

In the wake of the 'Witch'

1982 Jo Bailey, Skipper of the Sea Witch



rain squalls. Visibility, lowering to 1/2 miles. Special gale warnings are now whole knots gusting to 55 southeast. Westerly squalls estimated at 20 feet. I said to me and said, the wind had picked

up a little." I shifted my VHF receiver back to channel 16 after receiving the weather report. Here it was again—a special gale warning. We looked around. Not a troller in sight—and they were tough sailors, fishing in 30-35 knots of wind every day. Our engine

was sick. We were 10 miles off the lee shore and beyond the point of no return. Even from our position we could see the heavy swell smash against the rocks, shooting geysers of water 50 to 60 feet in the air, like the white fangs of a pack of dogs. I thought to myself, now they tell us.

The reason we had departed our anchorage in Experiment Bight just to the east of Cape Scott was because the wind had eased to 30 knots overnight, and that was the best weather we had had for three days. Our destination, and only protected harbor, was 30 miles to the Southeast. We decided to carry on and let Mariana handle the problem. She did so; beautifully, just as her designer had intended.

We had left Nanaimo May 26 after a rendezvous with San Juan Island friends at Newcastle Island. With no wind and a fair current we made the passage through Seymour Narrows the next afternoon. Some wind and sun made the passage through Johnstone Strait very pleasant. A mile past Kelsey Bay, while under power, I smelled steam. A quick shut-down and a look below showed a broken pulley on the saltwater circulating pump. With a bit of wind fortunately coming on, we made sail.

There is not much in this section of Johnstone Strait, so we proceeded to Alert Bay, 40 miles to the West. We raised Alert Bay the morning of May 29, where a foul current and no wind forced us to accept a tow the last half-mile. Three hours later, with a new pulley installed and a full belly of fuel, we departed for Port Hardy, where we moored.

The next afternoon we were at the Coast Guard float in Bull Harbor and filed a float plan. I got the distinct impression that the crew of their cutter pre-

signals about 25 knots of wind. By daylight the wind was about 30 and increasing, and soon the trees which formed our anchorage range began to move. Dragging! We heaved up and reanchored closer inshore in only three fathoms of water but with 40 fathoms of chain. We were holding now, and with a moderating wind, we rubber-rafterd ashore. What a sight: white sand, flat beaches, interspersed with rock islands topped with bonsai'd firs. Wild strawberries growing among the moss and grasses, truly a skookum Japanese garden.

(The Hoepfner's hiked to the Cape Scott Light for afternoon tea with the lighthousekeepers Don and Linda Wheeden.)

Winds were down the next morning to Force 5 so we got underway to double Cape Scott. The cape is so imposing: the stories about the gale winds and mountainous swells that slam against it constantly, the treacherous tide rips, the offshore rocks that have given it the name "Graveyard of the Pacific"—it was with a great deal of relief that we watched the light station drop astern as we headed down the west coast. A rapidly dropping wind and 30 miles to go to the next harbor indicated that we should start motor sailing.

A short time later, Peg at the helm called out that the engine didn't seem to be in gear. My short reply was, "Well, push the gear shift lever forward." A moment later the same comment from Peg. I looked over the stern—no thrust in the water! I dove below. All looked okay until I checked the oil level in the hydraulic transmission. No oil. Okay, add a quart and off we go. A half-hour later, same problem, and we headed back to Experiment Bight while we still could make an anchorage.

Back in the bight after our thwarted attempt to double Cape Scott, a careful check of the transmission showed no apparent damage other than a low transmission fluid condition, so I refilled the gear with fluid again, and we took off the next day.

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and Peg Hoepfner



3 The wind piped up to about 30 knots as we left the lee of Cape Scott, so we tied in the first reef in the main. Three hours later we tied in the second reef and about then the VHF started to crackle with a whole gale warning: southeast winds of 50 to 55 knots. I tried the engine several times and could now see oil droplets spitting out of the exhaust—a ruptured transmission oil cooler. We were committed now, so all we could do was to check our safety harnesses and see what kind of a sailboat we had. Tacking offshore to gain searoom, it became apparent that we could not make Winter Harbor before dark, and with wind and sea continuing to rise, it seemed prudent to seek some sort of shelter. San Josef Bay provided some wind protection, but the swell curled around us giving us an uncomfortable anchorage for the two days we holed up.

1

Well, obviously, the Hoepfner's story is going to have to be continued into another column, so next week we'll go on with it.