

Sly Fox Nova Scotia Trip, 2013

Part 1: Going to Nova Scotia

Our trip to Antigonish began late this year because of our kid's vacations and the need to babysit the dogs with someone not on vacation. Thus, we did not leave Rock Hall until Friday, August 16th. It also meant that Elke would not go with me to NS but would instead fly up there and meet me there on Sunday, August 25th. So: "*Dogs rule while Captains drool*". In her stead, Elke's nephew, Fred, who now owns Vera's home, Elke's sister, on Town Point, Antigonish, N.S. flew down here to go with me. This is actually good as Fred is a qualified captain and cook, and I can tolerate him most of the time.

For the trip, Elke had prepared all provisions, and daily menus for the entire trip. These menus even included the side dishes. Our deviations from her plan were almost nonexistent. It was fantastic. So we put on the provisions, filled up the water and fuel tank and left Friday morning. Apparently we left too early for the Friday Sailing Club as no-one answered our hail while we motored up the bay. This motoring turned out to be an omen for the whole trip as we did an awfully lot of motoring on this trip, and was the reason I called this trip the least fun trip to and from N.S.—not the least exciting, but least fun.

At least the trip up the bay and thru the canal was beautiful and peaceful as it gave us time to double check the condition of the dingy which we secured ahead of the mast, install the safety jack lines, check all flashlights for batteries, place all the harnesses and lifejackets in their proper position, and do all the other final inspections, etc. I should have used a couple hundred more rpms on the prop as we reached the east end of the canal just after the tidal current had reversed so we struggled to make the last 4 miles from the east end of the canal to our anchor spot at the entrance of Alloway Creek just north of the Salem Nuclear Power Plant, and, a second omen for our trip, a stiff breeze picked up which was right in our face. Since it was dark, I also anchored a little too quickly in the creek outflow instead of a little further north in the flats as the tidal current was quite strong and caused the boat to align with the current instead of the wind.

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We got up at 6 AM the next morning to take advantage of the ebb tide current and half an hour later were pleasantly surprised to be blessed with a beam breeze that allowed us to turn off the engine for the trip down the awful Delaware River/Bay. As we got closer to Cape May it shifted a little more easterly so we exited the Bay halfway between Cape May and Cape Henlopen. We had to go out to sea nearly 5 miles before tacking. We remained on that tack all the way up the Jersey shore but did turn on the engine for about 15 minutes at the Barnegat Bay entrance to avoid the shallows there that extend far off shore. Since we needed to recharge the batteries and frig/freezer, it made sense. Thus

we stayed on the same tack all the way up to near the New York Harbor entrance before making the next tack. We stayed on this southeasterly tack for over 100 miles before making the next tack. At about 2 AM this next night, the jib halyard splice at the head of the jib broke and the jib came down about a foot before I could put a furl turn on the jib to stop its downfall. This made the jib useless for close-hauling so we furled the jib and decided to motor to Block Island instead of Nantucket. After 10 hours motoring we finally arrived at Block Island in the late afternoon. We decided to stay there for the night. I hauled Fred up the mast to hook the spinnaker halyard to the jib since the jib halyard had come down inside the mast.

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We left Block Island at 6 AM hoping for the southwesterly breeze to be strong. It was 5 or 6 knots, so we ended up motoring all the way past Nantucket and the Gulf of Maine. But just before noon, we had a visitor join us. We have had birds join us before but this was the first flycatcher I have ever seen. This little guy absolutely amazed us as he could catch black flies anywhere around the boat. He did while they had found a landing spot or while they were flying. He had no fear of us as he would use any part of our body to use as a vantage point. He also didn't need our help. We swatted a bunch of flies for him but he often ignored our gifts for his own captures. It was hilarious as he also left fly detritus on Fred, later he found other spots. At night, he went below to sleep and returned in the morning to continue his mission. And he was totally successful as we had zero blackflies bothering us.

