

Saturday September 28

Awaking in the dark and then stumbling across the highway to Garry's establishment I looked up to see the most extraordinary meteorite drop out of the western sky. This one was very large, seemingly close, and bright green in colour. I asked the group of guys hanging around waiting for the restaurant to open, if anyone else had seen it. Several had, and all agreed it was the largest shooting star we'd ever seen. Many of these early risers were ironworkers erecting wind turbines inland on Manitoulin Island.

After a good bacon and egg breakfast we were down at the boat shortly after 7am to re-stow our bags and set off. Again the wind defied the predictions. There was very little movement as the picture shows, but the day was still early, and we hoped for better.



Little Current's waterfront with the red brick post office in the background

As we cast off from the dock and drifted into the middle of the channel we discovered why Little Current is so named. There is a quite noticeable current and confusingly it varies in strength and direction depending on weather and seasonal conditions. Today the current was opposed to our direction of travel, amplified no doubt by the south easterly winds of the previous few days. This became increasingly problematic as we approached the bridge and realized that we weren't making headway as the wind died to almost nothing. Fortunately we were on the water in good time and had 45 minutes to get up to the bridge. Jonathan shouted up a loud "Good morning." hail and eventually the operator, who was probably not expecting any traffic, confirmed that he would open the bridge for us at 8 am. I decided the only way to get through with so little wind was to line up the boat as close as possible to the shore side of the swinging structure. There's no way I wanted to have to tack while the bridge was in motion. When it actually started to move, Jonathan put in a massive effort with the paddle and we cleared the bridge quickly. I would have preferred to get through in a more seamanlike fashion, but what else can you do in this situation?

Once we had made it to the entrance of the channel tacking against the current and with a light head wind, we had more freedom to set our course. We were in luck, sailing a close reach in a strengthening southeast wind all the way out past Strawberry Island again and into Frazer Bay. An hour or so later we reached East Mary Island and bore off on a northeast course towards Baie Fine. The Marys are two quite bleak low lying islands with no distinguishing features and surrounded by very shallow waters, but ahead in the distance rise the La Cloche Range of white quartz hills.

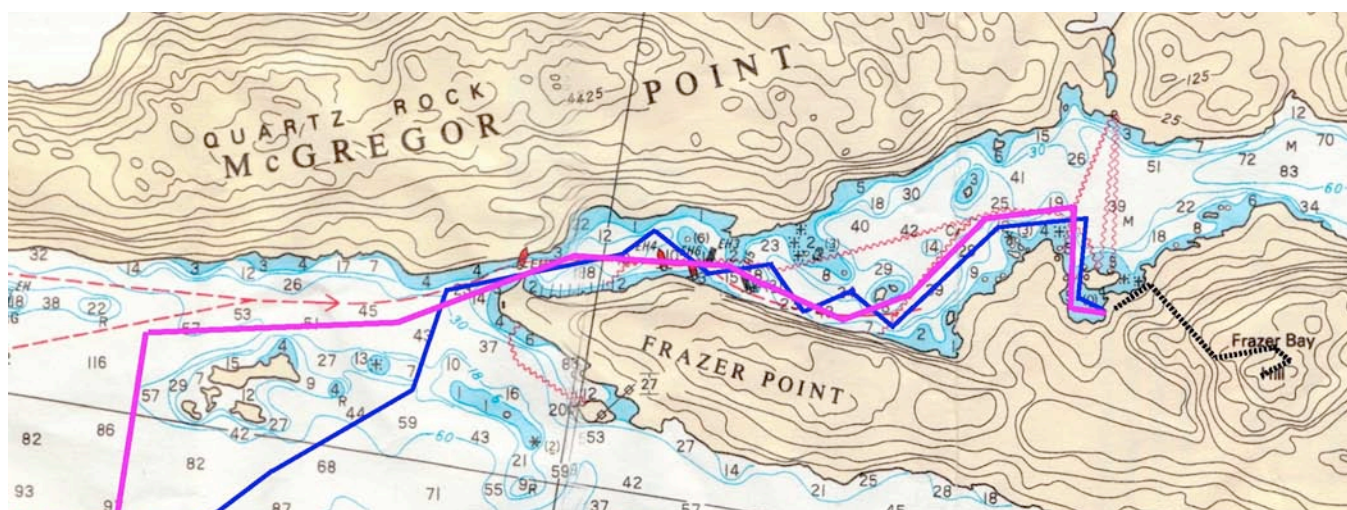


Day 3 Route - blue line is our morning's course to Mary Anne Cove, magenta line the afternoon's to Snug Harbour

