

CRUISING THE CHESAPEAKE

By John B. Schurr, N.

During the summer of 1980 my wife, Joan, my son, Tom, and I, spent three weeks plus the 4th of July weekend cruising the many rivers, creeks, narrows, bays, and other waterways of the Chesapeake Bay and its environs. Our boat, the JOANNE'S GIRL II, an Albin 36' Trawler, covered over 1000 miles during the cruise without a mishap until the next to last day when she ended up in the slings of a marine lift in Brielle, New Jersey, just ~~outside~~ ^{inside} Manasquan Inlet. A plate on the aft end of the skeg holding the propellor shaft threw a couple of bolts and was turning with the propeller. Of course, the only support for the shaft was the engine flanges. I'm very thankful it didn't happen earlier in the trip. Following is a capsule synopsis of the trip:

3 July - We left our house after work and cruised to Short Beach, near Jones Inlet so we could get an early start next morning, for the first days' run through the Atlantic Ocean.

4 July - There is no inlet north of Manasquan Inlet connecting with the Intercoastal Waterway so we entered Manasquan ^{Inlet} for lunch. Since it was still early in the day we proceeded through Point Pleasant Canal to Tom's River, N.J., where we stayed at Cedar Mar Marina. We telephoned some friends and had a few drinks while watching fire-works from the flybridge. The trip through the Point Pleasant Canal can be very fast since the current is very swift. There is a bridge at the north end of the canal, which must open for all but the smallest of boats, and it is well to lay back a good distance from the bridge or you could be pushed into it by the swift current.

5 July - We continued south on the Intercoastal Waterway and picked up a dense fog south of Barnegat Inlet. Because of its infamous reputation for shifting shoals, narrow channels, missing buoys and shoal water, we did not venture through Barnegat Inlet. At Beach Haven Inlet, we picked our way through the fog and as the waves began to build, we knew we were passing the mouth of the Inlet. As we continued westerly through Little Egg Inlet (which is contiguous to Beach Haven Inlet), the fog lifted and was replaced by "man eating" flies. We made it to Atlantic City and found space at the Senator Frank Farley State Marina, a large well-kept facility, but with many seasonal ships.

6 July - Not wanting to wait for bridges to open (there are several south of Atlantic City on the Intercoastal) and since the weather report was good, we cruised out of Atlantic City through Absecon Inlet into the ^{Atlantic} Ocean and headed south. Absecon is probably the largest and safest inlet along the entire New Jersey coast. As we approached Cape May Inlet, we witnessed a combined air-sea rescue when a small sailboat capsized. It was impossible to see the boat in the water or its occupants and we were wondering what the helicopter was

doing until the USCG boat came sailing across the water. At Cape May, NJ, we stayed at the Cape Island Marina West, which is within walking distance of The Lobster House, a very good restaurant.

7 July - We traveled through the Cape May Canal, which is wide and deep with little current, into Delaware Bay. Since the seas were calm, we took the direct route across the "flats". There is plenty of water and you avoid the large commercial ships in the main channel. There is an interesting phenomenon as you proceed along the Delaware River near Salem, NJ, your compass begins to swing wildly and the charts advise you of some magnetic disturbance in the area. I wonder if it has anything to do with an atomic energy plant being in the area? At Salem, you leave the Delaware River and enter the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal. We anchored in the anchorage at Chesapeake City (on the canal) for the night.

THE UPPER EASTERN SHORE

8 July - We cruised down the Elk River past the Bohemia River (which is more like a bay). The water was beginning to get choppy in the upper Chesapeake this day and the weather was not good, so we entered Turner Creek on the south side of the Sassafras and dropped a hook for the night. The entrance to Turner Creek is not marked and as you approach the spit of land on

your port as you enter, it is well to stay far to starboard along the western shore.

9 July - We continued into the widening Chesapeake and south to the Chester River, which is a beautiful area for "gunk-holing". We stopped in Queenstown for supplies and then traveled up the Corsico River (a tributary of the Chester) and most of the Chester River, before anchoring for the night in Langford Creek near Cacaway Island. Tom and I took the inflatable and went wandering through some of the creeks after dinner.

