

North, to Alaska

Come along with Sevtec, and participate in an adventure.

North to Alaska

Lets see, now, John Carter, 225#, personal effects, #, Bryan Phillips, 201#, personal effects, 47#, Barry Palmer, 156#, personal effects, 19#. Now wait a minute! I could see that we were off to a baaad start.



Now I was not asking John or Bryan to go on instant diets, as both of them are somewhat around 5 inches taller than me, but what about

those personal effects! True, I had toured Europe carrying nothing more than a small "D" bag, washing things out in hotel basins along the way, and Bryan and I had backpacking experience, but 50 pounds of personal effects, that is a bit much.

But Bryan said something to the effect that the plans indicate we should have 1400 pounds of payload, and I said that was a working maximum and after all, we were going to Alaska.

Lets continue, fuel, 40 gallons, 240#, plus an extra five gallons in a can that could be carried, 30#. Our basic load now added up to 970 lbs!

And now, we must take care of the sev. Anchor chain and rode, 40#, Oil and filter change kit, 20#, tools, spare starter, 2 bearings, skirt repair kit, and personal flotation devices, so that if Explorer sinks they can find the bodies, 20#. Small boat Stuff, like two Garmin 38 GPS'es, flares, cellphone, flashlights, air horn, knife to cut anchor rode and bagels, dramamine, candy, cruising guide, 8#, two sets of rubber boots, 9# in case we have to walk back. Bear scare 12 gauge, 7#. Now we are really out there, 1074#.

"Bryyan, can't we just change the oil now?" This loadmaster was getting nervous, and was becoming a nag, but Bryan was the captain, and at least he did not suggest how we could easily get rid of 156#.

John brought a borrowed brand new \$7000 professional level video camera, along with a laptop computer, and another cellphone, plus still camera and other stuff, 57#, and some 25# of books were taken for reading material, charts (really, cruising guides), along with miscellaneous, 18#. You always take a miscellaneous on a trip.

Tummy time! A kitchen kit, 9#, stove and white gas 4#, and food. Lots of food! Too much

food!! 78# of food, including 48 cans of pop. "Bryyaan!". "But the plans say 1400# payload." "But you installed a totally weenie engine on your Explorer".

Bryan had installed a 1.4 liter Subaru instead of the called for 1.8 liter Subaru. However I can't blame him, as the price (free) and the condition (brand new) of the engine fit in well with his college student lifestyle. Adding another 15# for potable water, we would get going with 1267# plus whatever else Bryan and John smuggled past me.

Dave Crawford, who would be joining us in his Vanguard for the first part of the trip, had his Vanguard all neatly packed and was getting impatient, and I was getting impatient, as our expected launch date passed. We would try to launch early the next morning.

Originally, Surveyor was to go on the trip, but while Surveyor would cruise along with Explorer just fine in ideal conditions, it was clear that when there was a little roughness, a 20 footer beats a 15 footer like guns beat knives. Besides, Reed Manwill did not want anything to do with the Alaska trip, after enduring a two day trip in Puget Sound in Surveyor in rough conditions (not adventurous, maybe smart).

Bryan had done a beautiful job preparing Explorer for the trip, and even though it wasn't exactly designed for such a voyage as we were about to undertake, I had confidence in Bryan's Explorer, and the engine, which ran with all the commotion of an unloaded electric motor.

Dave added his chicken dinner for his return flight to the cooler aboard Explorer and we were finally away on our early start, everything packed away in plastic boxes and in side pouches in Explorer's hull. Just about everyone in boating knows you start early to avoid afternoon roughness. I think our early start was 3 pm into a headwind and quartering 1 foot minus seas.

We departed from the north end of the Swinomish Channel and cruised by the City of Anacortes, then out Guemes Channel, across Rosario Strait and out into the San Juan Islands. Pardon me if I do not gush eloquently at every turn in our route over the scenery, as I can assure you that this is the Pacific Northwest, and it is disgustingly scenic almost everywhere you look.

Dave and his well loaded 20hp Vanguard kept up quite well, and it was clear that Explorer, in spite of the weenie Subaru engine, was up to handling its load. The wind and waves abated as the waters became more protected and we cruised onwards through the heart of the San Juan Islands, then passing north of Spieden Island, across Haro Strait and on to Bedwell Harbor to clear Canadian customs.

I hopped from Explorer into the Vanguard with Dave and both craft headed out through the Canadian Gulf Islands, destination, Protection Island, near Nanaimo. We visited Lyle Wylie at an invitation Marilyn had given us at a recent Canadian hoverin. We tried to phone but both of them were out in their garden. Marilyn was able to cook us up a nice pasta dinner with no warning of our visit and we flew both sevs up onto shoreline next to their home to overnight.