Also in the distance we could make out two or three cottage structures near the entrance to Baie Fine, easy landmarks to steer toward, but I was very glad to have Jonathan's excellent navigation skills on this part of the cruise. There are some small islands south of McGregor Point, the largest with a spectacular modern cottage overlooking Frazer Bay, but just to the east of it is a cluster of treacherous rocks. With the winds building up, we could see waves breaking on several of those rocks close to the surface. By this time we were sailing on a broad reach at a fair clip and couldn't easily turn back if we got into trouble, but Jonathan assured me there was enough water and guided me safely through the danger zone.



Baie Fine is similar to a fiord, with high ridges lining the narrow channel, about 15 km. in length. There are some cottages, but they are few and far between. There are many shallows and rocks at the mouth of the bay requiring a sharp lookout by the navigator. Most boaters want to travel to the very end, where the white quartz hills of Killarney surround a pool of turquoise water. We didn't have the time to do this, and in any case it's not so easy to tack up the narrow waterway under sail. Our plan was to get to Mary Anne Cove, which is about 3 km. from the entrance to Baie Fine, stop for lunch and climb to the top of Frazer Bay Hill.

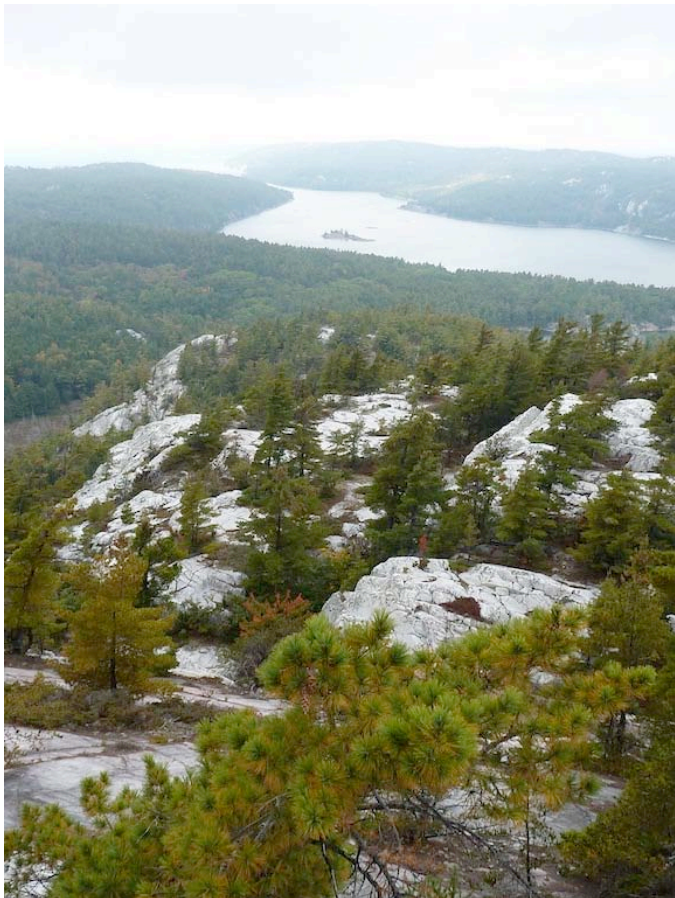




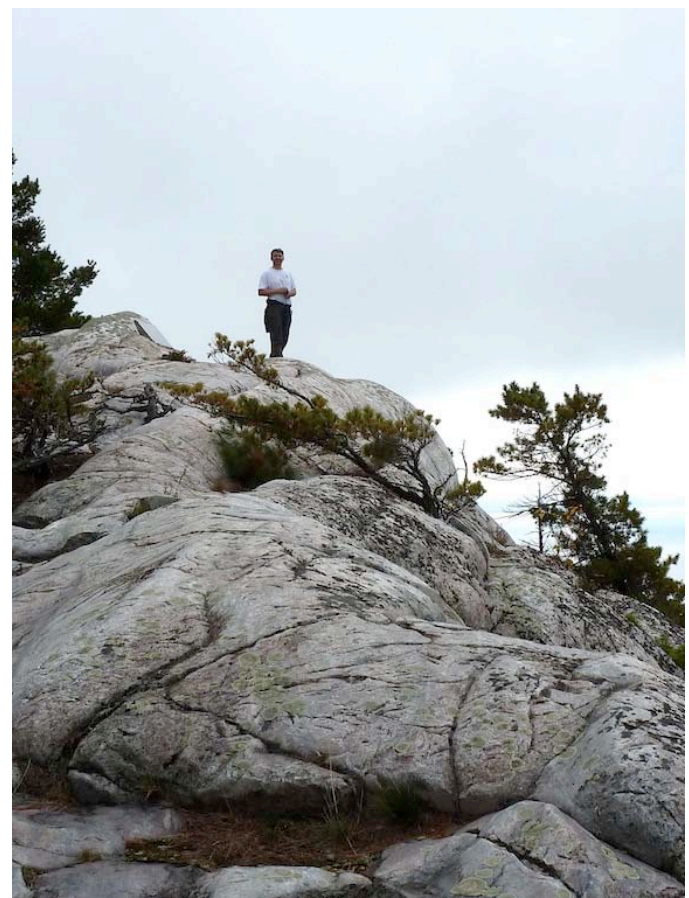
Peregrine beached at Mary Anne Cove



Our lunch spot in Mary Anne Cove



Looking west to the entrance of Baie Fine from the summit of the hill



Jonathan on Frazer Bay Hill

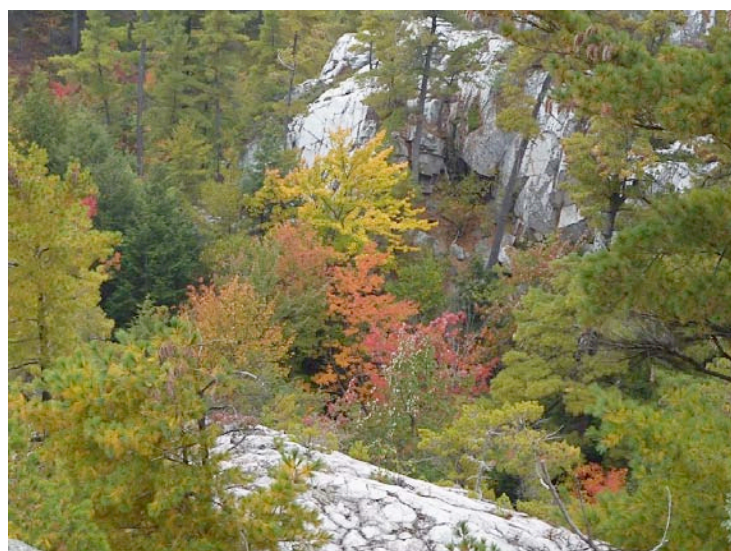
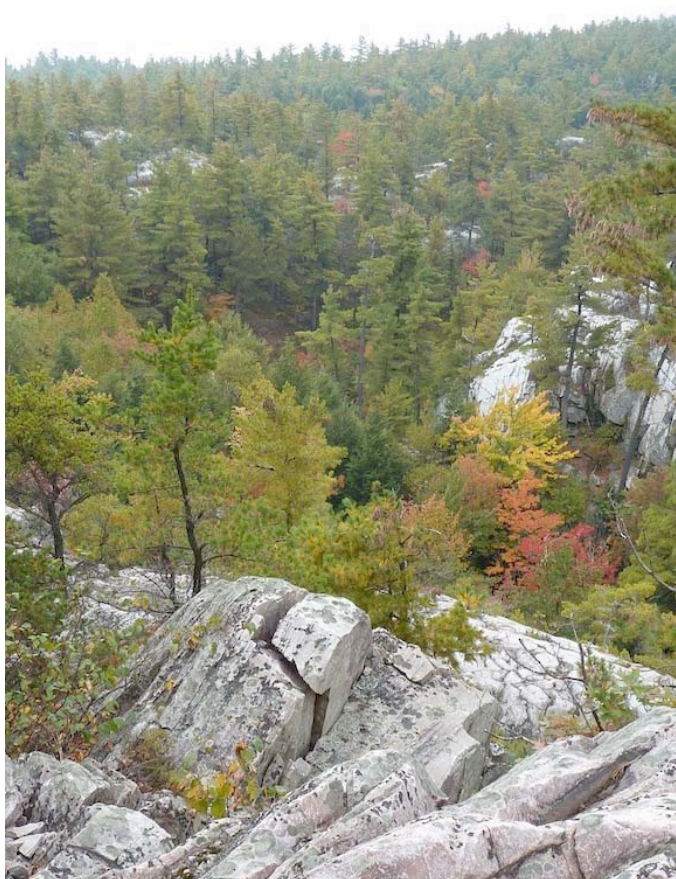
Frazer Bay Hill is one of the highest ridges in the area offering spectacular views over Frazer Bay to the south, and to the north over Baie Fine and beyond to McGregor Bay. To get to the summit there's a steep trail on a dried up creek bed with a fair amount of rock scrambling near the top. Though there was a haze in the air, the atmosphere was still bright enough for long distance views of the entire area. Brilliant flashes of scarlet from the turning maple trees dotted the landscape amongst the pines on this late September day.



