

Latitude 38

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VOLUME 383 May 2009

WE GO WHERE THE WIND BLOWS



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VOLUME 383

GUIDE TO



Is there anyone out there who's not feeling the pinch of the recession? We doubt it. And yes, many are feeling more than a pinch. We're reminded of the advice of Thomas Jefferson: "When you get to the end of your rope, tie a knot and hang on!"

Speaking of ropes and knots and hanging on, while the 'suits' rage from shore while the economy struggles to extricate itself from the tarpit — we submit that the best thing the rest of us can do is go sailing. Leave all your 'cares and woes' at the dock and think about nothing for a few hours but the song of the wind, the pull of the tiller, and the laughter of family and friends.

But even sailing requires decisions — an 'economy of scale', if you will — that rewards you for certain sailing choices and penalizes you for others. Since this is supposed to be a de-stressing exercise, we've made many of the choices for you — especially those of you new to sailing our local waters. In the next few pages, we've condensed several years'

worth of learning the hard way into one grand tour of the Bay done in style and comfort. We call it the The Perfect Day-sail, and it goes like this...

Start anywhere east of Alcatraz about 11 a.m., at which time the fog is beginning to burn off and a light breeze is filling in. You're going to be sailing counterclockwise around the Bay, so from Alcatraz, head around the backside of Angel Island and sail west up Raccoon Strait. (If there's a strong flood in the Strait, you may need to motor through this part.)

Once around Belvedere Point — you do have a chart aboard, right? — you can reach off toward Richardson Bay and the Sausalito waterfront. If you bear way off to hug the west shore of Belvedere, be careful not to stray past Cone Rock or you'll run aground. The Sausalito side of Richardson Bay is dotted with everything from floating trash to megayachts

The bailout for the automakers? Gajillions. The bailout for the banks? Bazillions. Going sailing and forgetting all about it for a while? Priceless.

and is worth a pass. Stay in the channel though, as the northeast side is shallow and the bottom is riddled with debris.

Sailing back out the Sausalito Channel, hug the shoreline and enjoy the Mediterranean look of southern Sausalito. Generally, the closer you stay to this shore, the flukier the wind — until you get to Hurricane Gulch. It's not marked on the charts, but you'll know when you're there.

Once you round the corner at Yellow Bluff, you'll have little Horseshoe Cove on your right and the magnificent Golden Gate in full view ahead. If the conditions are right (slack water or a moderate flood), you might want to slip under the most famous bridge in the world and enjoy the unspoiled scenery of the Marin Headlands. If you're on a small or slow boat, however, make sure you're not rocketing out on the start of an ebb or it will take you forever to get back in.

Now comes the best part: turn around. If everything has gone as planned, you've

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Chill Pill

Sailing on San Francisco Bay in the summer is not warm. We don't care if it's 100 degrees in San Rafael, it will always be cold on the Bay. So you need to dress for the occasion, but leave the Levis at home. The correct method is 'layering' with modern synthetics, which not only insulate better, but also wick moisture away from the skin. So go for undergarments of polypropylene, then polyester, and a top layer of quality foul weather gear (those made with Gore-Tex are best if you can afford them). Too warm? Remove a layer. Not warm enough? Add a layer — this isn't rocket science. As with most things, the more you spend on quality gear, the more comfortable and dry you will remain. We also strongly urge all boaters to wear flotation. If you fall in our cold local waters without a lifejacket, all the layering in the world won't keep you from going hypothermic quickly. And it's all downhill from there.

Flat Water Sailing

The main Bay offers great sailing, but you're going to get wet doing it. If you want some of the best flat-water, stay-dry (well, dryer, anyway) sailing of your life, head down the Oakland/Alameda Estuary. Again, it's best to beat to windward early in the day, then downwind sail back, perhaps stopping at one of the many waterfront restaurants that has a dock out front. Short of being kidnapped by the Swedish Bikini Team, there is simply no better way to rejuvenate your soul after a tough day at the office — even if it was the unemployment office.

Counterclockwise for Comfort

If your plan of the day calls for a grand tour of the Bay, always do it in a counterclockwise direction. It makes no difference if you start from the Estuary, Pier 39, Berkeley or Sausalito — and it's doubly applicable if you start in the afternoon rather than in the morning.

