

## Mahone Bay (Nova Scotia, Canada)

Ever sailed in Mahone Bay, Nova Scotia? You should give it a try! Mahone Bay is a large expanse of water with an abundance of interesting islands, which faces the occasional wrath of the Atlantic Ocean. A group of six people spent a week cruising the bay in three Wayfarers. The cruise was organised for September 2001 through a Wayfarer dinghy hire and Sailing School run by Michael Ernst, together with Nova Scotia's Wayfarer cruiser, Jim Fraser. The other members of the international group were Ralph Roberts, Alan Parry and Leighton Venables from the UK, with Dieuwke and Jan Katgerman from the Netherlands.



“Sail Mahone Bay”, the house and the wharf

The first day's sail began with selecting and packing the two hire boats and equipment before setting out with Jim Fraser's Wayfarer on the short trip to the local town of Mahone Bay. After some shopping, sightseeing and lunch in a stylish bar by the waterfront, we returned to Michael's base, where he had kindly allowed us to set up our tents in his large garden, with the use of shower and toilet facilities. In the evening we used Dieuwke and Jan's rental car to drive the 10 miles to Lunenburg and dined in an excellent restaurant after a walk through the town and along the harbour.

### **Sunday, 9<sup>th</sup>**

A decision was made to try to sail round the western point of the bay to make a return to Lunenburg the next day, but only Jan and Dieuwke managed to pick the right puffs in the light winds and bright sun to make any real progress. To the dismay of the other two boats as they disappeared into the distance, some poor organisational packing of the boats had meant that they had everyone's lunches with them! However the boats re-grouped before hunger led to any

mutiny and we found a sheltered beach on a nearby island for a lunchtime stop. The shores of the islands were usually quite rocky, but it was generally possible to find a sheltered, sandy beach on most of them. On our return, the evening was spent celebrating Jim's 50+ birthday in suitable style.

### **Monday, 10<sup>th</sup>**

The following day preparations were made to leave our base at Michael's home for further exploration of the Bay. It was early afternoon before the logistics of moving cars and buying sufficient provisions was completed.



buying sufficient provisions

Michael joined us for the sail eastwards in a gentle breeze and glorious sunshine. We weaved our way past a succession of small islands few or no houses on them. The scenery and the sailing were quite idyllic. At the end of the afternoon we started to check out some of the islands for their suitability to set up camp.

Our choice was an inlet on Squid island, with a campsite which we gave a 5 star rating (☆☆☆☆☆). It had:

- a made up fireside with grate for cooking
- bench seats around the fireside
- an ample supply of cut fire wood and logs
- roofed table with seating for 6 people
- cupboard for storing food
- selection of BBQ-sets
- wigwam for anyone without a tent
- choice of tent sites on the beach and in the bushes
- latrine at a suitable distance from the site – with toilet paper!
- and a welcome note of J, J & Pepper

There was no question that this was THE site to stay. Though Michael would have liked to stay for the evening, he needed to return home because of business commitments. (We learned later that with the wind dropping to nothing, he had to paddle for much of the way). After setting up our tents, we sat down for a nice drink on the beach. Evaluating our day's sail, we concluded that we had found paradise, which was reinforced later in the evening, when we watched the sun sink below the horizon in a spectacular display of colour.



sunset in paradise

Can you light the campfire was the question to Leighton. "Yes I can," he said and promptly poured some of Jim's cooking stove fuel on the kindling. We saw an explosion and a blazing campfire! It was decided to give Leighton some lessons in how to start a fire rather less dramatically with one match. After an inspection of the cooking facilities, we concluded that a meal for six could be prepared on Jim's two stoves in stages. Unfortunately at the supreme moment of the final stage, the table collapsed, and all the sauce for the spaghetti disappeared underneath the adjoining bench! Being outdoors seems to help in disaster situations such as this, and we were able to rescue a sufficient amount of the sauce to still enjoy a delicious meal. Indeed, with everybody sitting before the mast (or should that be tepee?), there was still spaghetti and sauce to spare!

### ***Tuesday, 11<sup>th</sup>***

The day started quite misty, with visibility too poor to make it comfortable to sail before mid-day. We decided to leave the tents and equipment on Squid Island and make a day tour in the direction of Chester. Chester is one of the bigger towns in the Bay, where they sell caps with the slogan 'Chester is a drinking town with a sailing problem!' (Alcohol being regarded as a problem in Nova

Scotia, and bottles of liquor can only be obtained from state run liquor stores). Entering a bar in Chester we saw everybody focussed on dramatic scenes on the television, so we asked, "What's going on?" We then received the terrible news about the terrorist actions in the United States. Shocked and disturbed, we went outside to eat our lunch at the balcony of the pub. We decided we wished to continue our more isolated existence in Mahone Bay, and not discuss the things going on in the rest of the world. We were however able to notice one immediate effect of the events. On normal evenings, many transatlantic flights crossed the Nova Scotian skies, leaving a record of their passing with vapour trails. But this evening, there were no planes in the clear blue sky, and sitting at our favourite spot on the beach back at Squid Island, we witnessed the most beautiful sunset ever seen.

### ***Wednesday, 12<sup>th</sup>***

After breakfast, we chose to keep our campsite base going for a further day and to make a trip to the largest island in the bay, Tancock Island. There was a light breeze and bright sunshine, which made for good comfortable sailing, though not for splendid speed. We arrived in the harbour of Tancock and went to a local cafeteria for a coffee and snack (definitely no possibility of getting anything alcoholic here)! We then took a walk across the island to the other side of the Island to look out onto the Atlantic, and the last of the islands at the eastern point of the bay, before returning to eat a fine lunch back at the café before it closed.



the Atlantic from Tancock Island

Returning to the boats, Jim knew of a public campsite on the mainland that was worth making a detour to for a much needed shower. Unfortunately, after a significant wind shift at mid-day, this entailed a fairly long sail to windward. Large tacks brought the 3 boats north-west, but after an hour, Alan and Ralph tired of beating and decided to ease their sails and head for Chester, tempted by the thought of a drink at the bar, as well as a need to buy more food (and

fresh fish). Jim guided the remainder of the group to the campsite, and even knew his way along the small paths to the welcome sight of the shower block. Later everyone met up again on Squid Island to enjoy another sunset and a pleasant meal with barbecued fish.



