

# Trailer Sailing

the Georgian Bay small craft route

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**30,000** is a lot of rocks to avoid with a boat. That's how many islands are said to be in Georgian Bay. Georgian Bay is located in the Northeastern part of Lake Huron. It is separated from the rest of the lake by the Bruce Peninsula on its southern end and by Manitoulin Island on the North. On a three week cruise in Southern Georgian Bay my wife and I discovered that missing those 30000 islands is a lot easier if you follow the small craft route.

The Small Craft route is a charted and buoyed route that wends its way from Port Severn to Little Current. The route is outlined on strip charts 2202, 2203, 2204 and 2205 which are published by the Canadian Hydrographic Service and available at most marinas in the area. Don't bother shopping around – the price for these charts is the same everywhere. The main channel is indicated by a solid red line on the chart. Alternate routes are indicated with a broken red line. Distances from Port Severn are marked in red circles. Make sure you have newer copies of these charts because fluctuating water levels have caused some changes to the route in recent years. However, if you have an older copy of 2202, hang on to it. My 1999 edition of 2202 has an inset for Parry Sound on sheet 5 that is not found on the 2007 edition. Note that these are strip charts. Chart 2202, for example consists of 5 separate sheets. Orientation on a strip chart is seldom North and can vary from sheet to sheet.

This was our first extended duration trip on this boat and we learned a few things about sailing in a smaller boat along the way. Our boat, a 1988 O'Day 240 named Solace, is 24 feet long, displaces 3600 lbs and draws 3'. It is powered with a 8 horsepower electric start 4 stroke Tohatsu engine. We acquired it after learning that we did not have the patience to sail our C&C 30 to destinations outside Lake Ontario and realizing that nothing goes to windward like an F150 pickup truck. The boat floats off the trailer easily but I am fairly particular about how the boat, with its wing keel, rides on the trailer and get it hauled with a travel lift. This requires a full service marina. There are several to choose from in the Penetang/Midland area. We chose to launch at Hindson Marina. We arranged, with them, for secure storage of the truck and trailer and use of the self service crane for raising the mast. Even if you can launch and retrieve your own boat from a public ramp you will still need to think about a location for storing your tow vehicle and trailer for the time you are away.

Penetang is about 2 ½ hours from our home. We leave home at 9:00 planning to miss the worst of rush hour, arrive at 11:30 and launch at 12:00 while the marina staff are on lunch and not using the ramp. Launch and raising the mast go well and we are ready to go by 3:00 but elect to stay overnight at Hindson's departing fresh the next morning.

## First Anchorage

Our first anchorage was on the north side of Bone Island. This is about a 10 mile jaunt from Penetang and it looks as if leaving the small craft route just past Tomahawk Island will provide a short cut. Short cuts in Georgian Bay are entertaining, often beautiful, sometimes tranquil but are seldom short. The trip around

Webber Island was an exercise in navigation. It is amazing how much one island looks like another especially when there are 15 of them in sight at any given time. One of the great things about the small craft route is that all the buoys are coded. You read the letters/number code on the buoy, find it on your chart and you have an instant fix. Leave the small craft route and you will be trying to figure out whether the island in front of you would actually look like a pancake when viewed from the air. After a few wrong turns, backtracks, a short stop at a friends cottage and some bad language from the admiral, we found the anchorage on the east side of Bone Island.

As this was our first anchorage I was determined to do it properly and put a marker over where the anchor was sitting. I had a cleaned out Javex bottle with a line attached to it that ran through a shackle attached to the forward end of our Bruce anchor. I dropped the hook in about 20 ft of water, tightened and secured the float line and then backed down to set the hook. All was well and I spent a peaceful evening eyeing the float occasionally secure in the knowledge that I, and others, knew where my anchor was. I did note that I was the only one of the six or so boats in the anchorage to do this. Morning came and it was time to get the anchor up. That sucker was dug in. I break it loose and it comes up with about 10



*photo captions still to be inserted*



channel. At this point the engine stops but at least we were drifting closer to a rocky shore. The line from the anchor marker has wrapped itself around the propeller. Down goes the anchor again and I raise the engine to unwind the marker line. At this point my nearest neighbour asks why I had marked the anchor. I reply that I wanted to know where it was. He remarks that he usually assumes that his anchor is on the bottom. I thank him for his observation and throw the marker in the back of the lazarette and don't see it again until cleaning out the boat in my driveway three weeks later. The anchor comes up without incident this time and we motor out of the anchorage into the Musquash channel where we rejoin one of the alternate paths of the small craft route.

