

## **The Third Annual Great Potter Yachter Northwest Escape and Messabout**

**May 12 to 24, 2005**

First, there were the veterans. They had been tested on two earlier Messabouts and were ready to do it again. The West Wight Potter 15s were out in force, captained by Pat Brennan in Eaglet, Jim Kirwan in Lark, Dave Lawson in Schatz, and Don Person in Sarah Ann. John Wheeler was there in . . . in . . . well, his unnamed Potter 18 was the second hull built, and the others called it "old number two." Dan Phy was in his recently adopted Montgomery 15, Six, along with Dick Herman in Muddy Duck, a SunCat. And then there was Brad Evans, the rookie in Mosey, a 17-foot Vagabond.

Their stated mission was simple: trailer their intrepid (Don insists we use this word as much as possible) sailing vessels to the Pacific Northwest to advance the cause of Potterdom. For the knowledgeable, Pottering is really a state of mind best captured by the West Wight Potter. John led the way and launched "old number two" out of Anacortes to work his way through the San Juans to Vancouver Island. By May 12, Dan and Jim had crossed the Straits of San Juan de Fuca on the Port Angeles ferry, and made contact with John and the friendly folks at Van Isle Marina nestled in Tsehum Harbor. The rest were close behind and had safely arrived by that afternoon.

Dan passed out the obligatory hats with ATUS emblazoned boldly on the front, and, in the tradition of previous voyages, All The Usual Suspects gathered on the dock around Muddy Duck that evening to comment on the latest acquisition of Scotch and plot the next day's activities.

The third annual Great Potter Yachter Northwest Escape and Messabout was underway.

### **Day One**

The first life stirred around 0500 on Friday, May 13, to a beautiful, clear, windless morning. As no one was really clear about what had been decided the previous evening, another crew meeting was held. John, Pat, Brad checked their barometers, and being good at barometry, predicted a change in the weather. The current Current Atlas was consulted and the intrepid captains slipped their dock lines to motor out at 1100 hours to challenge Sansum Narrows, and find Maple Bay Marina at Bird's Eye Cove, 15 nautical miles away.

But the wind gods were taking a breather that morning and the air rang with the drone of the iron jennies as the sturdy vessels bashed their way through Sansum Narrows and rounded Octopus Point. For some reason, the harbormaster at Maple Bay seemed glad to see us and berths were quickly assigned. The stalwart captains reconnoitered the area and, somehow, all found the nearest pub, The Shipyard, located at the end of the dock. Resourceful fellows, ATUS.

Dan regaled the crew with a tale of a lovely lass fetching a dock cart from the queue and knocking them all over in a domino effect. Moments later, said lovely lass passed by and Dan said, "That's her." As one, seven heads swiveled. She retaliated by sticking her tongue out at Dan who muttered, "She knows."

That night it rained.

## Day Two

The rain gods were lurking in the vicinity on Saturday morning, May 14, so it was decided to daysail to Crofton, six miles away, for the Saturday market. It was a good sail but the timing was wrong as the market was closing down. But the hospitality at Crofton Inn Bar and Grill was warm. Well fed and content, the astute sailors discovered they had tied up at an unmarked private dock. They apologized, offered to pay, but they had apparently forever damaged Canadian-American relations.

After an uneventful motor sail back to Maple Bay, they manfully gathered at The Shipyard Pub for refreshment and dinner. Dick tried to convince the crew that they needed to depart by 0800 hours the next morning. The smoke of a mutiny scorched the air and it was decided to depart at 1000. There went the last of the control.

## Day Three

It rained during the night, thoughtfully washing the boats down. Pat was woken at oh-dark-thirty by a "Shush. Walk softly. A lot of old guys are sleeping on these boats." Maybe Canadian-American relationships hadn't been totally destroyed. Somehow, the eight boats made it away at 1000 and discovered there was wind! The rain gods were content to watch as the intrepid vessels sailed the twelve nautical miles to Telegraph Harbor on Thetis Island with a 12 to 15 knot following wind, and under overcast skies.

John discovered he had a few bottles of Boone's Sangria rolling around in his bilge. Dave produced a Stilton and Brie to go with it, and soon the group was dock sitting again. For some reason, little old ladies are attracted by ATUS hats. The trouble is they have something to say and expect an intelligent conversation in return. One came down the dock with purposeful stride and the group expected another docking lecture. Pat made eye contact and said, "There's a lady on a mission."

