

Salute to Thor for fair winds, calm seas



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Columnist

As Mariana, in company with Liberty and Fragile Habitat, doubled Limestone Point en route Mitchell Bay to Friday Harbor on New Year's Day, it appeared as though Thor had hit us with Mjollnir, his short handled hammer.

Force 4-5 wind and near maximum ebb current created short seas that pitched our bows clear of the water only to fall into the next

wave tossing heavy spray the length of our crafts. And, to what avail? To participate in the local annual custom of "Saluting the Compass."

In the late '60s, the Bentzen brothers, John and Arne, owned and operated a boat-building and repair yard at Silva Bay, B.C. Rather than sit at home watching football games on New Year's Day they

organized tugboat races. Later, after they moved their business to Maple Bay, the tug boat races changed to the Danish custom of Salute the Compass, thus invoking Thor, god of thunder and protector of mankind to grant them "Fair Winds and Calm Seas" for the new year.

So at precisely the appointed hour of 12 noon, 16 local boats braved the

elements on a compass heading of North and their crews raised a glass to Thor. Then all turned to East and repeated the toast; then South followed by West. An informal parade of boats to Shipyard Marina and a smorgasbord hoisted by the Bentzens completed the traditional salute.

"Fair Winds and Calm Seas" ... I wish the same to you in the coming year.

— *Fred Hoepfner is a retired Navy captain and a competitive sailor living on San Juan Island.*