for the Suspects fairly close to the restrooms on the main dock walkway. That evening, they set up their traditional Happy Hour in the shade of a million-dollar motor yacht and met many of their fellow boaters strolling down the dock. The Suspects were careful to clarify that they were the “cute little boats” and not the gold-plater behind them. It was a lovely evening filled with comradeship and meeting new folks.

Around 8:30 P.M., a siren echoed over the marina and one of the ladies they had just met came running down the dock. Within minutes, a large team of paramedics ran down the dock. The mood grew somber as a quiet worry settled over the marina. Then the paramedics wheeled out a man on a gurney. Later, the Suspects learned that the sixty-six-year-old man had suffered a heart attack in his sleep and had



Sunrise Fossil Bay. Photo: Tim Derry

passed away. While sad, a few of the Suspects decided that crossing the bar while sleeping, in a beautiful place where you wanted to be, and doing what you wanted to do, is a fair deal.

Day Five: Saturday, Sept 10

The LTs at Annette Inlet weighed anchor and headed for Port Browning, a lovely marina tucked away on the east side of North Pender Island less than thirteen nautical miles away. Before the five boats transited Navy Channel, Rob Sampson established contact with Port Browning only to learn they were totally filled. A decision was made and the intrepid and flexible skippers headed for Otter Bay, which made for a very short day on the water. The marina at Otter Bay proved to be a good choice, and the LTs tied up and headed for “The Stand” at the nearby ferry dock. “The Stand” is a mom and



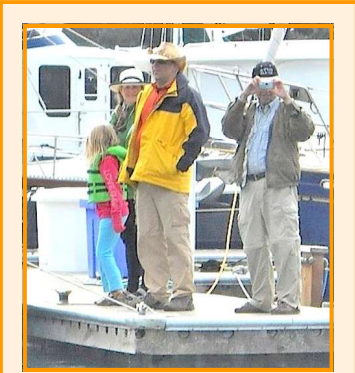
Dick Herman’s Muddy Duck at Roche Harbor Marina. Photo: Neal Fennel

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pop snack bar that serves up a world-class hamburger, which justifies any stop in Otter Bay. As always, it lived up to its reputation.

The Suspects at Port Sidney Marina were up early and wandered downtown for pastries, coffee, and breakfast. After a quiet morning watching Sidney come alive, they wandered the bookstores and eventually found “The Boat Exchange.” The Exchange describes itself as a used-parts chandlery, but think junk shop of used boat parts. It was easy to get lost rummaging around for a few hours, trying to decide if you really needed that bit or piece.



The Fennels and Rob Sampson at Blakely Marina.
Photo: Francesca Kautz

Jim Ferguson, a laid-back veteran of two previous Messabouts, lured Tom Luque and Rob Pettit into Victoria in search of a good pub while Muddy Duck and NV US day sailed over to Sidney Island. Later that afternoon, Neil and Victoria Fennell with Kirin, their delightful eight-year-old daughter, hooked up with the Suspects. The Fennells sail Dolly Dagger, a P-19, are from Victoria, and had sailed with the Suspects on Messabout XIII. Their passports were in order and they were eager to sample the waters of the San Juans. That evening, everyone made their way into Sidney for an excellent fish and chips dinner. Most were in their bunk by 2130.



Kirin Fennell at Blakely Marina. Photo: Rob Sampson

Real partiers, those Suspects.

Day Six: Sunday, Sept 11

The LTs were up and away early and headed for Roche Harbor to clear customs and immigration, and rendezvous with the Suspects returning from Sidney. They sailed south down Swanson Channel and into Boundary Pass where they had to cross the main shipping lane as it turned into Haro Strait. A parade of one southbound and three northbound freighters making the turn got their attention. Chiquita, Mud/Mother Hen, Sevilla, and Trailer Trash timed the distance and speed and crossed between two and three, while Surprise waited for the third freighter to pass before making it across. Cautious man, that Jim Kirwan. For some reason, Mud/Mother Hen attracted the attention of a Homeland Security patrol boat and made their acquaintance. But that’s another story for Rob to tell.

For the Sidney Suspects, it was a relaxed morning with breakfast downtown. They were away at 1100 hours – destination. Roche Harbor – and motored across a calm and warm Haro Strait, arriving in good order at 1400. NV US arrived first and arranged for dock assignments with the accommodating harbor master. The Fennells joined the now



Freighter in Haro Strait. Can you find Jim Kirwan? Photo: Francesca Kautz

reunited Suspects for a gracious and well-provisioned Happy Hour under the pavilion at the end of the visitors’ dock. Dick Herman coaxed everyone into autographing a copy of “Caly’s Island” for the good folks at Roche Harbor, since a few scenes in the novel are set at Roche. (Okay, so this is the second shameless pug, but Roche Harbor plays a role in the story, and, hopefully, we can go back.)