A small easterly wind, that I later learn is not unusual in the morning, takes us down the Musquash channel to Penetang rock where we rejoin the Small Craft main channel at mile 16. The wind dies off and switches

changes so we end up motorsailing part of the time. This is not an uncommon state of affairs on the small craft route so fill up your gas cans whenever you get the chance.

After a day of motor sailing we arrive at Indian Harbour where I learn two things that will stand me in good stead on the rest of the trip. These are anchoring technique and the importance of access to public land.

While ruminating on the anchoring debacle at Bone Island I decide to try things differently by deploying and retrieving the anchor from the stern of the boat. The tiller and motor are easy to hand, the swim ladder protects the hull from damage and the forward thrust generated by an outboard will set an anchor far more securely than the anemic pull they exert in reverse.

Indian Harbour has lots of swing room, no other boats and 20 feet of water. I loop the bitter end over a winch, slide the anchor over the stern, point downwind and goose

the throttle. The boat slows and the stern settles as the Bruce anchor digs in. I walk the anchor line to the bow cleat it off and bring the bitter end forward to loop over a cleat. After that it is just a matter of easing out 140 ft of line as the boat drifts back. I do recommend taking 150 ft of line with you. Many anchorages are in about 20' of water so 140 ft gives you the optimum scope of 7:1. Take a larger anchor/chain combination than your boat actually requires. Many anchorages are too small to allow you swing room with a 7:1 scope. A large anchor can compensate for reduced scope. I took a 10 Kg Bruce anchor with 12 feet of chain. This combination did not drag once.

After a refreshing swim in the pristine, albeit somewhat cool, water of Georgian Bay from the back of the boat we bring up the dinghy to go ashore. As we get closer to the shore we can see that the entire area is posted with no trespassing signs. On a larger boat a few nights without going ashore may not be a big deal. In the cramped confines of trailer sailor it becomes a major irritant. The second lesson I learned in Indian Harbour is that you should know where public land is and anchor near it whenever possible. Several publications provide this information. National Parks are marked and coloured on the strip charts. Provincial Parks are marked with broken lines. The Massassuga Camping and Facilities Guide published by the Queen's printer for Ontario is extremely useful if you plan on going into the Massassuga. There is a lot of information online as well so once you have planned

your route check to make sure that includes access to public land.

Our next stop is San Souci. A reasonable person might assume that San Souci is on San Souci Island but they would be wrong. San Souci is on Frying Pan Island which is across the channel from San Souci Island. San Souci is home to several cottages, one marina and one famous restaurant. We get gas, ice and conversation at the marina and head down to the restaurant. Henry's is quite well known for its fish and is not busy today. We dock around 3:00 and because we are too early for dinner and too late for lunch we decide to overnight on the dock here. Dinner was excellent but the docks are exposed to the wakes of passing boats and are not inexpensive considering the level of amenities provided. Next time I would time it so I stop for lunch and move on to another spot to overnight.

Parry Sound via the South Channel is the next destination. The south channel is well protected but you will be extremely lucky if you get to do much sailing through it. The wind shifts as it passes each island and there is barely enough room for two boats to pass each other in a couple of spots. Most of the route is lined with cottages which have no road access. The area puts me in mind of a Canadian interpretation of Venice. The trip from San Souci takes us about four hours motoring. We were lucky enough to arrive about 10 minutes before a bridge opening. You need to be aware that the swing bridge from the mainland to Parry Island opens on the hour.

Parry Sound Harbour is busy in the summer. There are float planes constantly taking off and a steady stream of work and tour boats plying the waters of the harbor. Transient

boats here are encouraged to stay at Big Sound Marine which is run by the local Chamber of Commerce. It is spotlessly maintained and has excellent access to just about any type of reprovisioning facility that you can think of. There is a shuttle service to the local grocery store. Almost everything else you could want is within walking distance. The Stockey center has concerts scheduled for much of the summer. Check the schedule as you walk by to see if anything is playing that might appeal to you.

