



CANADIAN WAYFARER ASSOCIATION

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LOG GROUP: Western Canada

LOG TITLE: Across Georgia Strait Single Handed

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DATE: not recorded

## **ACROSS GEORGIA STRAIT SINGLE-HANDED**

The moment had finally arrived and I couldn't put it off any longer, I had prepared as well as I could and had run out of excuses to prolong my stay in Vancouver. The boat was launched and ready to go. I stood in knee-deep water ready to jump aboard; Chris Blencowe had been down to wish me bon voyage at 0900, my proposed departure time. He was there but I wasn't. I was still thinking up excuses why tomorrow would be a better day to go.

But at 1100, with assistance and encouragement from my brother Pat, I jumped aboard and headed across English Bay, And of course, once afloat and underway, the doubts evaporated. I set course for Point Atkinson, bearing 320 T and about 4 miles away. That first hour I spent dodging other marine traffic - yachts, tugs with barges, and freighters. By the time I reached Pt. Atkinson the traffic had thinned out and the wind had fallen light and variable. I amused myself by trying to out sail a couple of 30 footers, which I did - just. Flushed with success, I looked about for more worthy competition. I took on a 45 footer but he got the better of me - just. After that duel I changed course to 270 T to clear Cowen Point on the southeast corner of Bowen Island, 4 miles away across Queen Charlotte Channel.

Across the mouth of Howe Sound just southwest of Passage Island is an area where the elements conspire to deposit logs and other debris. This flotsam never seems to escape once trapped and creates a continual hazard. I threaded my way through cautiously, trying to avoid hull damage.

About three quarters of the way across Queen Charlotte Channel another hazard comes to the fore - the B.C. Ferries. The ones which travel between Horseshoe Bay in Howe Sound and Departure Bay on Vancouver Island have to pass around the southeast end of Bowen Island. The B.C. Ferry Authority has very obligingly arranged its summer sailing schedule so that the ferry from Vancouver Island passes the one from Horseshoe Bay off Bowen Island, which is where I now was.

These monsters travel at 20 knots and don't much appreciate small pleasure craft getting in their way. I was very aware of this as only the day before, on my shakedown to Bowen Island, I had forced one of them to alter course to avoid me. Today I was lucky enough to reach Bowen Island without even sighting a ferry.

The wind had died away almost completely now and the sea was like a mirror. A breeze I could just feel was propelling the boat along silently at about 1 knot. I tacked along the south shore of Bowen Island for about 2 hours, gaining 4 miles in the direction I wanted to go.

Visibility was crystal clear and under the clear skies and bright sunlight, the islands in Howe Sound seemed much closer than they were, I ghosted past a large power yacht with a fishing party on board and someone took a photo of me. Why I don't know, At 1500 I headed across the western mouth of Howe Sound, bearing 310 T.

The silence was finally fractured by the sound of the Coast Guard hovercraft as it approached from its base south of Vancouver. It spent about 15 minutes looking for its objective and after 3 wrong guesses, finally approached a ketch wallowing in the swell just south of me. It must have been what they were looking for because the hovercraft cut its engine and the silence returned. The apron on which the hovercraft 'floats' deflated and the machine settled onto the surface. For some reason I expected it to keep on going until it settled on the bottom of Georgia Strait. But it defied my logic and stayed on top. A Coast Guard cutter was now making toward the ketch while someone from the hovercraft went aboard. I couldn't see what was going on and in the end the yacht was towed to Gibsons by the cutter and the hovercraft made its noisy way back to its base.

By this time the wind had died completely and I got out the oars. Two of the unanswered questions I had about single-handing were: making the boat self steer and rowing for long periods without relief. I managed to solve both problems at the same time, at least temporarily. For self-steering in light airs I trimmed the sails, wrapped the sheet around the end of the tiller, led it down and through the toe rail, and back to the tiller. As for rowing, I found it easier and more enjoyable than I had expected. And a good thing, too. Of the 4.5 miles from Gower Point, at the northwest side of Howe Sound, to Roberts Creek, where I spent the night, I must have rowed about 3 of them. It took 3 1/2 hours to cover that distance and I was ready for a good night's sleep when I arrived at 2130.

I anchored south of Roberts Creek jetty and was too tired to even go ashore. I slept the night under the mainsail, as the boom tent I'd been making wasn't ready yet. I spent a restless night partly because it was my very first one sleeping in the boat and partly the passing tug and barge traffic set up a continual swell into the bay, which made it uncomfortable.

The following morning a powerboat heading north at 0500 made more than sufficient noise to wake me, so I got up. The sun still hadn't come up over 4000-foot Mt. Elphinstone and a chilling breeze was blowing from the shore. It was better than any wind I'd had the day before so I got organized and weighed anchor at 0530. I set course for Mary Island, 11 miles to the west-northwest.

When underway, I put my boat on autopilot and had breakfast in the warmth of the now rising sun. The only other traffic at this hour was a tug pulling a series of log booms from Sechelt to the Fraser River.

The wind died away at 0700 off white Islets so I got the oars out. I did this 3 or 4 times between White Islets and Mary Island. Each time I got the oars out, and before I'd done half a dozen strokes, the wind would come up and save me the trouble of rowing. I think I'm on to something here. In future, in light going, I'll leave the oars out, ready to go.

Winds remained light past Sechelt and on to Mary Island, but finally filled in at 0900 from the southeast. I changed course to 260 T, which would take me to the eastern end of Lasqueti and Sangster Islands.

It also took me through a military practice range where, the week before submarines had been practicing the firing of torpedos. I hoped they took weekends off and that there weren't any trigger-happy, target-seeking submariners lurking under the waves.

The sea soon built up under the influence of the 15 knot breeze and whitecaps dotted the Strait. As I was broad reaching I tried to get the boat to plane on the waves. I was so engrossed in trying to surf that Sangster Island was off my bow much sooner than expected. I later calculated that I had covered the 12 mile distance in just under 2 hours.

Any qualms I had about the boat's ability or, more importantly, my own, were finally quelled on this stretch across the strait, I had always expected it to be the most difficult leg but found I could relax a bit and enjoy the experience.

I could make out Parksville on Vancouver Island 6 miles away and changed course to 225 T, after taking bearings on Sangster, Ballenas, and Lasqueti Islands, This would take me to the main Parksville beach where I'd spent many summer holidays in my youth. Because I thought I was familiar with the beach area, I relaxed my vigilance and it almost proved embarrassing. I mistook one building for another and headed, not for the broad sand beach, but for a rock-strewn river at the beach's left end.

I was busy getting things shipshape for my triumphant landing when I happened to glance over the side. I did not like what I saw. The rocks were no more than 6 feet under water and looked all too capable of punching holes in my Wayfarer. I immediately tried to come about but the boat wouldn't tack. After a few seconds panic I realized that I'd raised the centreboard for the beaching. I quickly pushed it down and this time the boat responded.

After that little episode I decided to bear away and head for my final destination, French Creek, while I still had a boat to do it with. The final 2 miles went without incident and on a dying breeze. I anchored in the unnamed bay south of French Creek marina.

I sat there for a moment and reflected on the crossing and was pleased with my 52 mile journey. I hadn't quite made it yet, though. After 26 hours in my Wayfarer, I had trouble when I jumped out and tried to walk up the beach, falling flat on my face. Now I had arrived.