10 July - Upon leaving the Chester River, there are two routes to Eastern Bay, one out and around Kent Island, and the other through Kent Narrows. We opted for the latter and were soon into Eastern Bay and then the Wye East River, an area with overhanging trees and many small coves and creeks. We traveled as far as we could go up the Wye East until we came to a fixed bridge with 10' clearance. On the other side of the bridge is the Wye River. At one time Wye Island could be circumnavigated by fairly large boats, but after the bridge was built boats over 10' in height can't get through. We returned to Shaw Bay near the mouth of the river and dropped a hook for the night. Tom decided to go swimming and dove into the water. He promptly came out since the bay was wall-to-wall "sea nettles" (otherwise known to Long Islanders as "jelly fish").

11 July - We pulled up our anchor and went the other way around Wye Island up the Wye River to the same bridge as yesterday (only on the other side). After going in most of the coves and creeks of the Wye River, we cruised south on the Miles River to St. Michaels, Md. and

found a slip at Higgins Yacht Yard. St. Michaels is one of the most interesting and best known yachting communities on the Chesapeake, with a maritime museum and other historical sights. At our slip we engaged in conversation with an elderly couple who were waiting for another couple of about the same age so they could leave on their boat for a cruise up the Chesapeake and then the Delaware River to Philadelphia. After they left, the Dock Master said they had first purchased the boat in 1926. I started counting and figured out that all four of them had to be around 75 years of age -- and they appeared to be young kids going off on a boating adventure.

12 July - Upon leaving St. Michaels, we returned to Eastern Bay, rounded Tilghman Point and cruised south through the Poplar Island Narrows (between Poplar Island and Tilghman Island). The area is very shallow and the channel has shoals on both sides, so to obey "Murphy's Law", the depth sounder quit. We managed to get through without mishap, and rounded Black Walnut Point and entered the Choptank River. We spent the rest of the day cruising the lower Tred Avon River and anchored for the night in Trippee Creek. Tom and I again went wandering through Trippee Creek in the inflatable. The creek is navigable for a considerable distance and many large boats are docked along its shores.

13 July - The next day we cruised the rest of the Tred Avon River to the head of navigation at Easton, Md. The river is lined with large expensive homes on multi-acre sites. The river is one of the most beautiful on the Chesapeake. After returning to the mouth of the river, we tied up at Mears Yacht Haven in Oxford, Md. for the rest of the day. Oxford is not far from St. Michaels by ferry and highway, but it is a long way around by boat. Oxford is also one of the most interesting and best known yachting communities on the Chesapeake. We had dinner at the Robert Morris Inn, which is located in an old historic building made of timbers. The food was excellent and is a place not to be missed when visiting Oxford.

14 July - Upon leaving Oxford and the Choptank River, we cruised into the main part of the Chesapeake past the Little Choptank River (which we did not have time to explore), James Island and Taylors Island to Fishing Creek (enter just north of Barren Island). As we entered the narrow, shoaling channel to Fishing Creek, I saw what I thought was a piece of cardboard, until it started to undulate, and I realized that the cardboard was a sting ray. In fact, there was a school of them which promptly disbursed ahead of the boat. The channel through Fishing Creek to the upper part of the Honga River is marked with sticks stuck in the mud (there are no buoys). As we proceeded through the channel, I had just come to the conclusion that the sticks were to be kept to port when a crabbing boat passed us at high speed waving instructions to keep the sticks to starboard. We made it through without damage thanks to the skeg protection of a trawler, but I think the channel is now about a foot deeper. The Honga River is very shallow for much of its length and the coves and bays are crowded with crab boats. We

dropped the hook for lunch, but decided to push on since the area is very commercial without much to see. We passed easterly through Hooper Strait and anchored for the night at Chance near Deal Island. That

evening I went ashore in the inflatable and spent a few hours drinking beer with some locals in a quaint watering hole known as the "Last Chance Saloon." It is also the only one.

