

Report: A Potter Yachter's First Messabout

by Jim 'Goose' Gossman

Well, my first Messabout was fabulous, with charmed weather and incredible people. I drove up with Don Person and Pat Brennan, spending two nights in pre-chosen motels and eating at great, vetted restaurants on the way. Their experience showed; Don has trekked up for 11 of the 13 Messabouts, and this was Pat's 7th. When we arrived in Bellingham on Sept. 9th, 2015, all the other boats were there. Rafael Davidson (Suncat) and Charlie Jeremias (Corsair 27 trimaran) had been there for several days, eventually joined by Dan Phyl (M15), Jim Kirwan & Steve Haines (M15), Judy Blumhorst (P19), Dick Galland (Marshal Sanderling 18'



Photo: John Chille

Catboat), Jim Ferguson (P15), Rick Ferguson (P18), Tom Luque (P19), John Chille & Pam Cabot (M15), and ourselves: Pat Brennan (Compac 16), "Goose" Gossman (P14), and Don "COE"¹ Person (P15). On the first day out, we ran into Bob (M15), and he joined in for the duration of the trip. 14 boats!

At the Bellingham launch ramp, a fisherman gave me three salmon (for which I gave him a couple of beers), which foreshadowed the good eats ahead. On the dock, we gave a nice couple (on a powerboat) one of the fish

and I received an expert filleting lesson and knife sharpening in return. The next morning, Thursday, Don was out early, en-route to Blakely Island, some 16 miles away. Winds were light, but sail-able, and the fleet converged into the Rosario Strait after several pleasant hours. At that point, the wind picked up into the teens and on the nose, whereupon Rafael proclaimed that "gentlemen do not sail against the wind", furled sail, and started his engine. Gale was happy, but having been on the same tack for such a long time, my arm was getting tired. As is the case around



Judy B in her modified P-19

islands, winds are shifty, gusty, and fickle... so one has to pay attention at all times. My new Tiller-Clutch was already earning its keep. Once in the lee of Orcas Island, winds moderated, and we crossed paths with a beautiful 80' schooner ghosting along. The currents were not favorable, so I turned the key and shot over to Blakely, only to see Don perched in a chair on a beautiful lawn overlooking the harbor entrance. His early departure paid off in spades, while we rookies fought it out.



Don perched in a chair overlooking the harbor

¹ Don has been called "Council of Elder" ([PYN 2014-11pg3](#)) and he also insists we use the adjective "intrepid" whenever possible.

Blakely was beautiful, but as it was a private island, we were restricted to the marina grounds... complete with clean bathrooms/showers. The office/store was already "closed for the season", but there was a person there to check us in. I fried up the salmon fillets, and then Tom projected an English satire show onto his jib with an iPhone gizmo. Honest.

Next morning, Friday, we readied for the shorter trip to Deer Harbor (8-9 miles), but the channel was looking ominous with whitecaps, so everyone reefed. I had only my racing main along (whoops), so I jury-rigged a reef in it and set off. It's hard to describe, but the energy of the mixing currents and the strong, shifty winds made it feel like sailing inside a washing machine. Not dangerous, but hard to find a



Toasting another successful day of sailing

comfortable course. After a couple miles, a trawler chugged by, and when I hit his wake, my jury-rigged leech had had enough, and ripped a foot long section at the new clew. It was unfortunate, because just a hundred yards away the fleet was drifting with barely a whisper of breeze. Time to turn the key again, but this time I rigged the fishing pole and trolled. I snagged something and lost the \$\$\$ flashing lure I'd just bought. We timed the approach to Deer Harbor at slack water so we could take a short cut through a narrow cut. On the approach, a seaplane casually landed a few yards away and taxied alongside Rick. Ho-hum.



Seaplane casually landed a few yards from Rick

regaling in the beauty. Charlie went for a swim!

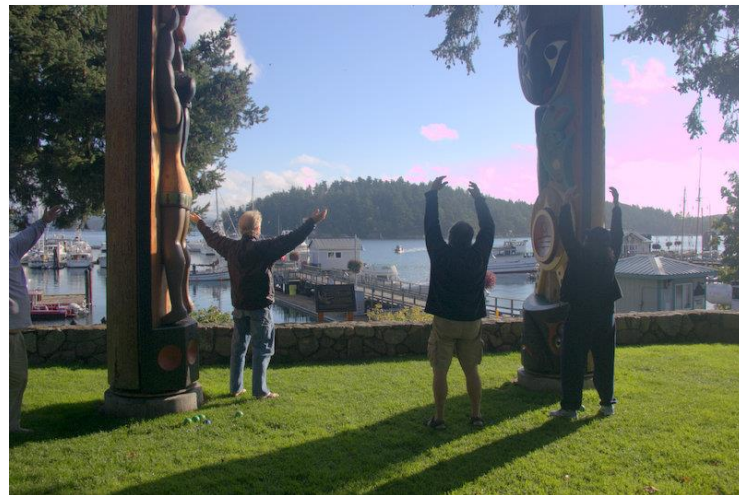
Next morning was Saturday and we headed south the 8-ish miles to Friday Harbor in light winds. It was just enough to keep going in the right direction without using the motor with plenty of time to make port. We had a front row seat in a beautiful water garden. I was thinking of pulling out the fishing pole, but then Charlie moseyed over and we raft-sailed for a while. Approaching Friday Harbor was like going to Avalon; ferries, boats, and sea-planes everywhere. It's a large marina, with plenty of space for us. We were staying there for three nights, which, at first seemed too long. As it turned out, it was perfect. We got our bearings and had an early dinner ashore at a pub. Again, all facilities were amazingly clean.