The next morning, we did have one exciting moment 60 miles ENE of Nantucket. It was 9 in the morning and I was at the helm looking aft when I heard a loud crash. Looking forward all I saw was a circle of roiling water that we were passing through and wondering what we had hit. Moments later, about 100 feet off the port side, up came a 40-45 foot humpback whale who pirouetted half a turn on its tail and landed with a back slap and a slap of its fin. Seconds later another humpback repeated the same procedure. Then every forty to fifty seconds they repeated the same spectacle for the next 5 minutes while moving away from us. It was absolutely awesome! I reported the incident to the Coast Guard but they did not seem impressed. The law required us to report Right Whales but not Humpbacks. Around noon, our little flycatcher also left us for parts unknown. We were concerned that one of the other birds we saw may have made a meal of him.

Except for seeing a cruise ship and a tanker late at night we did not see anything—even fisherman—for the next night and day until entering Shelburne Harbor to pass immigration and customs. This was our most uneventful crossing of the Gulf of Maine ever. The town of Shelburne is a great place to enter Canada. The yacht club is an extremely gracious facility to be inspected by customs, and the town is a historical town that is being restored and offers a lot

of restaurants etc. Shelburne was the town of refuge for British Loyalist during the Revolutionary War. Population there swelled to 20,000 then but has about 2000 now. The club also offers dockage and moorings, or anchoring is very easy. A dingy dock is also available. And fees were unbelievably low.

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We left Shelburne the next morning after getting fuel and water, something we could not do the previous evening because customs officers didn't arrive until after 6 PM. Once again we had to motor as the breeze was inadequate. While passing Halifax we encountered dense fog which did not lift until 3 AM when a northwesterly breeze at 15 knots appeared. For the next 12 hours we had a 15 knot building to 25 knot breeze while heading northeast up the coast. The only other boats we saw were all going the other way, an observation Elke saw while flying into Halifax the next day. This was our only sailing with a favorable breeze from a favorable direction until we rounded the cape at Canso. Now we were again going directly into the wind going by Canso and pounded up Chedabucto Bay and the Canso Strait to Port Hawkesbury where we anchored at 1 AM. The Strait is a unique navigable strait where it is advisable to contact Canso Traffic before you enter, and to give the specifics of your vessel and destination. The traffic controllers (on channel 12 or 14) have always been extremely courteous and helpful. The strait is a major port with heavy ship traffic—some with hazardous cargo. The industrial operations are fascinating. It is a natural deep water schism between mainland Nova Scotia and Cape Breton approximately 15 miles long by half a mile or wider. The tidal currents were so strong that they built a causeway and canal across it in the 50's—something that would never have been allowed in today's world.

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The next morning we got fuel and water at the yacht club so we wouldn't need to on our return trip home. After that we contacted the canal operators on channel 11 and got to the entrance of Antigonish Harbor 4 hours later. We scheduled our arrival there for 1 PM at high tide because the entrance at low tide has only 3 feet of water. The tidal range is 3 to 4 feet. And because the channel changes on a regular basis, there are no charts of navigation buoys. However, each spring the Coast Guard works with the local fishermen to mark a channel with small buoys that you hope are good enough. It is for these reasons that this harbor isn't listed in any yacht cruising guide. At this point I turned on the tracking mode on the chartplotter so I can return on the exact same course and know what the depths were when I passed through. When we were done, the minimum depth I recorded was at least one foot of clearance, and the course looked like a ski slalom run. Since Elke was not due to arrive for another 4 hours we went by our anchor spot and went around to the backside of Town Point to a location where Fred is building a dock that I am supposed to be able to dock. Even though it was high tide, we could not find a passage to the dock that had any clearance.

We returned to the anchor spot, anchored, and put out far more scope than should be necessary. Previously I had discovered that the ground in this bay is an oily clay that even my 30 kg Bruce anchor had dragged.