15 July - We left Deal Island with the wind blowing hard enough to create a chop on Tangier Sound, set a southerly, then westerly course through Kedges Straits, and entered the narrow channel to Smith Island from the west. The channel winds and turns into the middle of ~~the~~ *Smith* Island and careful navigation is required, particularly in estimating the set and drift caused by current. We made it to the Town Dock just as a sailboat was arriving and we were both able to tie up, although the dock is probably not more than 35 feet long. This left Joanne's Girl II with most of the aft portion lying against some piles and only the forward portion against the dock. Our co-occupants in the sailboat told us of a place to dine called "Mrs. Kitchner's." You must walk to her home (which is not far) and

make arrangements for dinner. She tells you what time to arrive. At 6:00 P.M. the "rag men," ourselves and another couple showed for dinner. There is no menu and I must confess, I do not to this day know what some of the dishes consist of. Joan thought the "eggplant" was delicious. However, the "eggplant" turned out to be fried clams. Smith Island residents consist largely of people by the name of Smith (the cemetery, which is in the middle of town, contains many headstones on which the name Smith appears). We asked Mrs. Kitchner why her name wasn't Smith and she replied - "It was --- before I got married." Smith Island is isolated from the mainland and exists as other communities did fifty years ago. That evening we observed many people hurrying to the middle of Town, so we joined them to see what was the attraction. It proved to be a softball game with the only other community on Smith Island, and I think they had 100% attendance from both communities, although most of the people from the other community had to come by boat. There are few cars (or roads) on the Island. Smith Island is one of the most interesting places to visit on the Chesapeake.

16 July - ^{We} Left Smith Island by the easterly channel, which is very narrow. There's a long stretch of open water, but only ~~the~~ the channel is deep water. When we tied up at Smith Island, a large sailboat ran aground just north of the Town Dock near a power line. The poles extend along low wetlands and the wires are close to the water, except they pass under the channel. The sailboat was very close to the

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wires and the masts were much higher than the wires. If the masts had hit the wires, it would have been a disaster. Upon leaving Smith Island, the same sailboat was ahead of us under power and was being blown to port without the helmsman being aware of it. When we caught up with the sailboat, she was hard aground. Tom used a heaving line to pick up a line from the sailboat and we managed to pull her free. Cruising south on Tangier Sound, we entered Tangier Island from the east. It is very similar to Smith Island, except that there are even fewer roads and more water. It seemed to be more commercial, particularly when the ferry arrived from the mainland. We tied up at a local dock for the night. Unlike Smith Island there seemed to be many places to tie up for the night even though there are no formal marinas.

THE LOWER WESTERN SHORE

17 July - Upon leaving Tangier Island ^{by way of} the westerly channel, we encountered a pretty good chop crossing Chesapeake Bay heading for the Great Wicomico River. After cruising most of the river, we stopped for lunch just below Glebe Pt. Bridge. I had to fix the depth sounder again. Since the ride across the Chesapeake had been rather rough and Joan was feeling a little nauseous from the rolling caused by a beam sea all morning, I "popped the cork" on a bottle of champagne for lunch. After lunch Joan was feeling better and was ready to move on, although we had originally planned to stay on the Great Wicomico for the night. We decided to take the short run up the Chesapeake and stop in the Potomac River. After passing Pt. Lookout on the northerly side of the Potomac, we heard a boat tell the St. Inigos Coast Guard that they "lost an engine". They were advised by the Coast Guard to turn around (they apparently were northerly of Pt. Lookout) and to return to refuge on the Potomac, since a thunderstorm with 60 MPH winds was coming through and already had hit further north. Tom and I hastened to remove the radio, the depth sounder and anything else that was loose from the flybridge. We barely made it before the storm hit. When it did, the seas were totally confused, first from one direction, then another, and many of them broke completely over the flybridge (which is nearly 14 feet off the water). We "hove to" for what seemed an eternity, but it was only 1½ hours. Visibility was zero and I was trying to make enough headway to avoid being driven up on shore. The Coast Guard was in constant communication with the partially disabled boat, which was apparently taking on water over the bow and the bilge pump was just about breaking even. After the storm, visibility improved, the seas dropped to 4-6 feet. The Coast Guard boat came ^{then} out and towed the other boat to safety. We proceeded up St. Mary's River and dropped the hook near St. Inigos for the night. We "popped another cork" for dinner after cleaning up the mess in the cabin of broken orange juice bottles, smashed cans and other debris.

