

Vancouver Island circumnavigation: April 28/1999

'Another day another problem'

**Hoeppners survive
'Shake-down' cruise;
log more adventures**

By Angelina Di Fazio

Peg and Fred Hoeppner's house is a magnet for boaters seeking advice about all things nautical, and both are willing to share their knowledge with eager students. Fred spent all winter dismantling his vessel and putting her back together, so his skills as a boat builder are often called upon too.

Thankfully, they dropped tools long enough to talk about their circumnavigation of Vancouver Island in Mariana, a CT-41 foot Ketch. The month-long adventure launched their sailing/cruising life — a "shake-down" cruise in all respects that nearly scuppered their enthusiasm. As Peg puts it, "Fred thought he could put up sails and that was it. He knows better now."

Perhaps Fred's experience commanding a destroyer during WWII did not prepare him for the petty nuances of sailing. Without a full crew to keep a vessel in order, Fred became commander, navigator "skivvie" and boiler room mechanic. Both admit that hardly a day went by without something going wrong.

Although Fred continued working on the boat until the very last minute, they finally set off from their private dock in Mitchell Bay, motoring all day to their first destination. Planning a counterclockwise circumnavigation, they headed for Newcastle Island near Nanimo, considered the jumping off place to cross the Strait of Georgia.

They were heading up Johnstone Strait, between the mainland and Vancouver Island, when the first problem struck. The water pump broke, so they fell back on sail power to reach harbor. Soon Peg found herself alone at the helm, sailing the boat in rough weather while Fred disappeared into the engine room trying to make a repair. Feeling very much alone, she couldn't wait for him to take over the helm. After more adventures, they were finally towed into Alert Bay.



**Fred Hoeppner aboard his
CT-41 foot ketch at
Snug Harbor.**

submitted photo

they headed out in gale winds to make a run for it. They just rounded the cape when Fred noticed his transmission fluid was low, so they had to turn back.

At the next weather update the now familiar voice reported: "For the north coast of Vancouver Island — storm warning. Strong winds, 30 knots-plus are expected by late afternoon and will increase by tomorrow morning. And yet another of an unending series of southeast storms is on its way." This led them to stay ashore, enjoying a delightful four-hour lunch.

The following day, with winds down to force five, they got underway for Winter Harbor, doubling Cape Scott for the second time. As they sailed southward, the wind began increasing, so they doused the mainsail and proceeded under jib and mizzen. They fought force eight winds (34-40 knots) and increasing, all the way to San Josef Bay, and despite a challenging day in heavy seas, Peg sat up all night to make sure they didn't drag anchor. "It was an uncomfortable and harrowing night," she said.

below decks.

The next day the hunt was on again for help and parts to make repairs. And so went their journey — eight knots forward — another "shake down" problem — and 10 knots back. Looking at the chart one bleary morning, Peg noted: "It took us 12 days to travel 11 miles from Port Hardy."

After lots more adventures in the open sea, they completed their last leg from Barclay Sound to Victoria, arriving just in time for the annual lamb barbecue. After spending the night, it was back to home port, their own sheltered dock in Mitchell Bay.

By the end of their 1,000-mile-plus circumnavigation, the Hoeppners knew they would be sharing many more cruising adventures. And sure enough, they travel any time they get the chance. They have cruised to Skagway, Alaska, twice, sailed the Queen Charlotte Islands and traveled the Columbia River. Now they are planning to fill in the gaps of places they've missed.

Peg is standing at the window looking at Mariana, tied to the end of their dock. Sunny skies and a gentle breeze are calling