At last we were at Fred's home—which he purchased from Vera before she died. Ignoring my previous pithy comment, it was a delight to have Fred along on this voyage. Not only is he a fully qualified sailor, he is an extremely capable and innovative handyman. He is willing to take on any task. He is professional builder who added two superb cabins and trails on his property for tourists, and now that he has built a new workshop and home for himself he also rents Vera's previous home, to which he constructed major additions. He also loves sailing so much that he might even be persuaded to act as a guide and crew—he does not have a Captain's license—if he could fit it in. He calls these facilities "SeaGarden Retreat" and they are listed in the Nova Scotia tourist guide.

Part 2: Time in Nova Scotia

Well, we're not having much fun. The most significant reason for this trip was to bury Elke's sister, Vera, at a special location on the property, and do a little sailing. However, the first two days were occupied by two visitors from British Columbia who came unannounced and were uninterested in sailing—which kind of ruined our sailing plans. (The Bras d'Or Lakes in Cape Breton are like the Chesapeake in May/June and September/October.) After they left, we had two days of stormy wind and rain, and Sly Fox dragged approximately 5 boat lengths. The next two days were occupied preparing the urn and grave site, and haggling with Fred's two sisters whose strongest personality trait seems to be waging war with family. Then we had one gorgeous day that made us consider extending our visit except the next morning was foggy, rainy, and accompanied with thunderstorms.

Part 3: The Return Home

We left at high tide at 7:30 AM. It was a dark and dreary morning. Had it been a beautiful day we would have stayed because we can anchor in the bay right off Fred's property and it is a gorgeous setting. But staying would have put our schedule way behind and we were already in September way up North. The days get shorter quickly here. And storms were also predicted for the next day. The days were getting short and stronger weather systems are due. In fact, we were hearing thunderstorms off to our North. Since they appeared to be heading east we did not feel threatened by them. So we weighed anchor and followed the path back that I had traced on the chartplotter. Traversing the path in the bay was not a problem for it is just outside the bay entrance where the water fans out in all directions that the shallow areas are widespread and following the channel

and our trace was critical. Do you remember the two days of storms that I referred to and that the Coast Guard has to remark the channel each spring? Well, we were approaching the last pair of buoys, right in the middle, right on my track trace, and bam! We hit the gravel hard. For 10 minutes I tried backing off, wiggling to port and starboard, etc. and we could not make any progress. Since the wind was coming from our starboard beam, I hauled up the main and pulled out the jib. After I got the jib tight we heeled over but not by much. I told Elke to bring in the main tighter with the electric winch to flatten the sail. She asked me how far I wanted her to bring it in and I told her all the way—just keep bringing it in. Bam! The clue pulled out of the main. The stitching in the main was not that old, but the soaking rain of the previous day and this morning obviously weakened the stitching. So, I hauled in the main and jib and told Fred to call one of his fishermen friends to see if he could heel us over. 20 minutes later, with the current now flowing fast by us, the fisherman arrived. We gave him our staysail halyard—the spinnaker halyard was still in use holding up the jib—and he pulled us over and we finally came free when we were heeled more than 45 degrees. We measured only 4 ½ feet of water under us when we cleared. The two day storm clearly had changed the underground profile while we were in the harbor. So, now that we had the wind off our stern, we had to utilize the iron jenny to assist the jib.

The “sail” from Antigonish through Cape George’s bay, the Strait of Canso—lock and all—went without a hitch until just before leaving Chedabucto Bay and entering the Canso channel. Our timing also appeared good as the thunderstorms that were following us were still a long way off. We were only 2 miles away from Canso when I saw a lobster/crab/whatever float and steered to be clear by 2 boat lengths away when getting closer I saw a line floating away from the float that went right in front of our bow. Not able to avoid the line, I quickly put the engine in neutral, and headed into the wind in order to back down away from the line without using the engine. But with only a jib, the boat just spun around so the line was wrapped around the keel and the rudder. I tried to use the grappling hook to grab the line so I could secure it to a cleat but it became taut too soon and my hook could not reach it as it headed down to the trap in 275 feet of water. I tried to sail away from it so I could grab the line but we just weren’t moving even though the wind was now almost 20 knots. Remember how I put the engine in neutral? What I didn’t do was disengage the transmission, so when Elke fell back on the throttle the prop turned and the line wound itself around the prop and stalled the engine. Remember those thunderstorms that were sliding past our stern? Well, they were getting closer. The wind was picking up and with the line tied to our prop we were effectively anchored to the trap with our stern facing the wind and waves—which were now coming into the cockpit on occasion. And the reason we weren’t moving—we later found—was because the trap weighed 500 pounds and in 275 feet of water.