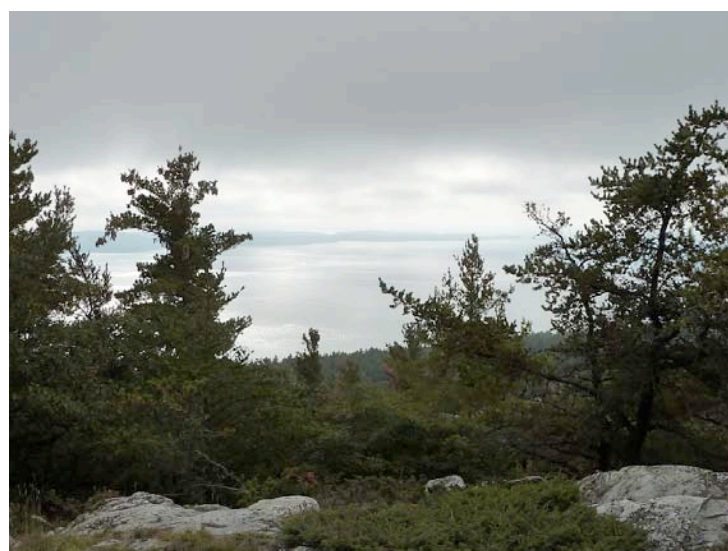
Baie Fine panorama looking north - McGregor Bay and the mainland in the distance



View to the west from the summit of Frazer Bay Hill - Frazer Point and Baie Fine entrance in the distance