Sausalito

Richardson Bay

Golden Gate

Hurricane Gulch

Belvedere Point

Tiburon

San Francisco

Raccoon Strait

Strait

Alcatraz

Angel Island

THE SLOT

Bay Bridge

Clipper Cove

Yerba Buena

Treasure Island

Oakland Estuary

That's Easy for You to Say

"If you can sail in San Francisco," the saying goes, "you can sail anywhere in the world." While that may be a bit of a stretch, the reverse is certainly true: "You can sail anywhere in the world on San Francisco Bay." We're speaking figuratively, of course. Check it out:

Caribbean — Reaching back and forth behind the Tiburon Peninsula on a hot September afternoon feels an awful lot like the Caribbean.

Mediterranean — A few passes from Richardson Bay to Hurricane Gulch and back are just like the Med: There's either way too much wind or practically none, and it comes from all directions.

Roaring Forties — Sail out to the Farallones and back on one of those 40-knot days. Cape Horn will seem like a piece of cake.

South Pacific — Sail up to the Delta around July and you'll get a taste of what sailing the tradewinds is like. When the wind shuts off, you'll also get a good idea of what the South Pacific bugs and humidity are like.

BAY SAILING

Fogbound

One of the weather phenomena most associated with San Francisco is our famous fog. We once brought an out-of-towner to the Marin Headlands who was actually disappointed because he could see the Golden Gate.

A couple of things sailors should know about fog: 1) The classic Bay stuff comes through the Golden Gate and streams down the Slot toward Berkeley. It pretty much stays right there, so all you have to do to get out of it is sail perpendicular to the flow. 2) Even when the fog is in, you can sail most of the Bay in perfect visibility if you just avoid the Slot. In fact, one of the most spectacular sails you can ever make is in the early evening between sunny Sausalito and Angel Island as a thick carpet of fog streams over the Marin hills and through the Gate. A true Kodak moment.

Cruising

Whether you have a week or a weekend, there are plenty of cruising destinations in and around San Francisco Bay. For the weekenders: Angel Island, the Petaluma or Napa Rivers, or even across the Bay to the Oakland Estuary or Sausalito. For those with more time: the Delta, or perhaps out the Gate and south to Half Moon Bay, Santa Cruz or Monterey.

Richmond
Bridge

Red
Rock

The Delta



Dreams and Nightmares

Two scenarios: 1) You want to introduce the man/woman (circle one) of your dreams to sailing; or 2) Your incredibly irritating mother-in-law has been whining for a year because you've never taken her sailing. Here's the best way to deal with them both. For the boy/girlfriend, follow the advice under 'Counterclockwise for Comfort,' ending with a quiet anchorage behind Angel Island. Break out some crackers, cheese and a bottle of vintage Merlot and he/she will be putty in your hands.

Now for the mother-in-law. Leave Berkeley at 2 p.m. and head for the South Tower. Don't reef! Plan to be there at max ebb. Then reach back and forth across the Golden Gate until she begs for mercy. If that doesn't work, sail her out to the Potato Patch via scenic Point Bonita. When she feels the need to "call Ralph on the porcelain telephone" make sure she does so over the leeward side — just as you punch through another breaking wave.

If you're somewhere between these two extremes, say out for an afternoon with the boys from work, or your daughter and a few of her friends, just take things slow and easy. As soon as you perceive the slightest fear or hint of seasickness, crack off and head downwind to a less windy area.

One more thing: for any newcomers to the Bay, make it a point to sail under the Golden Gate. They'll remember it for a lifetime.

Richmond

Little/Big Boats

We hate to burst anyone's bubble, but in our opinion, boats under 20 feet are too small for sailing the open Bay. There are exceptions, of course, notably organized races sailed by properly attired small boat sailors where 'crash boats' hover nearby to help anyone who gets in trouble.

On the other end of the scale, San Francisco is a vibrant maritime port, and all manner of commercial shipping comes in and out at all hours. The main thing to remember is that big ships always have the right of way. If one of them gives you more than four blasts on its horn, it means, "I don't understand what you're doing and it's worrying me." It's probably time to tack and go the other way.