Time to call the Coast Guard. They responded from Halifax—150 miles away—and told us they had no one there but would put out a distress call for us. Which they did, but no answer. And we did not hear another peep from them. In the meantime, the thunderstorms were getting closer and the waves higher, and my thoughts were concerned that this 500 lb. anchor would pull the prop struts off the bottom of the boat and wreck the shaft and stuffing box and flood the boat. Our dripless stuffing box would drip. Not hearing from the Coast Guard, I felt that I might have to dive off the boat and cut the line. Elke strongly disapproved of his idea and said that she would jump off also so we would both drown together. Despite her concerns, I went below and put on my bathing suit. When I went back up and debated with myself if there was any other option, I heard my phone ring. It was the Coast Guard! They informed me that they had tried to call me on the radio but got no answer, and that a rescue boat had us in their sights. Within minutes, a fishing boat arrived to assist us. It was clear from the beginning that their first concern was to save the trap that belonged to one of their compatriots. Their first move was to tow us backward from the stern so that we could grab the trap line and attach to our bow leaving enough slack so that we could cut the line and attach a float to it. After we released that line they threw us a tow line to attach to the bow and towed us to a pier in the town of Canso. One of their crew was a diver and dove in to cut the line off our prop and examined the struts, shaft and prop for damage. They then wanted the float that had been tied tight to our prop so they could give it to their friend. They admitted that their friend was the only fisherman left who continued using floating line for their traps. I wanted to write something appropriate on the float but couldn't find a proper marker in time. We then left the pier and anchored in the harbor because the pier was for much larger vessels than ours and had no tie-on points good for us. After dinner I pondered on the fact that in 13 years of owning Sly Fox we had only once called for assistance. Today we had two.

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We left early the next morning in a somewhat dismal sky with a slight breeze from the east. It took us an hour to get to the ocean on the south side of Nova Scotia where we were pleasantly surprised by a good easterly breeze of 15 knots. With only the jib we still needed the engine to maintain 6 knots but not much. Two hours later the breeze picked up to 20 knots and we cut engine. Our plan was to go about 90 miles to Owl's Head inlet for the night. But as we went on the breeze started to shift to the southeast and increase slightly. The weather report also indicated that by tomorrow afternoon the wind would shift to the southwest and stiffen to 30 knots—right in our face. That would leave us stuck in Owl's Head and keep us from getting our sails fixed in Lunenburg. So we decided to go another 70 miles and make it an overnight sail and arrive in Lunenburg in the morning. This was a great plan except that the weatherman was wrong. Shortly after passing Halifax at 1 AM, the wind had already shifted to the southwest and was already more than 20 knots meaning that the apparent wind was more than

25 knots. By the time we were halfway across Mahone Bay the actual wind was 30 knots, it was raining heavily, and we still had more than 3 hours to go. I had already furled the jib a lot leaving only enough out to steady the boat. Oh, I wished I had been able to use the main for that purpose. The engine was at 2800 rpm and we were severely pounding into the surf. It was miserable. Even at 5 AM when we turned the corner into Lunenburg Bay it was miserable but at least the waves were only 1 to 2 feet. At 6 we anchored in crowded Lunenburg Harbor using the radar with visibility near zero. We were both soaked and cold.

