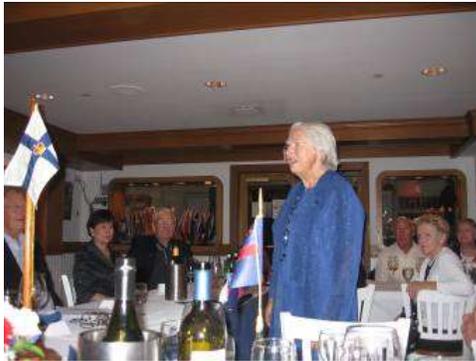


Canada, Cruising and Cocktails – 2009 Commodores' Cruise

Alastair Soane

Last year friends from Canada, John and Doreen Dew, sailed with us on our boat, Azur, in Spain. This year was the return match - to join them and their friends, Annie and Ray, on their 40 foot Jeanneau, Jess, in Vancouver. We were fortunate in many ways: the area is a yachties' paradise, situated as it is on the Inside Passage between BC and Vancouver Island, so blessed with generally fair winds and relatively calm seas and dotted with innumerable islands. Also this September was the time fixed for the International Council of Yacht Clubs' annual cruise. As one of the key founders of ICOYC, Royal Vancouver Yacht Club played host this year and the 10 participating boats were able to take advantage of all RVYC's organisation and formidable facilities.



We started with an opening dinner at the Jericho RVYC clubhouse, situated in an imposing position overlooking their private marina and the bay. The proceedings began with a cocktail party when we got to know our fellow crews and a buffet of all the best West Coast surf and turf followed. Tired and more than a little happy, everyone retired to their respective boats to sleep on board.

Sunday 30th August was the first day at sea. We left Jericho at about 10:00 on a fine and more or less windless morning. There was then time to take in our surroundings as we motored through Porlier Pass - eagles riding the thermals over densely pine forested mountains, bottle green seas patrolled by seals looking for salmon and islands rising from beds of pitted rocks. Our first night's destination was Scott Point about 35 miles away on Saltspring Island, another jewel in RVC's crown. The club owns 6 outstations on different islands. All have a caretaker and docking facilities. Amenities otherwise vary from the luxurious to the simple - a little house in the big woods aka an eco loo.

Scott Point, however, boasts a pool, showers, a small kitchen and, importantly for our purpose, a small wooden "gazebo". Jess had been nominated entertainment boat and as soon as we came ashore Doreen marshalled proceedings for that night's cocktail party. A troupe of boldly painted polystyrene parrots were retrieved from under the



forepeak bunk and hung around the makeshift bar. Mint was ground, ice collected and mohitos mixed for the evening's Cuban theme, complemented by guacamole and music from the Buenvista Social Club. It may not have been totally authentic but it was quite a warm evening so generally a great mixer.

The following day, heads didn't surface very early and there was a leisurely



start for the next 35 mile leg. Even though it appeared that there would be racing for the assorted fleet, no-one seemed to become too excited – not until 10 minutes before the rabbit start, that is. In case you have never heard of a rabbit start this is when the racing boats on starboard tack cross the stern of the start boat (in this case RVC's Commodore's power boat) which is on port. Suddenly we were in race mode on Jess with Alastair and Ray on foredeck gibing the gennaker every five minutes to catch the flukey wind. The tactic paid off. Jess was the next to smallest boat but by deploying the cruising chute, perhaps not an altogether gentlemanly tactic in

view of the two chartered Bavarias (Royal Thames and Royal Southern), we gained speed and finished first after a race of about two hours. Lunch was next on the agenda as we motored to that night's moorings, Telegraph Harbour, a small marina with showers and a store/café.

This was more or less the routine of our days thereafter: a race, winds permitting, a voyage of between 20 and 35 miles, cocktails and a prize-giving on arrival. Prizes were allotted on a strict but also quite imaginative basis and no-one was allowed to come first in a race more than once. Thus, though we did win the second race, we discovered that we had jumped the start and so ended up with the dreaded booby prize, the lead fender!

Generally the weather was very benign and warmer than we had expected when we ill advisedly left our sandals at home. However there was thunder during our third night and threats of gales later so we made an early start and had quite a lumpy two hour passage, mostly under motor, to Jedediah Island. It took at least that time to anchor safely and tie up to one of the chains bolted to the rocks on the shore. We then went ashore in the dinghy to explore. The small island is now deserted but it is kept as a provincial park by friends of a family whose son was killed on K2. The original and only homestead is abandoned, its legacy being a herd of shaggy sheep which emerged from the bushes to be fed on apples from the old orchard.



At Jedediah and other similar coves, we were sheltered and thus had the opportunity to use the two inflatable kayaks ready to go that Jess carried on deck. It was an immensely pleasurable experience to paddle quietly round an anchorage or harbour and explore the coastline. Here it was possible to examine the vivid purple, many legged sunstars and other creatures beached between tides. Below decks Doreen had installed cool boxes to supplement the fridge for food to last the fortnight's voyage, including what could have been four nights at anchor. A barbecue on the rails was a perfect way of extending the on board cooking facilities.