Later, many of the Suspects made their way to the shore for ice cream and to watch the retreat ceremony, which proved to be a very touching as Roche Harbor honored the tenth anniversary of 9-11.

Day Seven: Monday, Sept 12

Half of the Suspects breakfasted at the Lime Kiln Cafe and analyzed the weather as they waited for favor-

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able currents and the fog in San Juan Channel to lift. The winds had shifted to out of the south and small craft warnings were flying in Haro Strait. John Wheeler decided that he had tested the depths of minimalization and was going to catch the ferry back to the mainland to retrieve his car and trailer, then return to Roche Harbor to pull out. Wise man, John.

By 11:30, the Suspects were away in two groups to challenge the conditions in Spieden Channel. It was not a pleasant experience and most immediately reefed down as they punched their way around the northern end of San Juan Island and headed south for Friday Harbor. Snow Goose experienced a rigging malfunction and its skipper had a religious moment before clearing the malfunction. Rob had been tested and walked the docks afterwards with a more firm and confident pace. Pottering does that to a skipper.

The wind gods relented and the Suspects had to motor the last five miles to Friday Harbor. As usual, most of the Suspects tied up in the inner harbor near the floating restroom, and not too far from the visitors' dock where Chiquita, Mud/Mother Hen, Sevilla, and Trailer Trash were berthed.

That afternoon the Suspects gathered on the picnic barge for Happy Hour. Don Person drew himself up to his full five-foot-five and inducted John and Margie Couch into the Nautical Order of Geezers; John as a NOG in training, and Margie as a pre NOGette. John recalls it as a memorable moment that brought a tear to his eye, which is a very polite way of saying what he was really thinking. Before a round of toasts could be offered with Don's favorite concoction of rum and pineapple juice, the table tipped and the drinks landed in Dick Herman's lap, giving his jeans a fresh aroma for the rest of the voyage. Such is the way of NOGdom.

Four of the Suspects ambled into town for dinner at Haley's Bait Shop and Grill before hitting the sack. The evening sky held the promise of another nice day and the Suspects had decided to layover.

Day Eight: Tuesday, Sept 13

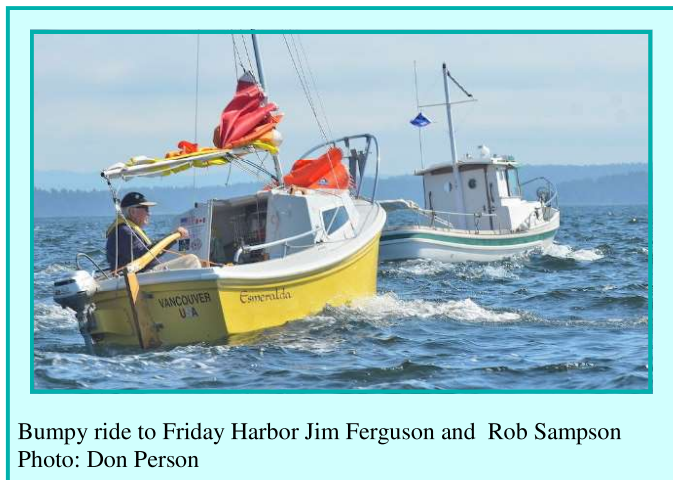
The Suspects were up and about early and half made their way to Rocky's, a cafe famous with the locals for its breakfasts and great coffee. Sevilla headed for Bellingham for an early pullout in order to attend a family function, and the rest of the Suspects

kicked back for the day. Three boats, Dolly Dagger, Muddy Duck, and Sarah Anne headed for Fisherman's Bay across San Juan Channel. It was a pleasant sail and they docked at Lopez Islander Resort for lunch on the patio overlooking the bay. Kirin, entertained them with third grade jokes, which were a perfect fit for the charmed Suspects.

Back at Friday Harbor, Tom Luque continued to install his Snap Gate on a few Potters (the boats, not the Suspects). The Snap Gate is a device for closing and opening the sail gap in a mast track, and keeps the sail slugs in the track. It is an elegant and simple invention, and most importantly, it works.