Dave pitched his tent alongside his Vanguard. Bryan and John slept in the Wylie gazebo and I stretched out on the bench seat that is across the rear of the Explorer cabin.

{youtube}8UqcNxaponI{/youtube}

Next morning we set out in near perfect conditions, our destination was Sandy Island, where Wolf Rautenberg would meet us in his older model twin propeller Explorer. I spotted what I thought was Wolf's and Gloria's Explorer well off in the distance, where it had hauled out on a beach, but could not get Dave to head over, as he wanted to follow Bryan, and Bryan did not realise that he had whizzed right on past. I finally convinced Dave, and we headed off to a nice lunch that Gloria had prepared. Bryan figured it out, turned around and bee-lined for the hello's, and the food.

We then split up, Wolf and Gloria heading for home in Comox, Dave, heading back solo to Anacortes, and the three of us, running in perfect conditions, ran up Sutil Channel to Hoskyn Channel and Whiterock Passage on to Debbie and Don Waiatt, who run a [fishing guide service](#) on Stewart Island, in the Desolation Sound area. The country had taken on the character of steep evergreen covered rocky slopes that ran right into the water, with places to haul out onto dry land almost totally absent.

A pair of 28 foot'ish cruisers were off in the distance, opposite us in the narrowing channel and on a slowly convergent course. I did not pay much attention to them. I did notice, when they got closer, that Explorer was cruising a little faster. I looked at the tach. Bryan was being naughty. Bryan was racing. They would add throttle, Bryan would add throttle. They finally gave up and dropped well back, as Explorer entered Big Bay, home to the Waiatt's. Bryan is the captain. He gets to race. It is a good way to not get bumped by the wakes of others, also. (This sort of thing seems to happen all the time, when I am out cruising.)



The lower limbs of the evergreens were trimmed off precisely above the waterline, indicators of a high water limit and relative calmness of the waters in the area. The Waiatts place was one of those rare places where a sev could haul out, but since a little sledge hammer work would have to be done to a few sharp rocks, Bryan elected to tie the craft to a float. The Waiatts fed us a nice pasta dinner and John found out that his laptop floppy drive died. He could upload text, but computer patch cords were incompatible (wrong sex plug problem) with the Waiatt's computer so he could not upload images to his web site.

While John and Bryan bedded down in the Waiatt's house, I made myself comfortable in the

sev. I awoke early next morning and took a long walk on the haul roads and trails to the other side of the Island, to the accompaniment of the Waiatt's dog, which responded obediently to the name "dog".

The next morning we departed the Waiatts, after leaving about 40# of assorted stuff that we clearly did not need, and that was under foot. Upon taking on some drinking water, a little brownish in color, but potable, we were off for the wilder areas of our tour. There would be no more visits, there just aren't many people up there, for a long ways to come.

Mid-day saw deteriorating weather conditions, as we passed through Cordero Channel, on through Chancellor Channel, and Welbore Channel. Not wanting to take abuse in the upcoming Johnstone Strait, which was well known for its winds, which would funnel along the north slopes of Vancouver Island, we decided to haul out in a small bay with a beach, called Forward Harbor.

Not only was our food supply still intact, except for a few cans of pop, we discovered we had taken on food, as Dave was returning to Anacortes without his chicken dinner. (That chicken was tasty, Dave.)

Other cruisers were escaping the conditions and were anchoring in the bay, some of them probably wondering about the strange machine that was obviously stranded on the beach on an outgoing tide. We could stretch our legs wandering along the beach and crossing an isthmus to walk a longer, but rocky Beach at an adjacent inlet. Around the same time Dave, far to the south, was thrashing his way through seas up to 3 feet and almost running out of fuel, completing his solo return trip to Anacortes.

All three of us slept in the sev, this time, in spite of its nose up attitude of about one in six. There was a worry of the tide coming in and getting into the engine exhaust before floating the sev, but while one should be wary of such problems, and be prepared to take action, the aft of the sev floated before any exhaust pipe flooding could take place. Bryan and John stretched out side by side up forward while I stayed on the back seat, with a wall of piled stuff separating me from the forward cabin and threatening to collapse on me should the incoming tide bounce the sev.

{youtube}SvWhBkPjwSA{/youtube}

The next morning was calm, and we were off to the north, but first we had to go west by continuing on Cordero Channel, and through to Johnstone Strait via Chancellor Channel. Spending as little time in Johnstone straight as practical, we then backtracked via Havannah Channel, and northwest through Chatham Channel. We blasted right by our intended fuel stop on Minstrel Island, which was partially hidden in a small bay, and then backtracked to pick up fuel and more brown water at this ramshackle assortment of old barges, log rafts, and mobile homes, as this was the only civilization for many, many miles around.