The following day was calm and warm. There was no race and we sailed at 3 knots and then motored to that night's anchorage at Hardy Island. En route we dropped Doreen's treasured prawn trap, designed to do just that, though it had to be in the right depth, 300 feet of water, and where it could be retrieved. A mooring buoy with address and telephone number was attached. Once all the boats had arrived and convened, it was the organisers' pleasure to bring all together to anchor and tie up sterns to in a circle. Again this took some considerable time- and just so that we could have fun tying up and meet for cocktails. Which we did.



We woke to rain and wind. Some of the boats had dragged their anchors during the night so Bob Andrews, our trusty leader, at the early daily skippers' meeting decided that we should leave for the shelter of Garden Bay, another RVYC outstation, rather than spending the next few nights in coves, as planned. It was a very wet passage through Agamemnon Sound and even worse, in spite of taking very careful bearings, the crab trap and all its potential delights was lost and gone forever.

The good news at Garden Bay was that we could plug in to the usual amenities, very welcome after two nights at anchor. There were showers,



washing machines, a kitchen and television lounge. In the surrounding small community there was a general store, John Henry's, that sold everything from garden tomatoes to fleecy tartan boxer shorts and books with unmissable titles such as "The History of the Chain Saw"; a café run single handedly by Laverne, an immensely cheerful lady who made us a wonderful breakfast; and the Garden Bay restaurant

and bar. It was here that we had two splendid meals and to crown it all were entertained to Blues music by Harp Dog Brown, a big man with a big presence, a big voice, a mouth organ and an accompanying guitarist. We bought the CD.

Although it didn't seem particularly windy (we were in a sheltered inlet) and in spite of mutterings about the Irish Sea from us and the Solent from the members of Royal Thames and Royal Southern Yacht Clubs, we were firmly grounded in Garden Bay. While it was a charming place, after 3 days when we had walked as far as we could in all possible directions and generally got the T shirt and done the jigsaw, it was good to be on the move again in calmer weather.

Now was the chance for the two boats from Seattle Yacht Club who had recently joined the cruise to show their paces. In the ensuing race Marda sped ahead in her eponymously named Marda Gras, a Santa Cruz 52 "racing sled" built for the downhill Vic - Maui race. However the forecast strong winds arrived and after battling with the sails for an hour John decided to motor to our next destination, Secret Cove. In fact it was not quite as secret as some of the other places that we had visited. There were houses among the trees lining the bay but no facilities at the Royal Van pontoons.



The following day, 10th September dawned fair and sunny, perfect conditions for a race to Tugboat Island. This time deploying the jennaker didn't work. We were outdone by the bigger boats and to add insult to injury were presented with the lead fender at the customary evening get together/cocktail party. However all the crews enjoyed wandering around this small island where there are amazing rock formations and the beaches are filled with bleached driftwood.

The cause of the driftwood was very evident the next day, when, on the race to Alexandra Island we finished just in time to avoid our course being blocked by a log boom about 300metres long and nearly as wide. These booms are a real hazard in Canadian waters, not only when they are being towed but also quite commonly logs break away and if not spotted in time can cause substantial damage to yachts. Another, unexpected danger for UK mariners is the seaplanes which are an important means of transport for the islanders. These regularly take off and land in strips of water near settlements and while no doubt aero engines should give way to sail, it wouldn't seem to be a very good idea to get in their way.



Our last night was really magic. After arriving at Alexandra Island on a soldier's wind (any airman/soldier can do it) there was a short pause before preparations for the final dinner. Ingredients were delivered from the Royal Van Jericho clubhouse by power boat. Existing picnic tables were put together on the long landing stage just above the water and the resident barbecues lit. As darkness fell we ate, drank, talked and listened to speeches

from participating yacht clubs. Distant views of snowy peaks gave way to starry skies. Memories of the cruise were swapped and already we were missing it. There is now a Liverpool Yacht Club burgee in the Royal Van clubhouse.

The following day we had an easy journey back to Vancouver under motor but not before exploring our small island base, yet another RYVC outstation. This is where we found Howard's Head, the previously mentioned eco loo, dedicated to a former commodore.

As you see from the happily named heads, the Canadians enjoy puns and these are very evident in boat names. There was the usual crop of references to types of grape, Merlot, Merlott and Merleau but also an astonishing number of up front allusions to finance: Advantageous, Perpetuity, No Refunds, plus tender Refunded and even Crime Pays. Would the coastguard think so? We can only wonder but judging by an article in a Canadian equivalent of PBO, it's perhaps not the best choice. There were 12 boats on the cruise, two from Seattle Yacht Club, Marda Gras and Flying Eagle. The fortunately named Andagift and Enchanted were chartered by Royal Southern and Royal Thames Yacht Clubs.

The names of the straits and islands in the hoped for inner passage that ultimately defeated early navigators are more eclectic and more romantic. They refer to famous people: Agamemnon Sound, Hardy Island, others perhaps on one of the exploratory voyages: Jedediah Island, Dodd's Narrows, and the Native American people: Nanaimo. Newcastle Island was named for its coal. Secret and Telegraph Coves are self explanatory.

Would we cruise here again? You bet!