One of the pleasures of Friday Harbor is ferry watching. John Wheeler disembarked with his vehicle and trailer and made contact on his way to Roche Harbor to retrieve Khaki Duck. He smiled broadly when he learned about the conditions in Spieden Channel the previous day. Not long after, Mike and Kay Trueman

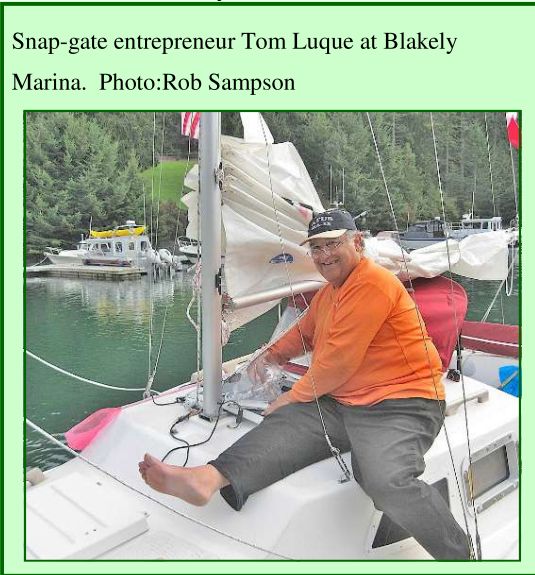
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Bumpy ride to Friday Harbor Jim Ferguson and Rob Sampson
Photo: Don Person



Dan Phy Don Hunter Jim Kirwan in Bellingham Bay headed for Lummi Island. Photo: Don Person



Snap-gate entrepreneur Tom Luque at Blakely Marina. Photo: Rob Sampson



Jim Ferguson, Dave Kautz entering Blakely Harbor. Photo: Rob Sampson

arrived. Mike is a veteran of four previous Messabouts and sails a beautiful Montgomery 15. He and Kay were touring the San Juans celebrating their 46th wedding anniversary, and, naturally, had to check on the Suspects. Then Bob and Dil Pisani arrived in their Ranger Tug, fresh from a Ranger Tugboat Convention. Bob is a new P-15 owner and sails mainly with the Wednesday crowd in the Oakland Estuary. They tied up close to Mud/Mother Hen and joined the Suspects for the day.

That evening, Don Hunter recalls having a rare moment preparing dinner for Rob Pettit and Dan Phy on board NV US. He outdid himself with filet mignon, Bernaise sauce, and green beans with bacon and onions. Rob added garlic mashed potatoes and they had a superb dinner, celebrating a great trip and good friends.

Day Nine: Wednesday, Sept 14

The weather reports were forecasting change and the Suspects sensed they were pressing their luck. It was time to head for home. A small group made their way back to Rocky's for an early breakfast, and everyone was away by 0900; destination – Blakely Island Marina nine nautical miles away. It was cooler, and, again, there was no wind. NV US and Snow Goose decided to take advantage of the calm conditions and pressed on to Bellingham, another eighteen nautical miles, to pull out. Dolly Dagger, Mud/Mother Hen, Sarah Anne, and Trailer Trash called in at Olga on Orcas Island for an outstanding lunch at the gift store before making the short run to Blakely.

After checking out his outboard, Jim in Surprise and Tim and Mary in Chiquita headed for Inati Bay on Lummi Island to anchor for the night. It was another eleven nautical miles but the conditions were calm and currents favorable. Besides, it would make for a short run to Bellingham the next day.

It was a quiet and warm evening as the last of the Suspects gathered for the final night. The last of the wine was poured and hors d'oeuvres shared as the Suspects were treated to Tom Luque's story of "Who's afraid of Virginia Fox." For Dave Kautz it was very special. "As much I like to sail, I have to say it takes a second priority to the camaraderie that develops on the trip. The group that was gathered at Blakely seemed particularly relaxed and cohesive and



Tom Luque tells the tale of Virginia fox. Photo: Rob Sampson

having the Fennell family there moved us another step away from 'Grumpy Old Men with boats.' The combination of great folks having a good time in spectacular scenery is much of the Messabout magic."

That says it all.

Day Ten: Wednesday, Sept 15

Tim had set Chiquita's plow anchor at Inati Bay and Surprise had rafted up for the night. Unfortunately, the steep shelf prevented a longer scope, and when the winds kicked up just after midnight, the two boats started to move around. Around 0500, Surprise's shorter mast locked under Chiquita's forestay, and Jim had to cast off to prevent damage. By early morning, two-foot swells were rolling across Bellingham Bay and the two boats were in for a bash as they made for Squalicum Harbor.

The Suspects at

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Olga public dock for lunch stop. Photo: Francesca Kautz



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Blakely said good-by to the Fennells who headed for Deer Harbor and home. The boats were away just after sunrise to take advantage of the favorable currents in Rosario Strait. The winds were increasing as the six boats rounded Carter Point on the south end of Lummi Island and entered Bellingham Bay. It turned into a real “Bellingham Bash” in conditions best described as on the interesting side of sporting as the winds reached sixteen knots and the skippers reefed. Conditions calmed as they approached Squilicum and all made safe harbor by 1130.

