

Circumnavigating Vancouver Island

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In the wake of the 'Witch'

Jo Bailey, Skipper of the Sea Witch



This is the second installment of Fred and Peg Hoepfner's circumnavigation of Vancouver Island in 1981 aboard their ketch Mariana.

The Hoepfners stayed two days in San Jose Bay then sailed the 20 miles to Winter Harbor in Quatsino Sound. A roller then towed them the next 25 miles to Coal Harbor where a local resident offered replacement for their oil cooler which had ceased to function several days earlier in 10 to 55 knot winds shortly after rounding Cape Scott.

But their problems weren't over. The next morning, after running under power for about an hour, Fred noticed the prop wasn't turning.

"What's the matter now, Fred?" asked Peg, with her inevitable question. And they sailed back to Coal Harbor for help. Diagnosis there was that the drive plate had disintegrated. The plate looks like an automotive clutch plate and functions as a vibration dampener between the diesel engine and the transmission. A new one was found in Vancouver and two days later a young mechanic and Fred installed a repaired transmission.

"Those of you who have worked in the bilges of a boat understand the frustrations, blood, sweat, and yes, almost tears that it took to bolt up a

was doused as we doubled the cape, and then bore off a bit for Nasparti Inlet in Checleset Bay, logging seven knots under jib and mizzen. Just as we anchored in a little bight Peg spotted her first black bear next to us on the beach.

"Our next destination was Kyuquot Sound and the course lay through a real rock patch. The Canadian Sailing Directions offered less than complete confidence by remarking that most of the rocks would show as breakers. With little or no wind next morning we motored forth with the mizzen to act as a steadying sail in the heavy swell.

"With only about three more miles to go through the rock patch, Peg stuck her head up the companionway and said, 'I smell steam' and of course asked, 'What's the matter now, Fred?' A glance at the gauge confirmed. I chopped the engine immediately and ran forward to hoist sail while Peg took the helm and sheets. The mizzen kept us luffing until the sails were trimmed to catch the breeze which just came up, and just in time to claw our way from rocks that were spouting geysers 50 feet into the air from surf. I didn't know if the anchor would hold in that, but I readied it anyway."

The Hoepfners finally found an anchorage and Fred dia-

Mariana spent some time cruising Kyuquot Sound, which the Hoepfners described as similar to the San Juans. Several days later they entered Nootka Sound for more exploring and then a pulse-racing sail around Estavan Point into Hesquiat.

"It was really no surprise to us that as soon as we cleared the protection of Nootka Sound the barometer began to fall, the swell started to build, the

wind came in from southeast and the rain fell. Halfway to Estevan Point we tucked in the first reef; an hour later the second reef. Breakers were showing two miles off shore in the now Force 7 wind—a moderate gale. As darkness fell, the rain pelted so hard it knocked down the white caps. The powerful 18-mile light off Estevan Point, 125-foot high, could only be seen occasionally five miles offshore. Finally, with a bit of help from the engine, the light began to drift aft and we were able to bear off a little for the reach into Hesquiat and Boat Basin. After the nine-knot sail around several breaking shoals to our anchorage, Peg, serving up a ration of neat rum, noticed little concentric ripples on the surface of the liquid in my cup. 'What's the matter now, Fred?' she asked. 'Oh, nothing,' I replied. 'It must be a little motion by the wind.'"

arrived we found perhaps three or four persons of both sexes, some covered, some not enjoying a hot soak.

"The drill seemed to be to select a pool of desired temperature, smile, slip in and uncork your bottle of wine. If after a bit, another pool appears more attractive either because of temperature or otherwise, one could shift and meet new companions. I was, however, under some constraint to stay where I was."

The Hoepfners ran into one more storm and fog before the end of the trip, but by then were so used to it, they weren't phased.

"Forty great days out of Mitchell Bay. A tremendous experience. Beautiful country. We are agreed however, that the most lasting memories will be of the wonderful people we met enroute.

"I sat silently looking out our window.

"'What's the matter now, Fred?' Peg asked.

"'Let's go again,' I said."



Fred and Peg Hoepfner and their sailing vessel Mariana