We spent several days exploring Parry Sound and actually got the best sailing of the trip on the Sound itself. The Sound is about 5 miles long and 5 miles wide. It is deep and relatively rock free on the western side. It is blessed with usually consistent west

winds and has a number of spots to anchor off. Remember my earlier rant about access to public land. The best spots are off Killbear Park. The park charges a nominal fee for boaters going ashore but once this is paid you can use park facilities which include showers, flush toilets, hiking trails and beautiful beaches. The fee can be paid at a self service area on the shore opposite the designated mooring area in Kilcourcie bay.

At Killbear the learning experience continued. We learn how important it is to have some means of water to shore transport with you. I know many of us can beach our boats or anchor stern to the shore and step off however there are a lot of anchorages where you can be 6 feet from the shore in 10 ft of water. Not having a shore transport means you



probably won't be anchoring there. We bought a dinghy that we towed and an inflatable kayak. Sidekick is a plywood/epoxy stitch and glue 7' dinghy that I built from plans downloaded from the net. I was warned that it would be swamped by waves and wakes from passing powerboats as we towed it. In fact, Sidekick performed like a champion. She planed at about 3 knots, exerted very little pull on the tow rope when positioned on the front end on the stern wave and usually finished the day drier than she started it. She rows extremely well with one person on board and adequately with two. We also brought along an inflatable kayak which weighs about 40 lbs and takes up about 5 cubic ft of storage space when deflated. It would have seen a lot more use had Sidekick not worked out so well. The moral here is bring something that can get you to shore dry.

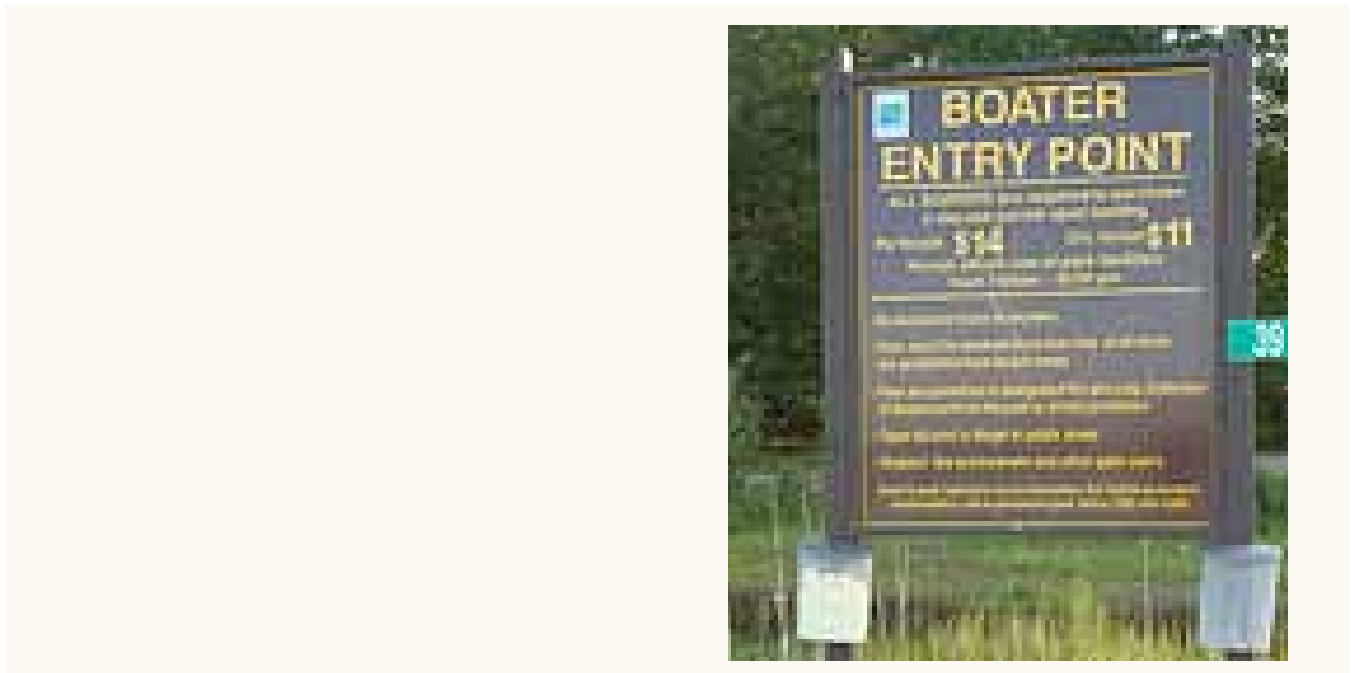
Another thing that we learned at Killbear was the importance of shade. Most trailer sailors do not have enough headroom to provide a useful bimini. The previous owner of our

