



Starting July 12, Chip Cunningham and I spent six nights on the hook in the great North Channel of Canada. I have been there many times before, but this was by far the best week for sailing of any that I can recall. Before leaving home, the forecast was calling for 4 to 6 knot winds. Ugh! Fortunately, we had everything but. Every day was a sailing day for us. We laughed as we only saw three big boats sailing the entire week. The rest of them would motor from anchorage to anchorage. Then they would climb into an inflatable dinghy and, using a different motor, they would explore. Why a sailboat? A trawler makes more sense up there if there is a preference for creature comforts. By contrast, Chip in his Wayfarer and I in my Sea Pearl sailed in and out of the most scenic areas of "the Channel" dodging the rocks and playing with the swirling wind in the tight spaces.



I saw parts of the channel that I had missed in previous years and enjoyed hearing Chip's daily exclamations about the beauty and interesting wild scenery. I half way joked to him that he was now ruined for enjoying any sailing on inland lakes (his usual venue).

Our track will show us poking into some tight and twisty areas and also some long runs in open waters. I experienced the biggest waves that I have ever sailed

single handed in a small boat. Only one other time have I seen bigger waves in a Sea Pearl (the Neuse River/Pamlico Sound in 2014), but I was not alone then. My GPS recorded 10.1 knots when I was surfing one of those waves in the North Channel. We were crossing a channel between islands



about three or so miles across with a 16+ mile fetch and a big wind. When we came screaming into a group of islands (Turnbull), I dropped my anchor behind a small rocky outpost and Chip rounded up and came along side to raft up. We were both in adrenalin fueled highs, but quickly added a shot of single malt to toast our successful crossing. Shortly, a motorized inflatable (about as big as the Wayfarer) came buzzing up. The guy driving came over to see if we needed help and was a bit disappointed when we raised our glass to toast the wind. He tucked his tail and returned to the safety of his Hunter 35 - too up tight to really enjoy the area in our collective opinions.

Speaking of the big boats motoring along. One day I was sailing on a reach on a course to intercept a sailboat that looked to be about 32 - 35 feet in length. He had his main up, but was obviously under power too. You could tell by the stream of water coming out of the transom to cool the diesel beast down in the bowels. You can almost bet when you see a sailboat with main up and jib furled that they have the motor going. Anyway, pretty soon he struck the main and continued motoring along. As I caught up (going faster under sail than they were under power), I saw a female on deck and she waved. Then the guy behind the wheel turned, waved and returned to his "work". I imagined his wife (?) asking him why they weren't sailing too. Ha! Ha! We passed by and left them to stare at our transoms becoming smaller and smaller. Do I sound elitest? I am not really. I just



felt sorry that they weren't enjoying "the Channel" as much as we. Always worried about rocks, too much wind, too little wind, will there be room in the anchorage for the night. We spent every night in a spot where there were no neighbors because the big boats would not try to get in those locations. When you spend time in "the Channel", the remote wildness is addictive and you don't want to clutter it up with a bunch of boats in an anchorage if you can help it. We had some great sunsets, star watching and just staring at the pines and rock formations for hours. It sounds sort of nuts in our

internet crazed world, but I would go back in a heart beat.

We were surprised to find that the Wayfarer (16 feet, 365 pounds) and the Sea Pearl (21 feet, 650 pounds) could sail in company so well. The SP would leave the W far behind in any following wind.



The two boats were closely matched up wind unless the wind dropped below 10 knots. Then the W has an advantage. The W tacks twice as fast as the SP and that is an advantage to the W. But, when reefing while under way, the W would lose a mile every time. The SP reefing is REALLY easy and fast. The winds that we experienced were not for the novice SP sailor. Heavy gusts required constant attention to the main sheet and one day at anchor before rolling up

some of the mizzen, a gust brought some water in over the gunnel in spite of my weight on the opposite side. Fortunately, I only had one episode while under sail when I wasn't fast enough spilling the wind with the main sheet. As far as accommodations (such as they are in a small sailboat), my tent went up before Chip could get his out of it's storage compartment. He worked a lot harder at anchor than I in making space to sleep, cooking, etc. in his boat. As is often the case for those new to this camp cruising in a small boat, he had way too much stuff with him (been there and I still take more than is needed). Taking up valuable space is only part of the problem; just finding what you need is much more difficult with too much gear.

The SP camping cabin keeps the mozzies out better than the W boom tent. Our second night ended with a racket outside. I peeked out my window with blurry eyes to see Chip taking down his tent. It was 5AM? A bit later, more racket and I peeked once more. He was flailing around with a towel and whimpering. When I realized what was happening, I struck my tent, brought the anchor aboard and had my sails drawing in less than 10 minutes. I yelled over that we had to get out to open water to cure his problem. He did get some relief, but it was a couple of days before he got all of those pesky creatures out of his bilge area. Chip had sat up ALL night sipping on his bottle of single malt scotch to keep him sane until morning. My offer of one of my four fly swatters almost brought tears to his eyes in thanksgiving. All of that gear and he didn't have a swatter or decent bug spray.



In spite of the mosquito episode, Chip will be back cruising the North Channel according to his parting thanks. Any irritation about my past cajoling and singing the praises of the area for the past year or so were faded memories. I enjoyed sharing this special area of North America with him and he said that he was telling no one. He wants to keep it a secret to avoid over crowding. One of his comments while standing on a high rock overlooking "the Channel" was "I can't believe that you don't need to buy tickets and have reservations to come here." Blind River Marina did charge us \$8 for parking our cars for the week. Launch ramp was free, after all "you guys are doing the work, aren't you?"

Gary Hirsch