BAY SAILING GUIDE

gone as far to weather as you're going to. With the breeze approaching maximum strength midafternoon, there's no better time to start reaching and running.

Go ahead and cross over to the San Francisco side of the Bay. If you've sailed out under the Bridge, be sure to give the South Tower a wide berth on the way back in. Otherwise, the South Tower Demon may steal your wind, redouble it and throw it back at you, causing your boat to momentarily head straight for the tower's cement cofferdam. Whee-ha, we're having some fun now!

Once back inside the Bay, the wind machine will probably be in high gear and whitecaps will ruffle the Bay. But you won't care because you're sailing downwind at what should be close to hull speed. The proper etiquette is to wave and smile beatifically at the cold, wet sailors pounding upwind past you. And at the sailboarders and kiteboarders who, on weekends, will be whizzing by you. Don't worry, they won't hit you. At least not too often.

This part of The Perfect Daysail will afford you one of the great views of San Francisco, the place locals call "The City"

(never "Frisco" or "San Fran"). If any greenhorns aboard felt queasy earlier, now's the time to roust them out from their bunks below and tell them to enjoy the view. No one pukes downwind.

Want an interesting detour? Jibe out toward Alcatraz. The likes of Al Capone and Richard 'The Birdman' Stroud once gazed out from behind those forbidding walls. The prison closed in 1963. Now it's a popular tourist destination and occasional Hollywood movie locale.

Once you've checked out Alcatraz — no landings allowed for recreational boats — jibe back and head over to Pier 39. Follow the curve of the shoreline around toward the Bay Bridge. The wind will usually drop quickly, giving you an easy and relatively warm sail while you enjoy the world-class skyline along the Embarcadero.

From here on, you have several options. You can power reach across the Slot to the lee of Angel Island, where you can drop the hook for the afternoon or the whole evening and celebrate cheating death once again. Or you could slip around the backside of Yerba Buena and into Clipper Cove. If you're looking for a

warm and gentle downwind run, keep right on going down the Oakland Estuary — an especially good destination if you happen to keep your boat there.

As you might have surmised by now, the secret to the Perfect Daysail is to get as far to weather as you're going to go before the wind really starts honking. Most days, that's about 2 p.m., with max breeze around 4. Reef early and make sure your guests are dressed warmly — remember, terrorizing chilly people by sailing rail-down for long periods is the fastest way to become a singlehander.

If you (or they) didn't bring warm enough clothes, definitely head for the warmest place on the Bay: the northeast (lee) side of Angel Island.

If you're not quite up to The Perfect Daysail yet, practice on the lighter-air, flatter-water Richmond Riviera or behind Treasure Island/Yerba Buena.

Oh, and don't worry about missing too much ashore. We guarantee Cramer or some other talking head will still be bellowing about some dire circumstance no matter when you get back to the dock. You may even surprise yourself by turning him off rather than up.



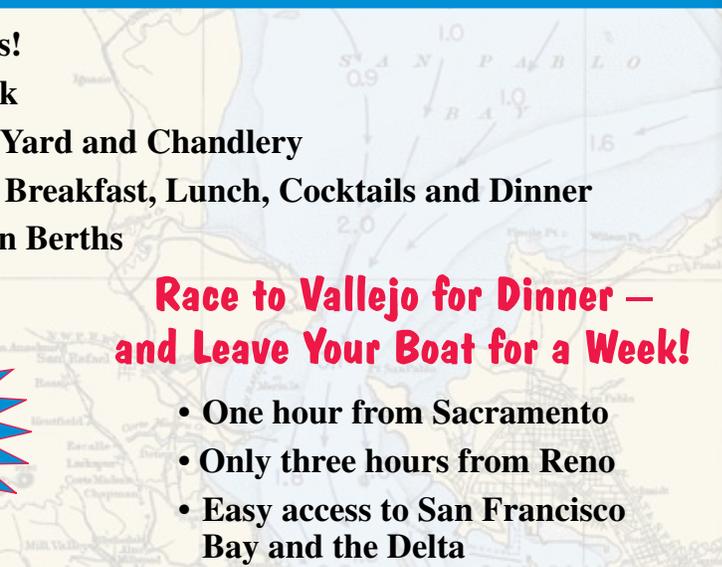
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