

## CRUISE REPORT – A QUICK ROUND TRIP TO NEWFOUNDLAND ABOARD THE MABEL ROSE

July 23 – August 29, 2009

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July 23, 2009 (Thursday) – We sailed from Nyack Boat Club just before midnight, catching a nice light to moderate Northeasterly, bound for the Narrows, the Atlantic Ocean, and our hoped destination the island of St Pierre, just off the coast of Newfoundland, 900 nautical miles from the Narrows. This is about as far from New York harbor as Miami, the Bahamas, and 250 miles farther than Bermuda. We could only afford the time for a stop in St Pierre if we made good time – meaning a passage of seven days or less. Our crew for this passage is just Robin and me, and our dog Lupie.

July 24, 2009 (Friday) – We spent the early morning hours sliding down the River with a variable breeze that went from NE to West, but never stopped. We were helped by a strong ebb tide. We made Liberty Island by 0400, and by 0800 we had cleared the Rockaways.

July 25 – July 31 (Saturday through Friday) – Our passage from New York to St Pierre was generally uneventful. We had dense fog about 40% of the time, and a moderate to strong favorable breeze (SE to SW) the whole way, mostly cloudy skies and occasional rain. In the fog we monitored the radar regularly and kept the AIS ship alarm set, and we saw very little traffic and had no close calls. We chose an offshore course, passing south of Nantucket Shoals, then across the mouth of the Gulf of Maine to the edge of the continental shelf, heading outside of Sable Island on the south side of Nova Scotia.

We generally kept two hour watches during the day and six hour watches at night so that each of us would get a full night's sleep. Most of the time we let the steering vane steer the boat, so that the watchstander just had to keep their eyes and ears open for traffic and wind shifts.

We saw many dolphins on the passage, some whales, and we saw several grampus south of Nantucket – a kind of dolphin. Shearwaters, petrels, and gannets were frequent escorts as well.

We ran the engine just once on the passage, for about an hour, to put a charge on the batteries.

We arrived at St Pierre in the morning of Friday, July 31, 2009, in dense fog. We used the radar to confirm that our GPS chartplotter position was accurate, and headed for the channel west of St Pierre, between St Pierre and Miquelon, where the fog scaled up enough to make a visual landfall with the cliffs of Miquelon. Huge northern gannets soared around us in the channel, and we saw numerous puffins as we rounded the north side of St Pierre and cranked up the engine for the harbor approach. Unfortunately, the

starter wire had worked loose on the passage, so I spent the dramatic passage between St Pierre and Grand Columbier down below hot wiring the engine to get it running in time.

St Pierre (and Miquelon) are a province of France, so we officially entered the European Union. We landed at the Ecole de Voile, which was quite modestly priced at about 20 euros a night. For another 30 euros, they repaired our mainsail, which had chafed through on the passage by the jib sheet rubbing against the reefed portion of the mainsail.

Because St Pierre is France, there are many written rules and regulations, and because it is France, they are mostly ignored. This was a good thing sometimes, as when the customs inspector cheerfully waved our dog Lupie in based on a week-old health certificate issued before we left (the official regulations require a certificate dated within 4 days of entry, not an easy thing to obtain on a seven day passage!) On the other hand, the post office closed a half hour before the posted time, and the ferries to Isle au Marins did not run at the posted times.

Isle au Marins is worth the trip. It is an island across the St Pierre harbor where the original fishing village is located. The bare island is dotted with a church, and colorful saltbox fishermen's shacks. Some are open as museum exhibits, but many are inhabited by the original fishing families.

The food in St Pierre is excellent. You can provision at the large supermarket or at the boucherie up the street. Both places carry French groceries and many delicacies. There are several extremely good restaurants.

There is nice hiking.

Because this is France, people drive very fast and pay little attention to pedestrians as they careen around the corners in town.