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It is amazing how snug the interior of the boat can be after just a little generator time with the heating systems and breakfast. We took showers and went to bed. Besides, it was still raining and the wind was too much to take down the sails. I had discovered that I had to also fix the jib as one of the straps on the clue was fully torn off by catching on the cleat for the courtesy flags. It turned out later that this was a very good decision. This also gave me time to see what was wrong with our radio. It appeared to be completely dead. Even after removing all connectors it did not work. Suddenly, after pushing some random button it turned on. I reconnected the connectors and it worked up until the moment I moved it back into the bracket. To make a long story short, it turned out that the connector to the RAM mike in the helm had corrosion in it. After cleaning that up it has worked fine ever since. But that it failed when it did is the mysterious part. The corollary must be that when you need something the most is when it will fail. It was not until late in the afternoon that conditions became acceptable to remove and bag the sails. But it was too late to do anything about it.

At 8 AM we weighed anchor and moved over to the most easterly pier which the charts call Scotia Trawler but is now known a Wharf Yacht Pier. They have 2 floating docks—one a small one that has water and used to have fuel. The easterly one is attached to a major pier and is there for our use if we go into the yacht shop or grocery store. The fuel dock is the only fuel dock in Lunenburg but not working for lack of an environmental license. The owner hopes to have it in operation next year or the year after so you either get fuel in 5 gallon cans or go all the way around to the Mahone Bay side to the Yacht Club to get fuel. This is the only negative currently in Lunenburg as Lunenburg is the best spot to visit on the Nova Scotia's coast...It is a beautiful "city" which has a maritime museum, restaurants, and trinket shops enough to please anyone. Those familiar with the Jesse Stone films with Tom Selleck will recognize Lunenburg as the Town of Paradise, Maine where he is the Police Chief. I am sure it has been used in other films for its picturesque beauty. In the past, Lunenburg was Canada's fishing capital to rival Gloucester, Massachusetts. It is also the home of Canada's most famous fishing/racing schooner "The Bluenose" which was an undefeated champion in those races. And, Lunenburg is a "sister city" to the town of Lunenburg, Germany where Elke grew up. Plus, North Sails has a major

sail making shop there. But the shop is about 6 blocks from the pier. Luckily for us, on the fuel dock was a sailor—later identified as a “wharf rat”—who stated that he had free access to a truck; so he took us to the shop. Later, when we came back to pick up the sails, we found out that he did not and the owner had the truck towed away. However, the owner of the shop also owned the wharf, the shop and half the rest of the town. His card is on Sly Fox, so I can't give his name right now, but he was a really friendly and accommodating gentleman and drove us back to the boat with the sails. One of the superlatives of sailing along Nova Scotia is that the locals will do more for visiting yachtsmen than any other location we have ever been. After we put the sails back on we went to the Fisheries Museum of the Atlantic to have dinner. We then anchored in the harbor and had some friends we met earlier over for late cocktails and discussions on their sailing adventures. They had sailed all the way from British Columbia via the canal and were on the way back.

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We left Lunenburg at 6 AM so we could have an easy sail to Shelburne and get more fuel and water. We started off on a beam reach with a 15 knot northerly. Perfect! But by noon it was dead calm. So we motored. Our intent to go to Shelburne got changed because the forecast for the next day was for a 15 to 20 knot southwesterly and a 25 to 30 knot northwesterly the following day. With this forecast we knew that we wanted to cross the Gulf of Maine the next day with the southwesterly and a close reach, and be tied up at Castine, Maine in Penobscot Bay the following day. Although low on fuel and water, it seemed the right choice. Thus, we decided to pass Shelburne and anchor in the northeast cove of Negro Island, which was 10 miles closer to Cape Sable and avoided the 10 mile passage up to and back from Shelburne. Negro Island is essentially barren and not a good place unless you are sure of the wind force and direction. We were. It was a pleasant night.