Rain was in the forecast, so the Suspects hurried to pull out and derig. In the midst of all the activity, Francesca looked out over the bay and offered the perfect summation, “That’s the price for all the good weather.” Finally, the last of the group, Jim Ferguson, Dave and Francesca Kautz, Tom Luque, Rob Sampson, Don Person, and Dick Herman gathered to chant the traditional “Cheated Death Again.”

Like Dave Kautz said, it was a truly magical Messabout.

An Afterword

In many respects, the ninth Messabout was the best I have organized and participated in. We may not have had the consistent winds that make for great sailing, but we did have a few good days and two challenging sails. There were many memorable moments; however, Dave Kautz expressed it perfectly when he described it all as Messabout magic. It is the camaraderie that develops each year as the group melds into a pack of true friends that has made the Messabouts such an important part of my sailing life. I will never forget gathering on the veranda at Boston Harbor on a warm Sunday evening on the first Messabout and laughing as hard as I can remember; or a few sunrises and sunsets that took my breath away; or sitting with Dave Lawson on a star-lit night at Fossil Bay swapping stories and destroying Pat Brennan’s bottle of Bushmills. And how many cups of early-morning coffee have I shared with Don Person as we greeted a new day?



Don Person motor-sails the last lap, Bellingham Bay bash, to Squilicum Harbor. Photo: Francesca Kautz



The short trip skippers led by Admiral Herman chant cheated death again. Jim Ferguson, Admiral Herman, Tom Luque, Don Person, Francesca Kautz, Dave Kautz. Photo: Rob Sampson

There have been some tense moments; like the run from Von Donop Inlet on Cortes Island to Hariot Bay on Quadra Island on the fourth Messabout; or the race against an incoming storm that chased us off the water on the same Messabout. And there have been a few miserable moments, like the slog in the rain from Friday Harbor to Blakely Island Marina on Messabout II. Still, I would not trade a single moment.

A few souls call me the group’s leader. But nothing could be further

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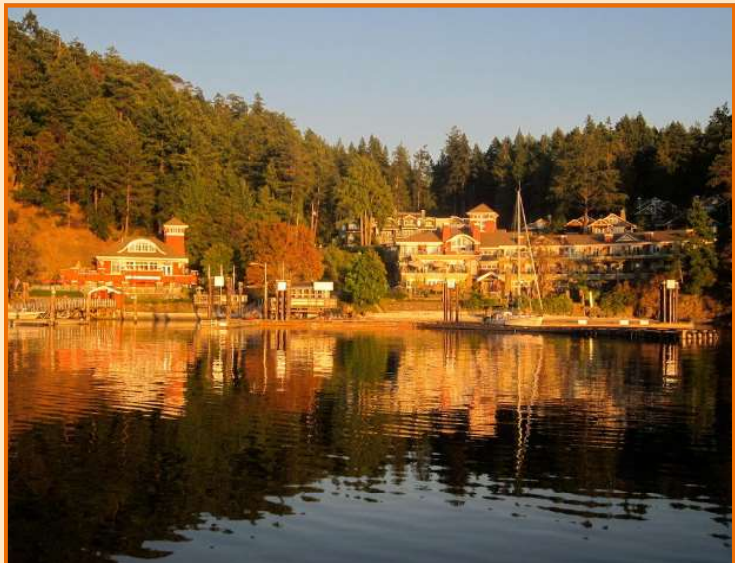
John and Margie Couch NOG(IT) initiates, Friday Harbor. Photo: Francesca Kautz

from the truth. The Suspects are as diverse and strong-willed collection of skippers as you can find, and any attempt to “lead” them is like trying to nail Jello to the wall. But if they agree on a common objective, they are as strong and cohesive a bunch as you can find. I’ll never forget Tim Derry’s radio call as I tried to organize a photo shoot for a news photographer on Messabout IV. “Is it too early to mutiny yet?”

In the opening paragraph, I wrote, “. . . a Messabout is about more than the boats.” It’s really about the individuals who have the temperament and skills to sail a microcruiser like the West Wight Potter 15. But as Don Person recites in the NOG Oath, “I am of a certain age and recognize the implacability of time’s measures on my mind and body. I will go forward undaunted and ignoring to the limits of my ability the changes wrought by time and accept them as signs that I am progressing as I must.” It has been a great adventure, but it is time for me to step aside. I hope some able-minded individual will organize another Messabout and point the Suspects in a direction, and then have the patience to just let the magic happen.

But for now, let me end by saying, “Thank you, one and all.”

Long trip skippers meeting, Rob Sampson, Jim Kirwan, Dave Kautz, John Couch. Photo: John Couch



Poet's Cove. Photo: John Couch