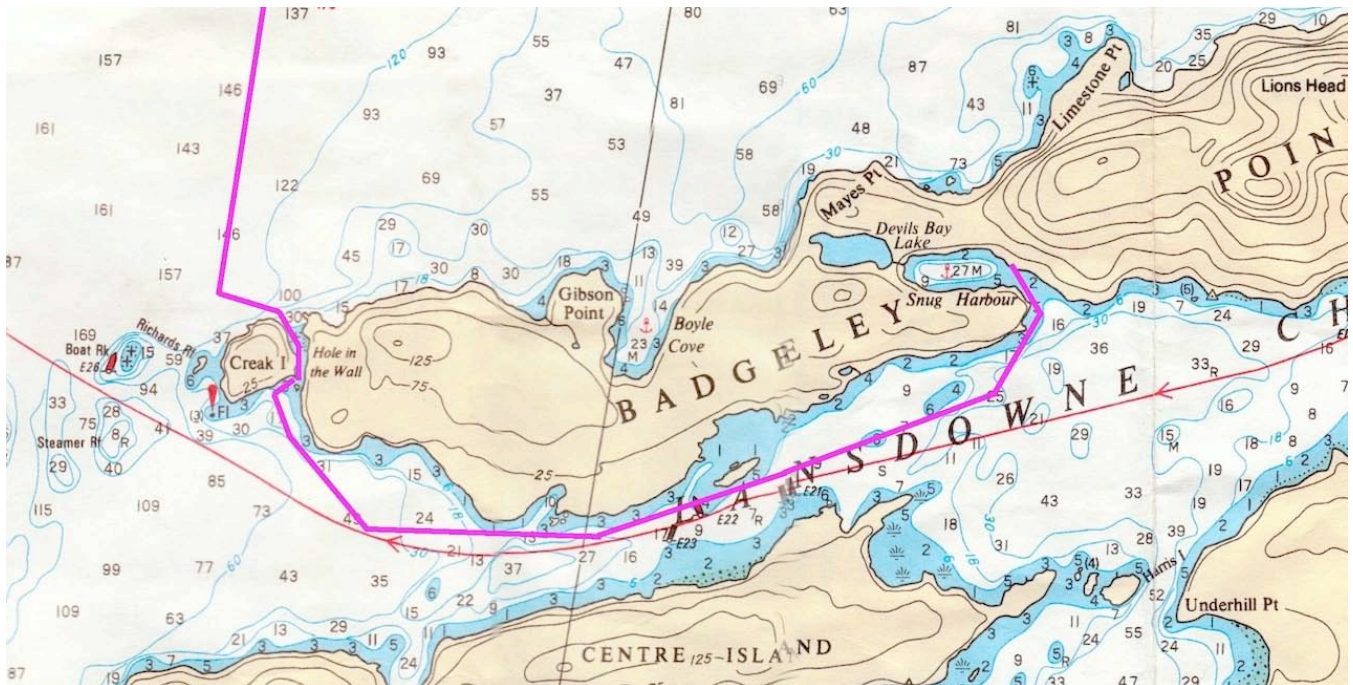
Impossible to see the water conditions in the picture to the right, but by 2 pm the wind was gusting to 15 - 20 knots from the southeast. It was going to be an exciting sail back to Snug Harbour!



View to the south over Frazer Bay - Badgeley Point in the distance

Actually at this point we hadn't settled on a camping spot for the evening; there were several other options for protected anchorages on the north shore of Badgeley Point. However, as Jonathan wanted to be back in Toronto by Sunday evening, we thought it best to find somewhere as close as possible to Killarney, so Snug Harbour was the logical choice.

As we set out from Mary Anne Cove an occasional massive gust coming off the hills caught us off guard and warned of the wind strength out in open water. When we reached the entrance of Baie Fine, the glare on the water ahead of us and because the surface was whipped up by the wind we couldn't make out the location of the rocks that we had previously navigated through. Playing it safe we opted for the longer but less dangerous route behind the island. In the sheltered lee of the island I had a moment of indecision about whether to put in a reef, but was quickly reminded of the conditions when we saw the waves out in Frazer Bay. We have to momentarily reef the main and instantly had the genoa reefed, thanks to the Aero Luffspar. This was the first time I'd tried the luffspar in such strong winds. With about 50% of the normal foresail area and a deeply reefed main, the boat was well balanced and felt comfortable and safe. I wish we had some photographs of this part of the cruise, as it was the most exhilarating sail on one long beat. However there was far too much spray to get out a camera – not to mention that my hands were full steering the boat.