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We left Negro Island in the dark because I wanted to pass the Seal Islands—which were 25 miles away—with a good current flow. You do not want to fight the Bay of Fundy currents. While we passed between the Seal Islands going more than 10 knots, there is one negative to this action. The current through the islands is going on a northwesterly course while the Fundy current is going north. Where they meet is a very sharp junction and the waves are short and severe. For about 100 yards we were pitching up and down in the roughly 8 foot waves and our bow ended up piercing some of them. But it was worth it. For now, we were sailing on a course of 100 degrees True—you don't use magnetic up there where the declination is more than 20 degrees—and the breeze was 15 knots putting us on a close reach. It was beautiful! By mid-afternoon the wind was up to 20 and more was forecast. Time to furl the jib and set the staysail. Not a fun job. I already had the staysail rigged, but I still had to go forward to untie the tie-

downs and get the sheet through the blocks. We have a very strict rule on the ocean. No one is allowed out of the cockpit unless another crew member is on deck and appropriately equipped. But clipping, unclipping, clipping, unclipping, etc. on a heaving deck is just not all that much fun. The staysail was working beautifully and we were moving right along. In fact we were moving too well. We were going so well that we were going to arrive in Penobscot Bay too soon and in the dark. If I was going to be able to avoid all the lobster pot floats and their toggles I needed to be able to see them. My solution was to head a little higher on a course of 090 and come into the bay in the ship channel where there are almost no pots. This would take me roughly 25 miles further west but also puts me on more of a beam reach going into the bay. The plan was working great until 2 AM when the wind shifted to a more westerly direction forcing me to go into the bay south of Isle Au Haut. And these damn pots go out into the ocean for almost 10 miles. At any rate, I was really lucky as I kept missing them. About a mile south of Isle Au Haut the wind eased substantially and I could see that I was not going to clear the island on the current tack so I turned on the engine to let me head higher for a little more than a mile. It was dawn but dark and rainy so visibility was poor. That's when I hit one and wound it around the prop. Now the wind died completely and the current was taking me onto the rocks of Isle Au Haut. Elke insisted I call for assistance which I did to no avail. Our Coast Guard was very courteous but unable to help. Boat US was more than 30 miles away and already assisting someone else. It didn't look good until the wind picked up to 5 knots and I was able to sail away. But I was going southwest. A few minutes later the wind shifted and I was able to head north again. For the next 8 hours it changed from dead calm to 5 or 6 knots so we worked our way north with the last few hours in a heavy rain. Considering all the traps, islands, rocks, and fluctuating winds and currents, and no power backup, it was the most difficult sailing that I can remember. Finally, near Cape Rosier I called Boat US again and they were able to send us a tow to get to Belfast where we had to go to get inspected by Customs. Now the rain stopped suddenly and we were being hit with a 30 to 35 knot northwest wind. During our trip up the bay I had stowed the staysail and put the jib back up so now we were being overwhelmed. Since we had to have a tow to get into Belfast and we were going straight into the wind we met the towboat, if you want to call it that. It was a small towboat. Three times he had to stop the tow to add oil to his engine. I wondered if we were both going to need a tow. But we made it two hours later and we met Customs and stayed tied up to the town dock.

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Next morning we hauled the boat out at a new yard and found nothing! Nothing! We could have at some point motored ourselves. But I was glad to have the inspection and be sure our prop and struts were safe. We then called our friends in Castine, Ann Ashton and Charlie, and she set up a dinner with our

other friends nearby, Bill and Bettie Miller, to celebrate our safe arrival. It was a great time.

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Next morning, we left for Boothbay Harbor, a full day's trip. The wind was now from the southwest, so once again it was going straight into our face. Normally, we would have headed straight to the Cape Cod Canal and Block Island on a single overnight. But the forecast was for the wind to build to 30 knots from the southwest—in our face—so we decided to head toward Portland via day sails and hope for more favorable conditions later in the week. Boothbay was our first stop. At least today we were able to see the traps ahead of us. We got there just after dark and took one of the mooring balls that would normally have been impossible to get. We also got TV reception and the forecast indicated that our best chance would be to go to the canal and Block Island tomorrow because the following days would be even worse.

