

# Wild west coast of Vancouver Island hot spot for recreational and racing sailing

## Advanced course takes participants offshore

BY CHRISTOF MARTI, SPECIAL TO THE VANCOUVER SUN JULY 30, 2015

An introduction to offshore cruising means nothing but sea, sky and stars for days on end. Christof Marti/Special to The Sun

We were to leave God's Pocket on Hurst Island in great anticipation of sailing around Cape Scott, the northern tip of Vancouver Island, before venturing offshore for a couple of days followed by exploring the west coast of Vancouver Island.

Conditions were perfect, a boisterous north westerly blew into Goletas Channel, blue skies and Neptune was smiling on us. At the same time, just a couple hours of sailing south of us, the fleet of about 50 boats participating in the biannual VanIsle360 race crossed the start line in Port Hardy.

With the race fleet bearing down on us, and having a front-row seat to watch some world-class racing action in Goletas Channel, we raised the sails.

Just as the wind filled the big white canvas, our engine quit. So much for a great start to the day. I headed down to check out the engine room and realized that one of the valves on the fuel filter was turned ever so slightly from the correct position, likely the result from a previous filter change. This caused the engine to starve of fuel. Fantastic, now we had the fuel lines full of air instead of diesel.

Bleeding fuel lines at the dock is one thing, doing it in one- to two-metre waves with the wind blowing through the rigging at just under 50 km/h is way more fun though. It took 10 minutes of fiddling around in the engine room with my trusted crew member, Jamie, before the engine was running smoothly.

Not that we needed the engine in this wind, but we thought that perhaps it would be a good idea to have it running again before we really needed it.

In the meantime, the fastest boats of the VanIsle360 race caught up with us. Dragonfly, a mighty catamaran, flew by us and soon disappeared over the horizon.

By the time the rest of the fleet caught up with us, we approached infamous Nahwitti Bar. The ebbing tide pushes against the strong winds that enter Goletas Channel, and a sharp drop in the seabed creates impressive waves. Some of the smaller race boats disappeared behind massive waves while we were beating our way to windward, spray flying over our teak decks.

Clearing the bar and then rounding Cape Scott was the icing on the cake. While the race boats popped their colourful spinnaker sails, we headed offshore, into the sunset. After all, this was an advanced sailing course with an introduction to offshore sailing.

We sailed southwest and passed the Coast Guard cutter shadowing the VanIsle fleet. As we sailed toward open ocean, perhaps it was unsettling for some of our crew to leave the company of other boats

and the Coast Guard as they headed for Winter Harbour.

We spent the next two nights more than 100 kilometre offshore of Vancouver Island. The sea was ours, not one other boat around us. Nothing but the blue sea, the sun by day and the stars by night and the wind. It was a wild ride in strong to near gale-force winds. This is exactly what the crew of five intrepid sailors joined this expedition for.

Roughing it offshore is one thing, but it wouldn't be complete without making landfall at one of B.C.'s most magical places: Hot Spring's Cove, just north of Tofino. Timed perfectly, we made landfall just after sunrise at 5 a.m. and by 7 a.m. we are soaking in the natural hot springs overlooking the ocean and sipping on a well-deserved rum.

Over the next few days, we explored Clayoquot Sound, famous for the logging protests in the '80s and '90s. We anchored in paradises like Whitesand Cove in Gibsons Marine Park and explored Mathilda Inlet, where we met Hugh Clark, founder of the Ahousat general store. It is a mixture of grocery and marine hardware store and served as the local post office. Clark started this store 60 years ago when he was in his 20s. Sadly, after having had a stroke, it's now up for sale.

On we sailed, through the Broken Group of Barkely Sound, exploring Bamfield, trail head of the West Coast Trail, Coast Guard station and once the terminus station of the more than 6,500-kilometre telegraph cable via the Pacific Ocean connecting Canada to Fiji and Australia.

The history on Vancouver Island's west coast is so rich, we barely scratched the surface. I promised myself to come back again and one day spend an entire summer exploring this marvellous coast.

But once again, the schedule of rigid sail training and yet another keen group of sailors awaiting us in Victoria forced us to leave and sail south.

Just as we entered the Juan de Fuca Strait shortly before sunset, a pod of maybe a dozen humpback whales approached us. They came within less than a boat length of us and we had to manoeuvre to avoid being in their path. I have sailed these waters many times, but never have I seen whales this close.

The colossal mammals are graceful when slicing through the water, raising their flukes before diving below the surface without the smallest splash. A fitting last night at sea before the sun set again and we sailed under a starlit sky southeast in the Juan the Fuca Strait — more worried about avoiding deepsea vessels than the odd humpback whale.

Perfect timing again, we sailed through Race Passage, a gentle breeze on our stern, spinnaker up and entered Victoria Harbour two hours later.

Another fantastic cruise came to an end, leaving the crew and their skipper with memories that, I hope, last a lifetime.

[Check out the YouTube link here.](#)

Christof Marti is the owner of Simply Sailing School in Vancouver ([simplysailing.ca](http://simplysailing.ca)) and is a director on the Board of BC Sailing. Trained as an engineer and with an MBA in finance, Christof is also a qualified sailing instructor and a certified Yachtmaster. He will be filing reports from B.C.'s coastal waters over the season.

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