18 July - It was very calm the next day and we cruised up the river to St. Mary's City where an old sailing ship is tied up. We then went down the Potomac and up the Chesapeake to Patuxent River and Solomons Island. After filling the tanks with diesel fuel which we found to be cheap, we had an excellent dinner at Bowen's Inn. The high point of the evening was the Tiki Bar watching the sights. It's under a tent attached to the motel and overlooks the waterfront. Some come to watch the crab boats return, but most come to watch the two bar maids dressed in scanty attire (be careful, one is the wife of the owner).

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19 July - After leaving Solomons, we cruised back across the Chesapeake to ^{the}Choptank River and Cambridge, Maryland. As we approached the river, we ran into "wall to wall" boats - so many we could not locate the buoys marking the channel into Cambridge. We went around them, finally found the channel and went into the Municipal Yacht Basin adjacent to the Cambridge Yacht Club. We found out that we'd hit the big Yacht Club weekend for small boat races. The place was mobbed with young men and women who had come from afar to race and have a good time. The Dock Master told us the restaurant at the Club was very good, but that we'd have trouble with reservations for that evening since there was a dance after the races. We opted for a place in town, The High Spot (where the Dock Master dines). The restaurant was unpretentious but served good food. Cambridge is a Chesapeake yachting community which is a must stop for any boatman.

THE UPPER WESTERN SHORE

July 20th - We cruised down the Choptank River, around Black Walnut Pt., west of Tilghman Island and Poplar Island (crossing Chesapeake Bay) to South River. This river is flanked by beautiful homes, owned by people from the Washington, D.C.-Annapolis area. We cruised up river and anchored in Church Creek. We all went swimming since this was one of the few areas where there were no "sea nettles".

July 21st - Cruising down South River, rounding Thomas Pt. Light, one of the few remaining manned light stations on the Chesapeake, we witnessed "The Fleet" - a long string of ships waiting to enter Baltimore Harbor. Our next stop was Annapolis on the Severn River where we stayed at the Yacht Basin Co., a yacht club in downtown Annapolis. We spent the afternoon wandering through town and visiting stores. We had dinner at Donnetelli's Restaurant, a very good Italian restaurant near the water.

July 22nd - We left Annapolis, and cruised up the Severn River to the head of navigation. This river is similar to the South River but longer and with more bridges. On the way down river, we saw two men in a small outboard waving to us. We approached them and found that their engine had died. We took them in tow and retraced our course to their home port. They offered to pay for the tow, but we left them with the thought that they should reciprocate if they came across someone in need of assistance. After leaving the Severn, we cruised under the Chesapeake Bay Bridge to the Magothy River. As we started up the Magothy, a summer squall started and we headed in behind Gibson Island, a very exclusive private island with many boats (predominately sail) moored in the cove. The island is connected to the mainland by a narrow strip of land, on the other side of which is Chesapeake Bay. The full force of the squall hit as we were in the mooring area, so we dropped the hook on the edge of the area in relatively shallow water, but far enough away from other boats to avoid collision if the wind shifted. The squall turned into a steady rain so we decided to stay for the night.