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I got up at 5 AM to make the most of the apparent calm weather, but the morning was so foggy and wet and cold that I could not keep the dodger window clear. I did not want to risk a trap here so I waited until after 6 to actually leave. Even then the conditions were not comforting. We had to motor but the wind did not increase to more than 15 knots until mid-afternoon when it started to really pick up. Before we got to Provincetown around midnight it had built-up to 25 knots and we were really pounding into the waves at max rpms. My goal was to time our entrance into the canal for after 3 AM so we would go through with the strong current. With no current charts available, I had to plot on graph paper the tides for the east and west end approaches over a 24 hour period to discover that 3 hours after high tide at the east end would be the best time to start the passage. We arrived there 2 hours after high tide and the current did not get really going for half an hour. By the time we got to the Buzzards Bay end we were zooming along at over 10 knots with minimal engine rpms. As we passed the Massachusetts Maritime Academy and left all light sources behind, I discovered I had made a huge mistake. Elke gets so little sleep on these trips that I decided before entering the canal not to wake her. That meant that I could not go out of the cockpit to clean the salt off the dodger window. I was now nearly blind going 10 knots down the east end raceway relying totally on radar and chartplotter, and not able to see effectively the buoys that marked the side of the channel. Worse, I was going through one of those 15 minute sleep deprivation periods where I could barely keep my eyes open. I was fully aware of my situation but just could not keep my eyes open for brief moments. It was the most anxious I have ever been while sailing. Even when we had to be rescued off Hatteras I never felt anywhere near this level of alarm. It was 20 more minutes before we exited this 4 mile channel before I could relax and turn the helm over to Elke. I went down for a 2 hour nap. To hell with the salty and wet clothes.



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Block Island's Great Salt Pond is 60 miles from the canal and we need to get there for fuel. We had motored from Castine to Boothbay, Boothbay to here, and will have to motor all the way to Great Salt Pond. And the forecast for leaving Block Island was indicating that we would still have to do some substantial motoring before a front was forecast to produce northwest winds. I had hoped that the weather on this side of the cape would be better and it was. Instead of 25 to 30 knots of head wind it was only 20 to 25 knots. Whoopee! Let's just cut this short and say we made it to the Pond by 3 PM. Those familiar with Block Island's fuel docks know they are all on the southwest shore. The wind in the pond was less but still a steady 15 knots with greater gusts. This being a Thursday and late in the season and cold with lousy forecasts, there were few boats in the harbor and no staff appearing on the docks. After 2 passes and blowing our horn—no one answered radio hails, and yes the radio was working—we finally saw some staff on the dock. Up to this point, Elke had refused to fly over to the dock. Even with 3 of them it was hard to get the boat pulled up next to the dock. One of them turned out to be the bartender and he is a real hoot. Boy, did he really try to sweet-talk Elke into having a drink. Ladies, beware of the Irish! Elke may have been close to considering his entreaties.

We got our fuel and anchored in the harbor. The forecast for the next day was for a front to come through early in the afternoon with 20 knot northwest winds. That sounded perfect. In order to go up the Delaware Bay with the tide, I needed to pass the Cape May harbor entrance by 10:30 AM Saturday. That would have me passing Cape May Point 1 ½ hours after low tide. If we left at 4 AM we would only have to average 6 knots, which is my usual choice. But 7 knots would allow us to leave at 6 AM and that is what I chose. Elke made another fine dinner, we showered and went to bed.

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We left as planned and the wind was from the southwest but only about 10 knots. Even so, our course was off the wind by about 20 degrees so putting up the main helped and we were easily able to maintain 7 knots. But by noon, the wind had shifted so it was now straight on and increased to 15 plus knots. I shortened the main considerably and used it to just steady the boat in the waves. Noon came and went and the wind was still coming from the west southwest and building. By 6 my spoken and unspoken words concerning weather forecasters were not printable for children, adults or sailors. We were only making 6 knots and pounding into the surf and the wind was 20 to 25 knots. More unprintable thoughts, etc. Suddenly just as the sun was setting, we were hammered with 30 to 35 knot gusts off our starboard beam from the northwest. Initially, I headed into the wind to see what was next—the change was that sudden—and flattened the main even more tightly. At first the wind was quite changeable, but after a few minutes it settled down. We finally had our northwest wind but instead of 20 knots on our beam it was 25 with lots of gusts to 30. Since it was on our beam the apparent wind and the true wind were the same. I now had the main as far forward and flat as I could with a significant reef/furl and our speed ranged from 8 to 8 ½ knots continuously until daybreak when we were just south of Atlantic City. Needless to say the waves on our beam caused the boat to roll considerably from zero to 45 degrees but Sly Fox was holding up superbly. We felt very safe. At this point the wind eased and I had to put out the jib to maintain our speed. We went by Cape May Harbor entrance 2 minutes and 38 seconds late. Wow!