Her opening comment was not the usual "What cute little boats" but "These are work boats, not push button boats." That was how the group made the acquaintance of Liz, a delightful 76 year old with sparkling blue eyes who had lived for 33 years on a 52-foot ferroconcrete cutter that her husband, Jo, had built. She was a babe, and, as Dan had an extra hat, it was quickly decided to make Liz an honorary member of ATUS.

## Day Four

The rain gods voted on Monday. Not about to let a little pluvial deluge intimidate them, the group took the ferry to Chemainus. Apparently, the incident at Crofton had not made the nightly news and the town's people proved to be very friendly. After a truly excellent lunch at the Harborside café, the requisite amount of money was spent on gifts and used books.

The rain stopped and the ferry ride back to Thetis was uneventful. That night, the group again gathered on the dock at Telegraph Harbour where Dave, being a proper Bloke, delved into his never-ending supply of Cherry. Contrary to popular opinion, the evenings on the dock are not wasted and problems are solved. The evening's topic was the dreaded Cut, the high-water only passage between Thetis and Kuper Islands.

Locals tell stories of what can happen when the water is too low so tide tables were checked and studied. After due deliberation, it was decided to send John through first thing in the morning in "old number two" to test the waters, so to speak. He was expendable.

## Day Five

The sunrise that morning was breathtaking, as if in tribute to John's upcoming endeavor. True to his word, John cast off at 9:15 and made his way into The Cut, centerboard still down. Brad was right behind in Mosey, not hesitating to accept whatever challenge The Cut could offer. He may have been the rookie but he was no novice. John ran aground once near the eastern end but managed to motor off. Brad radioed back that the channel was clear and the others quickly followed.

Unfortunately, the wind was coming directly up Trincomali Channel as the intrepid Potterites bashed their way southward to Montague Bay on Galiano Island. After two hours of making little headway, the gas guzzlers were started and the 15 nm run was made without incident, which is a polite way of saying no one got lost. Now Montague Harbor Marina is one neat place, owned and managed by Newfie Bill, an experience in himself. But there are no showers and no one wants to end up smelling like an old rubber boot, which has been known to happen.

Again, gathering on the dock for the traditional fare, it was decided to dine at the Hummingbird Pub. Dick stepped smartly to the fuel dock, without falling off, as has happened before, and hailed the island's taxi service with a loud "Ahoy!" It worked and the driver motored in from his boat. The owner/hostess/waitress at the Hummingbird was a tour de force as she sorted out the orders without making a single note. The food and beverages met all expectations and the crew was safely in bed by 9:30 that evening.

But a storm was on the way with southeast winds predicted for 25 to 35 knots.

It was raining when the rugged Potterites finally stirred. They slowly gathered at the Marina's café for breakfast with bravado. It was duly noted that the rain was slackening so Dick and Don went day sailing in Muddy Duck. The winds cooperated perfectly and they made a quick passage across Trincomali Channel to Long Harbour on Salt Spring Island. After cruising Long Harbour, they made it back to Montague Bay on a single reach.

In their absence, the others had made the acquaintance of Denis and Judy, a couple cruising aboard their Catalina 42, and their loyal Portuguese Water Dog, Gus. ATUS joined a group from the White Rock sailing club at the marina's Café, and enjoyed an excellent meal served in Newfie Bill's inimitable style.

## Day Seven

The weather cooperated on Thursday as Newfie Bill came down to see us off. The group departed smartly at 0845 hours with John racing ahead under power as the loyal scout. Dick was the last to clear the dock as Denis took the group's measure with a practiced eye. His last words were "You guys are gutsy." Did he know something?

Most of the intrepid captains tacked out of the harbor under a reef, which was quickly shaken out as the wind died. All but Don motored into the main channel and then sailed across Trincomali Channel – destination Ganges on Salt Spring Island. The winds held the rain at bay until the sturdy craft turned north to make the run up Ganges Harbor. But the rain gods could not be denied for the last 45 minutes. John was waiting on the dock with slip assignments after making friends with the friendly, and very pretty staff, at Ganges Marina. Don was the last to dock after sailing most of the way – rain, current, and winds be damned. He made one proud to be a Potterite.

Most headed for the Oyster Catcher for lunch as Don's oyster low-level light was on. Afterwards, they toured the town and gathered on the party dock for the usual hors d'oeuvres and libations. Then it started to rain.

## Day Eight

Friday dawned as life slowly returned to the fleet. After coffee and breakfast on the boats, most headed for town and ran to earth in the bookstore. After lunch at the Tree House, Dave and Dick in Muddy Duck joined Don in Sarah Ann for a short afternoon sail. Craft of all shapes and sizes were streaming into Ganges for Victoria Day holiday and the around Salt Spring Island race, which gave a whole new meaning to traffic control and docking procedures.