July 23rd - The next day remained overcast, but we could see ships moving up and down Chesapeake Bay on the other side of the strip of land leading to the mainland. We could see only ^{the}upper portions of ^{the}ships and they appeared to be moving as if in a shooting gallery. We hoisted the anchor and traveled up the Magothy to the head of navigation and returned. The Magothy is very similar along its banks to the South River and the Severn River, with large beautiful houses. Upon leaving the Magothy, we again crossed Chesapeake Bay and cruised

the asterly side to Bohemia River. As we passed Sassafras River we heard loud "booms", which we thought were thunder. However, when large spouts of water arose off to port, we realized that the boys at Aberdeen Proving Ground were testing. I don't know what they were firing, but I'm thankful for their accuracy. We cruised up the Elk River and the Bohemia River to the bridge and anchored. Before dinner, Tom and I took a ride in the inflatable up the tributaries east of the bridge, and after dinner Joan and I took a ride up Scotchman Creek, which winds and turns through very shallow water in and around fallen trees and stumps. After going a very short distance up the creek, you get the impression that you are in the heart of some far off jungle.

GOING HOME

July 24th - The trip back through the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal was uneventful. The Delaware River was heavy with ship traffic going up as we were going down. The ships follow a rigid course up and down river since they set a course on the range markers which indicate the middle of the channel. Many of the ships are deep draft vessels which cannot stray outside the center of the main channel. After we passed Ship John Shoal Light, we continued out of the main channel and across the "flats" of Delaware Bay to the west end of the Cape May Canal. Just before reaching the highway bridge across the canal, we turned to starboard and entered the creek leading to the "back wharf" and tied up for the night at Roseman's Boat Yard. Joan Roseman was extremely accommodating and made us feel welcome. I had no trouble cashing my personal check (I was running out of cash) and Joan also took my check for dockage. Later, we wanted to bicycle into town, but we only had two bicycles on board for the three of us. I asked Joan Roseman where I could rent a bicycle and she insisted that I borrow hers. You do not find that kind of hospitality everywhere!

July 25th - We ran the outside route from Cape May to Atlantic City and stayed at the Senator Frank Farley State Marina. While walking on the docks observing many large fishing boats which make the marina their home port, the Coast Guard towed in a large sailboat, on which there were a man, woman and their two daughters. Apparently a fitting holding the boom broke and the boom fell on the man's head, knocking him unconscious. The two girls brought the boat back and radioed the Coast Guard for an ambulance upon arrival. A good reason for women learning to operate their boats.

July 26th - We ran outside from Atlantic City to Manasquan intending to stay at King's Grant Marina. About half way between Barnegat and Manasquan Inlets, Tom noticed noise coming from the stern. We checked all likely sources (rudder, stuffin' box, shaft coupling, etc.) and tightened everything, but the noise persisted. Tom then went overboard to inspect the shaft and prop and emerged with the discovery that the plate at the aft end of the skeg (which holds the shaft) had broken a bolt and the plate was turning freely with the shaft. By the way, Tom also indicated that the water was so clear that he could see bottom (unlikely, since we were in 75 feet of water). In any event, we proceeded slowly to Manasquan Inlet and arranged to have the boat hauled at the Brielle Marine Basin in Brielle, New Jersey. We had arranged with our other two sons, Robert and Steven, to meet at King's Grant Marina, which is a considerable distance from the Brielle Marine Basin so we had to get word to them that we were "high and dry" in Brielle. We had dinner that night at the Union Landing Restaurant, an excellent place to dine. They serve no alcoholic beverage but you can bring your own, and if you bring wine, they will put it on ice for you. There are no reservations and there is a long wait to be seated but it's worth it. Many people sat outside with coolers of beer and/or wine while waiting. The restaurant is also one of the originators of "The Turtle Club." Are you a turtle?

CONCLUSION - The following weekend the boat was fixed and we piloted the boat past Ambrose Tower into Jones Inlet observing the somewhat faster offshore race boats participating in the "Around Long Island Race." During the three weeks plus a weekend that we cruised, we put nearly 1,000 miles behind us and had an enjoyable and interesting cruise. If anyone would like further information covering our Chesapeake cruise, please ask.