

Continuing the Ultimate North Atlantic Cruise

Following August SQ, Bruce and Bonnie Marriott continue their cruise in Freedom Now, arriving in Halifax, Nova Scotia just ahead of a blow. Freedom Now can be seen on the east side of the Squadron's marina Stage 4. Bruce continues:

They claim that Halifax Harbour is the second best natural harbour in the world, second only to Sydney. We were on a mooring at the Armdale Yacht Club at the end of the beautiful protected North West Arm. A bus stopped close to the club and provided ready access to the city. The club was welcoming and the Friday night jam sessions will linger long in our memories.

It was now the height of their short summer and we decided we would not have time to sail to Newfoundland and back so we left our boat on a mooring and travelled by bus and ferry to experience its rugged beauty, climb its mountains and cruise by our boat around its icebergs. Its rugged beauty is breathtaking.

An overnight sail from Halifax along the Nova Scotia coast and eventually through the St Peter's Canal took us to the cruising paradise known as the Bras D'Or Lakes, Cape Breton Island. They are a series of huge salt water lakes open to the sea on the north and surrounded by mountains clad in deciduous and evergreen trees. Access to many of the best anchorages is extremely narrow but deep and once inside they are spacious, well protected and truly magnificent. It may well be the best cruising ground we have ever experienced. We became stranded for a month in a small town called Baddeck while our motor was shipped to Halifax for urgent repairs. People were friendly and life was full with events like Ceilidh with blazing fiddles, jigs, Gaelic songs, poetry, stories and step dancing. A local resident loaned us his car so that we could travel the Cabot Trail. It was a most enjoyable delay.



Bruce and Bonnie Marriott, keen sailors and bushwalkers.

With the motor reinstalled, summer was virtually over and though we were under pressure to move south we still had Nova Scotia we felt we had to visit.

An overnight sail brought us back to Halifax. The autumnal hues in the trees forced us to make it a short stopover for supplies and fuel. An easy long day south took us to Lunenburg, an historic fishing and ship building town and home of the famous *Bluenose II*.

On arrival, we were greeted by a huge fleet of schooners participating in the annual schooner race, and just as we entered the breakwater *Bluenose II* was motoring out. What a magnificent sight. Six days later we romped down the coast, covering 85 miles in less than 12 hours, to Shelburne, another historic fishing town..

It was then time to sail across the Bay of Fundy where the biggest tides in the world occur. One tidal station records rises and falls exceeding 16 metres! This means strong currents for the whole of the bay and around the southern foot of Nova Scotia. To get



Freedom Now is emulating her name as she wings it on passage from Bermuda to Halifax.

the currents right, we left Shelburne at 0430, had a wonderful sail around the bottom end of Nova Scotia and then set course for Bar Harbor, Maine. Because of the strong currents we simply set a compass course and ignored our cross track error and rhumb line. The plot of our course was a perfect sine curve as we went up with the flood and down with the ebb.

Arrival in Bar Harbor was a horror never before experienced.

The fog was so thick that visibility was about 15 metres and we had to motor through a 20 mile minefield of lobster trap lines. We needed a lookout on the bow but then had no one to watch the radar. By some miracle, we made it without fouling our prop, and without collision with a fast catamaran ferry, a cruise ship or fishing boat. Charges for mooring were \$4 per foot per night at the dock or \$40 a night for a mooring. We moved on quickly to the beautiful North East Harbor where end of season mooring costs were only \$5 a night and we had easy access by free bus to the magnificent Acadia National Park. We walked its trails, climbed its mountains and then reluctantly sailed on.

New England cruising is beautiful, but not relaxing because of the fogs and lobster traps.

Another overnight sail took us further south to Salem, Massachusetts. The winter weather patterns were starting to establish themselves and we arrived just before a gale.

It was nearly Halloween and the Salem witches were out in full force. We walked past many quaint old buildings and stores offering Tarot readings, séances and fortune telling but managed to escape unscathed and unread. A re-enactment of an actual witch trial was memorable. We also trained it to Boston for an historic walking tour and a visit to the ship *Constitution* built in the 1750s, and now maintained as a working museum.

With the days getting shorter and colder the race was on to get further south. We decided to give New York a miss and take the shorter outside course, but we still had places we wanted to visit on the way. An easy sail of 50 miles took us from Salem to the Cape Cod Canal. This canal is a wonderful short cut provided you get the tidal flow in the right direction. We judged it perfectly and rocketed through in less than an hour making 6 knots through the water but 10 knots over the ground.

One night at anchor in Onset Harbor and we were off again down Buzzards Bay to Cuttyhunk Island (near Martha's Vineyard) where we negotiated the narrow entrance and picked up a mooring in the dredged pond. Cuttyhunk is a delightful little island full of holiday homes, shacks and a small permanent population of mainland dropouts. The trendy summer visitors had all left and everything was closing down.

Block Island was an easy day sail south and as the extended forecast looked grim we moved on quickly and picked up a mooring in the Great Salt Pond, New Harbor. The weather was against us for the next few days with strong south westerlies forecast. With an end of season free mooring we took the mainland ferry to Newport and Bristol. The opportunity to visit the Hereshoff Museum and the America's Cup Hall of Fame were too good to miss. We also visited the International School of Wooden Boat Restoration where many old Hereshoff boats are being restored by apprentices.

The forecast finally looked favourable with 20-25 knot north easterlies forecast so we left for a long overnight sail to Cape May (at the mouth of Delaware Bay). The forecast was wrong. The winds were 30-35 knot north easterlies and with a lee shore we had a rugged ride and a wild entry through the breakwater. We sat out three days of horrible weather enjoying life with other retirees in the picturesque town of Cape May before we were able to sail outside again and around the Cape into Delaware Bay. The run up the Delaware River was a dream with tide and wind running with us all the way. We entered the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal late in the day, motored through easily, and dropped anchor in the boat basin at Chesapeake City just before dark. Hurricane Noel was moving north along the coast so we sat tight for 3 days giving words of encouragement by HF radio to a yacht caught in Noel's full force.

The panicky, 'This is the worst day of my life,' message from the skipper brought back horrible memories of our own near fatal storm experience in the Tasman Sea in 2001. They survived too and eventually arrived in Bermuda with their boat needing substantial repairs.

After a long day sail down the Chesapeake we were tied up at a friend's private marina in Annapolis. The whole experience had been demanding (more than most American sailors would attempt in one season) and we were well satisfied with what we had done and the memories we now treasure.



The perfect anchorage, Maskell's Harbour, Bras d'Or lakes Nova Scotia.

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