Sunday, August 2, 2009 – St Pierre, FR to Fortune, Newfoundland and Brunette Island

We had a nice easy passage from St Pierre across to Newfoundland, a mere 25 miles to the town of Fortune. We waited a little too long to start, so the SW wind that whistled in the rigging all night died in the middle of passage and we had to run the engine for about two hours. We cleared customs in Fortune, Newfoundland, where we got plenty of free advice from the old salts at the dock. We then sailed on to Mercer Cove on Brunette Island – an abandoned community and now a wildlife preserve, about 15 NM north of Fortune. The guidebooks recommend against anchoring at Brunette Island, as the harbor is open to the westerly surge, and the only charts available date back to a 19<sup>th</sup> century British Admiralty survey. But we spent a splendid night there. We were the only boat in the harbor, and the only people on the 10 mile long island, which was crawling with huge arctic hare and caribou. Lupie went crazy chasing the hare, which stood taller than she did. After stalking a family of caribou on the muskeg, we had a bull caribou walk past us within about 20 yards as we went back to the dinghy beach.

Monday, August 3, 2009 – Brunette Island to Francoise, Newfoundland.

We set out for Hare Bay, but as the wind forecasts for the next few days were iffy, we decided to head for Francoise instead. We arrived in fog and rain at about 1500 hours. Francoise is one of Newfoundland's remaining outpost fishing communities, accessible only by boat. The town is set on the steep sides of a mountainous amphitheater. A large waterfall runs through the center of town. There are no roads, and no cars – just paved walkways. The school allows you to use their internet access, and the small grocery store had basic supplies but little in the way of vegetables. There is fantastic hiking in the hills above the town, with marked paths leading to a promontory over the harbor entrance, as well as a steeper trail up to a peak called "The Friar." You can see other fjords from the hills over town.

During the evening, a local came up and collected \$13.52 Canadian for the privilege of using the dock overnight!

Tuesday, August 4, 2009 – Francoise to Aviron Bay, Newfoundland

We tacked out of Francoise midday after hiking the hills around town. We ran westward to the mouth of Aviron Bay, and the fog scaled up as we entered Aviron Bay. Aviron Bay is about 6 miles long, with a pristine anchorage by a thousand foot high waterfall at the head of the bay. We had the entire bay to ourselves. This is truly the most spectacular anchorage I have ever visited. There are thousand foot cliffs on either side of the bay. The head of the fjord has rocky mountains rising from a meadow – the scenery is very much like Rocky Mountain National Park in Colorado, only without all the people.

Wednesday - Thursday, August 5 -6, 2009 – Aviron Bay, Newfoundland to Glace Bay, Nova Scotia

We had to cross the Cabot Strait back to Nova Scotia to pick up our daughter Beryl by Friday, August 7. Given that possible gales were forecast for Friday, we decided to head across the Cabot Strait overnight Wednesday and Thursday (160 NM). We had variable winds, generally unfavorable, for the crossing, but we made Glace Bay by 0100 hours on Friday, August 4. Glace Bay is a small fishing and coal mining community. Both industries are moribund. We tied up at the public bulkhead. We were the only sailboat in the harbor, and apparently the only yacht to visit this season. Many locals came down to visit and say hello.

Glace Bay is in Nova Scotia, and seems like a city compared to all the places we visited in Newfoundland. Because this is Canada, the drivers are all very polite and stop even if you just look like you might be thinking about crossing the road. Glace Bay is very convenient to Sydney Airport – even more convenient than Sydney Harbor. Beryl arrived on the 2330 flight from Halifax Friday night, and we set off again for a few more harbors in Newfoundland shortly after midnight.

Saturday, August 8, 2009 – Glace Bay to La Poile Bay, Newfoundland

We left Glace Bay at 0100, sailing out of the harbor. Beryl wanted to see Newfoundland, so we were heading back across the Cabot Strait back to some more fjords of Newfoundland's South Coast – a 135 nautical mile passage. The weather overnight was squally, with some squalls packing sustained winds of 30-35 knots. We put in a third reef and rolled up part of the jib at daybreak. But by dusk the weather had calmed down, and we made landfall on Newfoundland's wall-like south coast and sailed into La Poile Bay and the town of La Poile, another Newfoundland outpost. A welcoming party met us at the dock.

Sunday, August 9, 2009 -- Northeast Arm, La Poile Bay, Newfoundland.