boat had equipped it with a tarpaulin which attached to the mast and to the backstay. It is stiffened with 8 battens that run laterally and attaches to the lifelines with shock cords. Our trip occurred in late June and early July and we blessed those previous owners as the cooling breezes wafted through our shaded cockpit as we lay at anchor. It also covers the companionway hatch so in the event of rain, which we didn't have during the daytime, you can leave the hatch partially open

North of Parry Sound the trailer sailor can run into an interesting dilemma. Head capacity becomes an issue. Marinas, and more specifically the pumping out facilities that they usually provide, are few and far between Parry Sound and Killarney. Our head holds 2 1/2 gallons. Unless your bowels differ significantly from ours, this will last about 2 and 1/2 days for two people. This has never been an issue on our usual Lake Ontario cruising grounds where you sail from marina to marina and usually use the onshore facilities. You can do the math but a couple of

days holed up in a remote anchorage due to bad weather will result in an extremely unpleasant living environment. Because of this, our northernmost stop was Franklin Island and the time we thought we might invest in travelling northward we spent playing on the sound. When we do decide to go to the North Channel, we will simply trailer the boat to Little Current or Killarney. We will improve the head capacity prior to that trip.

Reluctantly, we pointed our bow southward. Luckily, during a shopping trip at White Squall in Parry Sound, we had learned of one of Ontario's undiscovered treasures – The Massassauga. The Massassauga is a water access provincial park which extends from just south of Parry Sound to the Moon River area covering about 33000 acres. It can be accessed from several points on the small craft route. There are also a couple of access points where you can park your car and launch a canoe or kayak. There is a small amount of private property within the park but it is easily avoided. Although





you can anchor anywhere, you are encouraged to do so in designated areas. Designated anchorages have steel pins on the shore that you can tie your stern to while your anchor holds your bow. I prefer to swing on a single hook if there is room. These designated areas will usually be near a small dock with a pit toilet, dinghy dock, picnic table and a fire pit. These spots are known as boaters gathering places. The park rangers will come around and collect fees if you go ashore, are tied up to the shore or elect to use a mooring. The fee is much less than you would pay in a marina and funds collected are used to maintain the park so cough up. It's worth it. We anchor in Port Rawson Bay in 20' of water and have the western end of the lake to ourselves for most of the first day.

After several days exploring the Massasauga we push south again.

The trip back to Penetang could have been accomplished in one day from the Massasauga but we decide to have a look at Beausoleil Island. We follow the small craft route passing up the Little Dog channel into Beausoleil Bay at Mile 13. Our chart shows 3 feet of water in the channel and we don't have time for short cuts today. We take Big Dog channel instead at Mile 12. It's a good idea to have your VHF radio on before going through either of these channels. Larger boats will often announce their intention to enter the channels prior to doing so. Beausoleil Island is part of Georgian Bay Islands National park and is the closest public land to the Midland/ Penetang area. It is only accessible by boat and is hugely popular with local boaters. It is not particularly busy, by Beausoleil standards, having only about 15 boats in sight on the day we arrive. The bottom has good holding

in about 20' of water. Beausoleil Island offers overnight and day docking facilities and walking trails.

The next day we head back to Penetang and home. We motor back to Hindsons Marian in about 3 hours, retrieve the truck and trailer and book a haulout time for the following day at 11:00. The mast comes down with the self service crane at 8:00 and the boat is lifted on to the trailer at 11:00. Three hours later we are back in Suburbia backing into our driveway feeling like we have crossed into a different dimension. We have spent 3 weeks together on a 24 ft boat and survived and thrived. Nest stop is the North Channel.



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