BBQ at Squid island

### ***Thursday, 13<sup>th</sup>***

We finally decide to break the camp at Squid Island and put a 'thank you' note in the cupboard for the regular campers on Squid Island: J+J+Pepper, together with our e-mail addresses - though up to now (November), we have not heard from them. There was only a very slight breeze as we set off in the morning, so a decision was made to stop for an early lunch on one of the smaller islands nearby. With the sun blazing down on the soft white sandy beach, the clear blue water looked invitingly tempting for a swim (or intention to swim - as there were cries from some quarters that the water was so cold that .....!!!!). But for the hardier members of the group, after the first minute or so of active swimming, the body acclimatised to the temperature and 10 to 15 minutes of bathing were thoroughly enjoyed. Looking out at the sea and islands before us, as we sat eating out lunch on the shore, everywhere in the Bay appeared absolute paradise.

We phoned Michael Ernst as we left the beach to arrange meeting up with him again, as he was keen to join us for our sail westwards to the other side of the bay. Later in the afternoon, four Wayfarers ventured out towards the Atlantic swells which break onto the finger like rock formations stretching out into the sea and forming the western point of the bay. Michael guided us through some channels to a possible site on an island for us to camp, but had to return home before the wind dropped again.



Atlantic swells breaking on the rocks

After further exploration however, we found a more suitable site at Sacrifice Island, (later called Mosquito Island by Leighton). Again we found facilities like a table, seats, a fireplace with grill, and a nice flat area for the tents with easy mooring for the boats. But we gave this campsite only a 4 star rating, as it was not quite up to the standard of the one on Squid Island. The worst points come from the mosquitoes. Long trousers and Deet rubbed liberally into the skin helped, though Leighton also tried telling them to 'GO AWAY', which not surprisingly, didn't appear to help him too much.

***Friday, 14<sup>th</sup>***

We concluded after the efforts of our first day's sail that the route outside the point to Lunenburg was too long for a day trip, so we decided to take another route through some inlets and cuts on the Mahone Bay side of the point to the back(side!) of Lunenburg. It proved to be an extremely interesting and very scenic route and a highlight of our week's cruise.



sailing in the finest weather Ralph could arrange

After walking a little way into the main town, we had lunch and visited the well laid out and informative fisherman's museum and then carried out raids on the local liquor store and supermarket. Loaded with a fresh supply of drinks and special things for the BBQ, we sailed back to our base on Sacrifice Island. Needless to say that this was yet another day Ralph had arranged the finest weather you can imagine. Glorious sunshine making for just the right temperature with a friendly light breeze. Go cruising with Ralph and you will never complain about the weather any more! (Note - I do seem to have built up a reputation for always bringing fine weather, particularly to international rallies. If anyone wishes their weather to be guaranteed on a holiday to the Bahamas, or any other exotic location, then I am readily available for hire! - Ralph) On the way back Leighton met his niece and she sailed with us to our campsite. Leighton and Ralph took her back later in the evening. She was disappointed to have to leave as we prepared our evening meal, after sharing the relaxed atmosphere of the group. With a little bit more wind during the evening, even the mosquitoes were not around to bother us, and we enjoyed another good meal and spectacular sunset.

### **Saturday, 15<sup>th</sup>**

For our final day's trip, we sailed outside a group of islands on the western point known as the 'Hell Rackets' – not that there was anything 'hellish' about them in the benign conditions we encountered. We saw many seals on this particular trip, as well as some dolphins or small harbour pilot whales. Finding our way into a narrow creek called Tanners Pass was not easy, even using the detailed chart that Jim had brought along, but we eventually found a suitable spot to stop for a lunch break by some fisherman's dwellings.

Our route back provided some interesting sailing, as Ralph and Alan tried using a shorter route. This started out looking as though the wide channel would provide easy opportunity to gain access to our base. But the channel gradually narrowed until the way ahead was blocked by a line of rocks, but with a break between them just wide and deep enough for our Wayfarers. Michael joined us later as we made our way back to his house. It was one of those rare days where instead of having to beat in whichever direction one sailed, the wind actually turned in our favour, so we sailed the whole day again with the wind from behind.



Wayfarers waiting during lunch



From left to right: Al, Dieuwke, Leighton, Michael, Ralph, Jim and Jan

Back at our base, Michael honoured us with the first Mahone Bay cruising awards, and we would predict a growing Wayfarer cruising business for him because this area is one of the sailing paradises for Wayfarers. A similar cruise is being organised for September 2002 (contact Ralph Roberts

[ralphroberts@lineone.net](mailto:ralphroberts@lineone.net)) or Wayfarers can be hired at any time during the summer at special weekly rates for Wayfarer Assn. Members from Michael Ernst (contact [sailmahonebay@auracom.com](mailto:sailmahonebay@auracom.com)). It has to be said that Michael's Wayfarers are far from new, and racing helms would likely be frustrated by their performance. But they are well maintained, and perfectly adequate for the sail training and cruising which Michael uses them for. The support and advice on the area that Michael also offers certainly cannot be faulted.

Jan Katgerman (W5535) & Ralph Roberts (W9885)

## Sail Mahone Bay

Lessons/Rentals/Cruises

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