We sailed up La Poile Bay to Northeast Arm, and anchored at the head of the fjord by a waterfall. We bushwacked through the muskeg and went hiking up on the ridge; where we saw more stupendous views and a moose. Great blueberry picking, too! Back at the anchorage, the water in the pool under the waterfall was just warm enough for swimming.

Monday, August 10, 2009 – La Poile Bay to Grand Bruit, Newfoundland

With time for just one more Newfoundland port, we decided to head for Grand Bruit and the rocky passage between La Poile and Grand Bruit. We made Grand Bruit in the late afternoon, and tried to sail up to the ferry dock just as the southeast wind piped up to about 15-20 knots. After a couple of attempts to find a quiet moorage at the ferry dock, we moved across the harbor to raft up to another cruising sailboat (the only other cruising sailboat we shared a harbor with in Newfoundland).

Grand Brit is a very colorful and picturesque little town, with a waterfall in the center. Unfortunately, the town has voted to disband and the school and the grocery store have closed. By next year, there may be no community there anymore.

There are great hiking trails leading from town, Unfortunately, we didn't have time to explore them as much as we'd liked.

Tuesday - Wednesday, August 11-12, 2009 – Grand Bruit, Newfoundland to Louisbourg, Nova Scotia

As our son Justin was flying into Halifax to meet us on August 17, and we had a favorable forecast for yet another crossing of the Cabot Strait, we sailed from Grand Bruit for Louisbourg, Nova Scotia. The fog lifted by midday on Wednesday, and we watched the cliffs of Newfoundland for a long time as they sunk over the horizon. We had fair winds and made great progress, arriving in Louisbourg early in the morning of Thursday, August 12.

Louisbourg is a fishing community on Nova Scotia's southeast coast, on the island of Cape Breton. In addition to being a fishing community, the town is the home of a huge historical restoration, Fortress Louisbourg. Fortress Louisbourg is the restoration of the 18<sup>th</sup> century French village and fortress. You can easily spend a day there wandering among the streets and buildings, with actors playing historical roles. Picture Mystic Seaport, only without the ships and about five times the size.

Thursday - Friday, August 13 - 14, 2009 – Louisbourg to New Harbour Cove, Nova Scotia

We left Louisbourg at midday, intent on making some westing towards Halifax. We hoped to make Liscombe River by Friday evening, but the winds did not cooperate, and instead we pulled into a tiny harbor called New Harbour Cove, at dusk. Seals greeted us on the way in, and a local family invited us to join their picnic on the rocky beach by the pier. The night was quiet, for the most part, but periodically the ocean surge would rock us against the pier.

Saturday, August 15, 2009 – New Harbour Cove to Liscombe River, Nova Scotia

We did an easy day sail from New Harbour to the Liscombe River, and sailed three miles up the Liscombe River into the primeval northern forest, to Liscombe River Lodge. You can tie up to the dock at the lodge, and enjoy guest privileges, all for a modest \$20 per night. We met a couple anchored in the river on a Little Harbor 38 – another Ted Hood design very similar to the Mabel Rose. The couple had purchased and restored the boat after it had sunk in Halifax Harbor.

There is very nice hiking in the forests from Liscombe River lodge, and a great restaurant at the lodge.

Sunday – Monday, August 16-17, 2009 – Liscombe River Lodge to Halifax, Nova Scotia

We sailed back down the Liscombe River and made an overnight passage towards Halifax in order to meet Justin's flight on time. The passage was mostly in light airs and uneventful, and we tied up in Halifax's downtown waterfront by around noon on Monday. This left plenty of time to wander around the waterfront exhibits and visit the bookstore long before Justin's flight arrived at midnight.

A man on the dock greeted us and warned us that there was a hurricane brewing in the Caribbean that might be headed our way in a few days.

Tuesday, August 18, 2009 – Halifax to Lunenburg, Nova Scotia

We sailed from Halifax on Tuesday morning and had a generally pleasant, if foggy, upwind passage in light to moderate airs to Lunenburg. I did badly sprain my fingers returning to the cockpit after reefing the mainsail at one point.