We then headed westerly out Knight Inlet, where I took a snooze, to awake to find Bryan and John picking their way northwesterly along Queen Charlotte Sound in a low overcast. I think

the overcast was at about ten feet. One of those radar things would sure be nice.

The vegetation was no longer neatly trimmed off at high water. We had reached big water country. The fog let up and After getting lost for a short time in a disorganized mess of small islands, we entered Schooner Channel to get out of the big water, which had roughened up a bit. We headed for Nakwakto Rapids, noted for being the fastest in the Pacific Northwest, at a 24Kt maximum, but since it was neap tide time there would be no show, so we just cruised on by.

We headed back for big water, in Slingsby Channel only to discover Mother Nature had closed the door. The combination of an ebbing tide colliding with ocean swells had created a well organized train large breaking waves, so we turned back to moor to a log raft in well protected Treadwell bay, misnamed in that its near vertical sides did not exactly allow any place to tread.

We visited a recreational scuba diving operation, a set of cabins on floats, in the bay, the back country camp of Seymour Inlet Lodge, to gain some local knowledge of the situation, and they assured us that it was like that most of the time, but we should try going out into the flood tide, so that the waves would be less.

The next morning, I awoke to some grumbling up front about water drip torture or something to that effect. It seems that the heavy morning dew had made its presence known and John and Bryan were trying to figure out from just where it was getting them and their sleeping accommodations.

Vhf radio weather was reporting 1M seas on 2M swells outside in our area so since we had little to do we went out again. We entered the outer narrows in neat 1/2 M swells and they built as we progressed outside.

From my back seat position, with John riding alongside, we could see Bryan go up, then go into near freefall, and the sev would let out a loud "thwhap", and his seat would bend ominously, and Bryan would go up, then go into near freefall, and the sev would let out a loud "thwhap" and his seat would bend ominously, and Bryan would go up, and Bryan would go into near freefall, and his seat would bend ominously. One particularly large sea, perhaps 3M high, fortunately not breaking, made Bryan open to suggestions. I immediately offered one, a new course, like 180 degrees from where we were going, and he accepted the suggestion immediately.

I tried to image the huge wave, but as I was unused to the shutter release all I got was a clear image of the sev's floor, as the sev went "thwhap". Bryan was seated on a bench seat I had given him. The seat was used in one of my old sevs 15 years ago. I had two of these seats, then. I would have given Bryan both of the seats except I had broken the other one in half doing just what Bryan was doing.

Next morning, third try. Once outside, this time we could hardly see where we were going through fogged up windows, mist and rain, and Bryan would go . . . , well you know how it

goes. This time Bryan called for the bucket and relinquished the helm. That is why serious rough water boaters helm their craft from the aft, even though they sometimes cannot see where they are going. Another 180 degree course correction was in order.

I noticed a sailboat mast outside the channel as we were about to re-enter the channel. Some time after we had tied up to the float, the sailboat pulled into the anchorage to escape the rough water. John hopped into a leaky old canoe that was on the float and paddled over to the sailboat. Amy and Tim Whelan and their 32 foot cutter were headed to the same destination we had been trying for. They ought to know where they were going, as they worked in [moving map GPS navigation software](#). We were trying to get around Cape Caution, one of two areas that was exposed to the full fetch of the Pacific Ocean.

We would call Amy and Tim on the VHF radio next morning as they would leave early, around 4 or 5, to motor at perhaps 6 knots and should be well out and around Cape Caution by the time we wake up so we would know what conditions were like. It was really unnecessary, as they would be in the vicinity of Egg island, which is a principal VHF weather reporting site, by the time we would be getting up, but fun, anyhow.

We contacted Amy and Tim and received good news, seas of 1M or so, and departed about 11AM or so, nothing like keeping banker's hours. After all I had to listen to more complaining about water drip torture. I never let on that I was absolutely dry and comfy in the back of the sev.

We entered Queen Charlotte Sound, heading 1M plus seas at an inspiring 4 knots, and fell off to quarter the seas at maybe 6 knots, so being on a cushion of air was not a guarantee of haste. As we went around the corner the seas came at our beam, and were smaller as we were now beginning to hide from the Pacific fetch, behind a stretch of shoal water and Calvert Island.

Speeds came back to normal, around 20 knots, about half power, which was our average speed for the trip, pretty good since we were essentially going "uphill", against prevailing weather, burning around 2.2 gallons per hour. With a maximum fuel load of 45 gallons, that gives us a fuel range of 400 nautical miles at fuel exhaustion, an incredible range for so small a craft as Explorer.