Denis and Judy had sailed over from Montague and made the mistake of inviting the group over to their Catalina for wine and hors d'oeuvres that afternoon. Foolish folks, or were they simply amazed to see us there? Gus, that amiable water dog, was so glad to see Don that he gave Don a thorough ear licking, a most memorable event.

Later that evening, a 48-foot Ocean Alexander docked next to the intrepid fleet and sent two emissaries over to establish contact. After ritual formalities had been exchanged, the newcomers produced a bottle of "Royal Salute," a truly world-class scotch that trumped anything the humble Potterites could retrieve from their bilges. But they tried.

## Day Nine

Only one "Ouch!" was heard from Muddy Duck as the fleet came to life on Saturday morning. After listening to the weather report that predicted what could be called "sporting conditions" for that afternoon, it was decided to make a breakout for Otter Bay, seven miles away on North Pender Island.

The intrepid four, Brad, Dan, Jim and John, were away by 0830. The remaining laggards hung around to watch the start of the around the island race. It was an impressive site as approximately a hundred sailboats milled around the start line. At exactly 1000 hours the horn sounded and the race was underway. Thirty minutes later, the tail-end Charlies, Dave, Don, Pat, and Dick, cast off and departed in good order to motor out of the harbor.

A 34-foot sailboat passed the final four and the captain carefully studied the tight formation. He looked at Muddy Duck with a concerned look and snapped a snappy salute. Did he know something?

The wind veered and Don hoisted his sail. Soon, all four were sailing as they beat down Captain Passage. Rounding Point Liddell on the southern end of Prevost Island was attention getting as the intrepid sailing vessels punched into Swanson Channel. Don and Dave doused their sails and motored across while Pat and Dick tried to match Don's performance on the sail into Ganges. But it wasn't going to happen and they had to motor the last mile into Otter Bay.

The scouting four guided the arriving Potterites into the dingy dock at the packed marina. The rain started to spit down as the stalwart group made their way to The Stand, the snack bar at the nearby ferry terminal. Not only did The Stand have a great view of Swanson Channel, but it served up a mind-boggling, world-class hamburger that was worth the trip to Otter Bay in itself.

The weather held off long enough for the obligatory dock gathering. It was a chastened and quiet group that listened to the weather report as the winds kicked up.

## Day Ten

An astute reader will have noticed that little mention has been made of Jim in Lark. That's because he is a man of few words and tends to go with the flow. But he is a walking, if not talking, encyclopedia of experience sailing in the Pacific Northwest. He listened to the group's Sunday morning's discussion about the weather and treated it as a sanity check. Given the winds, he really liked Otter Bay and that is where we stayed.

But being rugged and dedicated Potterites at heart, the group headed for the ferry to do some sight seeing. It is a far different world when you're forty feet above the water and wind is gusting past 25 knots than when you're sitting a foot above it in a fifteen-foot sailboat.

That afternoon, John decided to strike out on his own and headed for Poets Cove at Bedwell Harbour, seven nautical miles away. He later reported it was a "bumpy passage" and he arrived wet, cold, but safe. Given his penchant for understatement, perhaps it was best the rugged and dedicated Potterites were doing their usual thing dockside, safe and snug in Otter Bay.

### **Day Eleven**

The rain gods were satiated, the winds had sat down, and clouds chased themselves across a clearing sky. Nine miles away, the sybaritic pleasures of Van Isle Marina beckoned. As there was a following current, it was an easy decision. The stalwart captains were underway at 0800 hours in good order. Most motored into a headwind across Swanson Channel, but within three miles, the wind had veered and all were sailing.

Reefing became the word of the day as reefs were taken in and then shaken out. The winds kicked up and soon, thanks to the current, the fleet was making a steady five knots. Reefs were in again as they rounded the southern end of Coal Island, and speeds reached six to seven knots, and the seven intrepid craft soon made safe harbor.

It was a perfect sail.

### **Going Home**

The boats were quickly on their trailers and the group made the break to catch the three P.M. Ferry from Victoria to Port Angeles. Muddy Duck, Sarah Ann, Eaglet, and Schatz arrived barely in time to get on board. But Lark, Six, and Mosey would have to catch the seven p.m. ferry. However, they all gathered in the parking lot as they waited and grinned foolishly at each other. Then they chorused the three ritual words. "Cheated death again." They were going home.

But would they do it again? Oh, I think so.