Lunenburg is an historic fishing and boatbuilding town – the birthplace of the famous fishing schooner Bluenose, and its replica, the Bluenose II. We arrived at dusk and tied up at the fisheries museum dock (about \$40). Bluenose II was in town, and you could tour it for free.

We had some time to enjoy Lunenburg on Wednesday the 19<sup>th</sup>, but the forecasts now predicted that Hurricane Bill would hit Nova Scotia's southwestern shore, possibly as a Category 3 hurricane, in about four days. We did not want to be in its path, so we made a plan to position ourselves to cross the Gulf of Maine back to the US before Bill's arrival. This meant leaving Wednesday evening. We spent some time Wednesday afternoon storm prepping the boat – I mounted the storm covers on our hatches and ports and repaired chafed lines. We made plans to head for Cape Sable, and make the final decision whether to cross the Gulf of Maine when we reached Cape Sable in about 24 hours. It was about 300 nautical miles to Cape Cod bay – which would give us about 12 hours to spare if Bill's current forecast speed held valid and we could make Cape Sable in 24 hours and six knots for the Gulf of Maine crossing.

Wednesday – Saturday, August 19 – 22, 2009 – Lunenburg, Nova Scotia to Sandwich, MA

We sailed from Lunenburg at 2000 hours on Wednesday, August 19. We made good progress against the S-SW winds, and made Cape Sable in dense fog by about 2200 hours on Thursday, August 20. Off Cape Sable we had a tense few moments when an unidentified radar target approached within ¼ mile. We also passed within about 1 nautical mile of the tanker Acadian, but had a clear picture of them on the AIS display and the radar, and confirmed our positions by VHF. At this point, the forecast for Hurricane Bill had not changed, and we had about 60 hours before it was supposed to hit the Nova Scotia coast, by which time we could easily make it to Cape Cod on the forecast 15 -20 knot southerly winds. Our plan was to point as high as we could while maintaining at least six knots of boat speed to leave an adequate margin of safety, and choose our port of call based on where we ended up.

As it turned out, we easily made six knots pointing straight for Provincetown on Cape Cod, and made Sandwich by 1530 on Saturday, August 22. Customs came to the Sandwich Marina for our check-in inspection. There were Tropical Storm warnings posted for the Cape for that night, but it ended up being perfectly quiet overnight.

Sunday, August 23, 2009 – Sandwich to Cuttyhunk, MA

We made our passage through the Cape Cod Canal with the afternoon tide on Sunday, August 23, and made Cuttyhunk Island inner harbor by about 1900 hours. We caught a

bluefish on the way. There were plenty of town moorings available, and we spent two nights there and enjoyed a lay day of hiking and beachcombing.

Tuesday, August 25, 2009 – Cuttyhunk to Padanaram, MA

On August 25, we crossed back across Buzzards Bay to meet Justin's girlfriend, Chelsea, who was joining us for the sail back to Nyack. The New Bedford Yacht Club maintains guest moorings and launch service for a reasonable fee.

Wednesday, August 26, 2009 – Padanaram, MA to Block Island, RI

We left in the pre-dawn hours on Wednesday, August 26 in order to maximize the favorable tides for our westward passage to Block Island. We had a pleasant passage, and arrived at the Block at around 1300 hours and anchored close in to the Scotch Beach dinghy beach. We enjoyed another lay-day on Block Island and went beachcombing and horseback riding.

Friday - Saturday, August 28-29, 2009 – Block Island, RI to Nyack, NY

We sailed from Block Island at 0900 on Friday morning. Another tropical storm was threatening, but this one promised fair winds from the southeast/northeast for the homeward passage. We set a course south of Montauk Point and enjoyed generally brisk sailing, making the Narrows by 0500 on Saturday morning, and making it back to the touch and go dock at Nyack Boat Club by 1635.

SOME PICTURES OF OUR TRIP ARE AVAILABLE AT MY FACEBOOK PAGE AT THE FOLLOWING LINK:

<http://www.facebook.com/album.php?aid=29048&id=1027939250&ref=mf>