We then passed into Fitzhugh Sound where we caught up with Amy and Tim, as they were putting sail on.

It was then on to our destination, Bella Bella, via Fisher Channel, Lama Pass and Hunter Channel, where we refuelled and tied up at the Shearwater floats, with hot showers. Amy and Tim came in at dusk, proving that you can make long passages at low speed.

It was surprising how few watercraft were out there. Most recreational watercraft disappear after Nanaimo, to be replaced by infrequent fish boats and other commercial craft. It is normal to cruise for long periods with no other watercraft in sight. In Bella Bella we encountered the first of the huge cruise ships. seeming alien in this rustic environment.

I woke up early and had a good long hike over the roads in back of the Shearwater resort and we then set out for our next destination, Prince Rupert, via Seaforth, Finlayson, Tolmie Channel, Frasier Reach, McKay Reach, and on through Grenville Channel, where we ran above 30 knots for almost the entire length of the relatively narrow channel. We did make a short side trip in a light drizzle to Bristol Bay Hot Springs, a base for tourists to touch, so they can talk about it, not quite hot enough, and causing one to seriously consider possible high coliform bacteria levels. Here there were several recreational cruisers arranged at a float around a big fish boat, their decks decorated with bright red range extenders, plastic fuel cans.

Both GPS units, which hinted at malfunctioning earlier, were now almost totally useless. Whether this was due to poor satellite geometry (not enough satellites with sufficient orbital inclinations, or high terrain, I do not know.)

After getting lost behind Smith and Ridley Islands we made a 10PM arrival to tie up at a Prince Rupert yacht club. This was our longest leg, over 200 nautical miles, and the first time we had seen some "hover-friendly" terrain since our departure from Treadwell Bay. The cell phone started working. Civilization!

After a morning delay, trying to stop the water drip torture by smearing the entire windshield frame with some sticky black stuff we set out for Ketchikan. The route took us up Chatham Sound, through Main Passage and on across Dixon Entrance, which is another section of the inland passage that is exposed to the Pacific Ocean.

I got a call on the cellphone, just as we passed into Alaska. I told the customer where we were. He just wanted to know why he hadn't got his Vanguard parts.

We rounded the south end of the mainland of Alaska, with its beautiful pinkish shell beaches intermingled with rocky headlands, right into a gauntlet of fish boats. There would be a gillnetter at right angles and next to the shore every few hundred yards, and a seiner just west of the gillnetter, to snare any south-streaming escapee salmon just before it could change its citizenship. Bryan ran over one of the nets, getting the fisher real excited and agitated.

And then it was up Revillagigedo channel in perfect weather, and on to our goal, Ketchikan, all 700 plus nautical miles. Originally it was planned to go no further, and make the "downhill run" back from this point. However, Bryan had an opportunity to cruise on northward to demonstrate the Explorer to interests in Juneau. I left the party here to get back to business and return by Alaska State ferry, while Bryan and John continued on up north.

All in all, the Explorer performed flawlessly from the surface skimmer standpoint, and no repairs needed, and the weeine 1.4 L Subaru was still running like an electric motor. Problems were still being encountered with weatherproofness



of the top and windscreen, though. Bryan's Explorer was built from the very first set of Explorer plans, and the "prototype" was in the mind of a computer, just numbers, only.



No "dialing in" of rotors or drive ratios was ever needed. Balance was all right, perhaps just slightly nose heavy. (The only changes since made to the original plans were rudder area has been added, and the skirt fill port increased in size, and another band was added to the thrust drive belt, as the standard engine was changed to the Subaru EA82 1.8 L design. This is a current engine, and the older engines are becoming hard to come by. 80hp vs. 55hp for Bryan's Explorer.)

Bryan would add another 500 plus nautical miles to the cruise, on to Petersburg, Wrangell, and Juneau, and he had time to explore up a river, and go into floating ice, watch bears, and lick a glacier. I will let him write that part.

Bryan and John and the Explorer would return on an Alaska State ferry, and after demonstrating his Explorer at the Pacific Northwest Hoverin he would immediately put the Explorer to work, hauling tourists on rides out of the south end of La Conner through the end of the summer to places such as Deception Pass, the Skagit River Delta and up the Skagit River. (We will look for him at this same location next summer, but he is available for charter any time.)

All in all, even though the terrain was almost devoid of places where a sev could haul out, the sev concept is realistic for long range cruising from the economy standpoint alone. There is undoubtedly more cruising in places where only the sev can go on the surface, but our trip was mainly in the deeper channels of a half submerged mountain chain. It was nice, though, to go using only cruising guides, rather than charts. However, to do the trip in comfort, you really need a bigger sev, maybe a 25-30 footer.



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