Sunday morning, we had breakfast at a place called Cynthia's restaurant. **THE BEST BREAKFAST EVER!** I had a baked avocado w/salmon and poached egg and baked bacon encrusted in maple syrup and crushed



Enjoying the multi-hull life on Charlie's Trimaran

pepper. After b-fast a few of us joined Charlie to go whale watching on his trimaran on the west side of the island. It would be an all day trip, and a sail to remember. No whales, but what a boat, and what fine mates! We had cool, crisp weather, whirlpools, and steady winds. We were always going 5-10k, in total bliss. I don't think we let Charlie drive much, nor did we bother with the motor. Judy and Dick got their first taste of multi-hull sailing, and their smiles told the story. Others went with Charlie on Monday. They saw whales, but didn't get the wind. Jim and I poked around the harbor to find the guy who lived aboard a P15 for several years. We found him, but he'd moved up to a 28'er. Amazing. We gathered everyone's gas tanks on Gale and went to top them off at the fuel dock. Funny... total came to \$18, and half of that was for Gale. On Monday we also had an impromptu Tai Chi session led by Charlie, followed by a juggling lesson from me... in the magical setting between totem poles on the waterfront of Friday Harbor.



Impromptu Tai Chi session amongst the totem poles

Tuesday morning we set off for Roche Harbor, which was another 6-8 mile sail. Winds were light, so Jim and I trolled while sailing. The "Story" is that he hooked a king salmon, but lost it when his net was too small. I was so stoked, I fished every second I could for the rest of the trip... but no luck.

When we arrived at Roche harbor, it was other-worldly... huge yachts, wide docks, and cute attendants to take our lines. Potters are living large now! They plugged us in, and we walked to the restaurant to dine al-fresco in shirtsleeves. In the morning, some played bocce, while I wandered the docks lined with multi-million dollar toys.

Wednesday morning we headed out, and Don and I went through a narrow channel known to have shoals. I was alongside a MacGregor 26X when suddenly he ran hard aground on a submerged rock. Oops... and this was a rock which even had a red buoy (unlike many unmarked ones). Within a minute I was over there, and was able to pull him off before he was shredded. I suggested that they check their prop, and sure enough, it was toast.

I continued trolling across the channel to Reid Harbor, on Stuart Island. This was only five miles and supposedly with the current... but as seems to happen often, the water lords didn't read the charts and the current was adverse. Like many spots, this harbor had a dock on the shoreline, but also some docks anchored in the cove's center and another spot had a heavy net strung between pilings to raft up to. John and Pam were anchored and blissed out close to shore, so I rafted with them for a while before moving over to spend the night rafted with Charlie's Tri-Chi. We rowed Gale over to visit the shipwrecked MacGregor who had just pulled in, and then to say 'hi' to the fleet at the dock. The Mac's skipper gave me a bottle of grapefruit cider as thanks for the rescue. For the first time on the trip, it started to rain, so I got to test Gale's new dodger and tarp (with excellent results).



Photo: Pam Cabot

The following morning, Thursday, we set out in clearing skies for Fossil Bay on Sucia Island. It would be a long motor-sail for about 16 miles against the current. Hugging the shore of Waldron Island provided some relief, and we were not disappointed when we entered yet another breathtakingly beautiful bay. We all tied up to the

Friday Harbor dock gang (from left): Jim Kirwan, Don Person, Judy Blumhorst, Tom Luque, Steve Haines, Raphael Davidson, Goose Gossman, Pat Brennan, John Chille

State Park's dock and proceeded to live large after the fine day of 5-6 hours on the water. Steve, Charlie and I hiked over the isthmus connecting to Fox Cove in the surreal beauty. On the way back we figured out the meaning of life, and crossed paths with Pam and her new friend, a baby gopher snake. Once back at the dock we feasted on what stores we had left before departing to Bellingham the following morning. We had a fishing lecture from a captain whose stash of fishing gear cost more than most of our boats.

Friday morning we all set off bright and early, as it was 18-20 miles back to Bellingham. My battery decided to play dead, so I borrowed Jim K's jumpstart battery, returned it, and shoved off. I discovered I'd left my depth sounder on, and not trusting my motor's alternator, I settled on motor-sailing and trolling again. When we got into the Strait of Georgia the winds and currents were light,



Gale happily awaiting the next day of sailing

but the weather looked ominous. I dropped my main, but having only the jib up, with the current on the beam, the boat just wouldn't hold a course. Gusts started appearing; one just moments after I had answered my cell phone, and then a 20 knot "Hello" while trying to relieve myself into what turned out to be too small of a target. That was a hint that it was time to reel things in and respect the elements before bashing up the Hale Passage. I could see Dan was doing pretty well tacking up the strait, but I was anxious to put this stretch of water behind me. Nearing its end, I passed a Native American gillnetting in the challenging conditions. No big deal for him. At that point I saw Dick Galland in *Catbird*, and got to witness the 'Bird stretch her wings for the barn,



Another beautiful day in the San Juan Islands

moving at a solid 6 knots across Bellingham Bay. Everyone arrived within a few hours and the herded cats dispersed for home at their own pace. After spending ten nights on a 14' boat, it seemed like the cruise was just beginning... and then it was over. Go figure. What stands out most is how well our wide range of boats in our pack were all able to flourish in the variety of conditions. The smiles tell it all. — 🚩

More Photos from MA-XIII by *John Chille* (from left): Pam at truck stop; Charlie, Goose, Steve; *Six & Surprise*.