At this point I hailed the Coast Guard on channel 22A concerning Cape May Point. I had just received all new chart chips in May and they showed no change from Hurricane Sandy. I wanted to know if there were any changes around the point that may be missing from my charts. They assured me that there were no reports of any shoaling or other hazards that they were aware. Interestingly, two other boats hailed me on this channel to advise me that they were also unaware of any new hazards.

Remember the northwest wind that I was so happy about? Well, now that we were going up the Delaware Bay/River it was still there. More pounding straight into the chop. Delaware Bay/River has never been fun and it wasn't now. We got up to the canal just before sunset and made it through canal with a favorable current of up to two knots, and anchored 100 yards off the channel in the Elk River. We were home. Sly Fox, and we, were totally covered with salt but the wind had completely died and the water and air was warm. And we were exhausted.

* * * * *

Next morning we left at 8 AM and got to Rock Hall at 1 PM—beautiful day, no wind, favorable current, but motoring, of course.

Epilogue

The one thing that really hit me hard while on this trip was how dependent we are on mechanical and electrical systems. While we tend to think of ourselves still in our prime, the fact is that it has passed us by a little more than just a little.

On our last day the chartplotter lost the ability to set and follow a track. Not a big deal, but after the trip our inverter broke. I can run Sly Fox without the generator, but that inverter is the heart of our electrical systems. What if the chartplotter and radar—they are bussed together—broke down while we were in the fog and rain off Cape Sable, approaching Isle Au Haut in Penobscot Bay, leaving Boothbay Harbor, or in the Cape Cod Canal east end raceway? I already lost the use of our radio—without knowing it—and came too close to jumping into cold Atlantic waters to dive underneath the boat in a storm. With Elke not far behind. And what if one of us got sick or injured in a disabling manner? In each case I could have anchored or headed further out to sea, but what if I lost autopilot? Would Elke and I have had the stamina to manually steer Sly Fox in some of those conditions for a long time?

None of the above is to indicate that we don't have backups, or an alternative—liking being able to look out the dodger window in place of the chartplotter. Except for the autopilot, we have paper charts, guides, almanacs, EPIRB, or gadgets, for most everything. The charts may be out of date but for us that doesn't really matter. Rocks in Maine don't change. Underwater profiles change little and where they do NOAA doesn't update them anyway. Anyone wants to try going through Knapps or Kent Narrows now based on current charts? And try to find the needed information in Notices to Mariners—if it's even there. They don't even make charts for inlets like Oregon or Hatteras. You get there and follow the buoys. Besides, we had 2 Garmin on board to back up the GPS. I even added a cable at the helm to connect the Garmin to the chartplotter if needed. And now we have marine navigation software on our iPad and smartphones. But I also got lazy as those items were not immediately available on this trip. They were in a bench lazarette which was pinned under the salon table. When I first started ocean voyages I always had the current chart out and marked up at frequent intervals. I need to get back to that practice. Even when the autopilot failed on a previous trip up north, Elke hung a gallon soap container on the side that failed, and when the wind got too strong we added bungee cords. But that was not a complete failure out in mid-ocean at night in a storm.

As a result, we both feel that future trips like this one will, at least probably, require another person—even though we prefer going it alone.

Just things to think about.

Jarvis Fox



Elke's solution for a broken autopilot



Sly Fox anchorage in front of Fred's house



Fred's new wing—on right—designed by Elke



Elke loves collecting Phefferlinge mushrooms