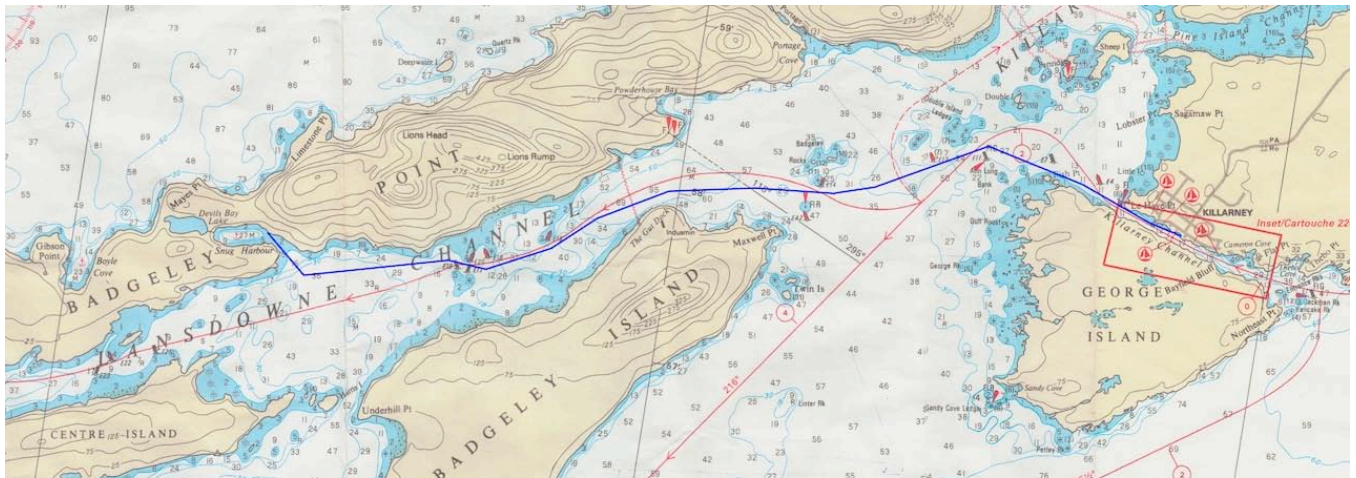
On the other shore of Frazer Bay we discovered the Hole in the Wall and took a chance on getting through to Lansdowne Channel. While the cruising guide stated that there was enough draft for small keelboats, the water levels of Georgian Bay are down and it certainly looked shallow at the entrance. Pretty soon this was confirmed when the centerboard hit bottom. We carried on with some difficulty, mainly because there was a strong current against us. Head to wind, now in the lee of Badgeley Point we had little motive power, and tacking constantly, we sometimes only gained a couple of metres with each tack. At the other end of Hole in the Wall there's a small island in the middle of the channel and frustrated with our lack of progress we chose to take the western side of the island to get to open water. Wrong side!! The bottom grounded on a rock, but we quickly pushed off with the paddle. I was glad the underside of the boat had a tough protective coating of epoxy graphite, and indeed when we hauled out the only evidence of this incident was a small scratch where we hit.

Once back in Lansdowne Channel, we only had a short distance to sail back to Snug Harbour where we set up camp again on the same beach. What a great day it had been.



Sunday September 29

We had been blessed with fantastic weather for the first three days, but now there was clearly a change in the works. Rain was forecast and though the breeze was still from the southeast, the strong winds of yesterday had blown over. After tea, coffee and breakfast we packed up and just as we pushed off from shore the rain started falling.



Sailing down the Lansdowne Channel in the drizzle seemed a bit of an anticlimax after the previous day, but at least it was new territory for us. Our entire circuit had only included a very short section of sailing the same waters. Our return to Killarney took us past the quarries of Badgeley Island and we were soon out in open water. Somewhat my surprise, Jonathan expressed delight in the heavy swells coming off Georgian Bay. With a southeast wind over the last few days and a 200 km. fetch to build, we were suddenly sailing in deep swells. This is what had reminded him of sailing in the English Channel off Plymouth, where he had grown up. A few local powerboats were present, confidently taking shortcuts close to the Badgeley Rocks where breakers were visibly crashing.

Finally on our approach to the Killarney Channel the drizzle changed to rain and as we cruised gently in the lee of George Island the wind died out completely. We ignominiously had to paddle the final few metres to the launch ramp, in full view of all the customers of the fish and chip stand.

I went to retrieve the car and trailer from Pitfield's store; we hauled out and unrigged the boat, then treated ourselves to a lunch of Herbert Fisheries' excellent fish and chips.

In retrospect, we could have easily spent three more days to get to and from the Benjamin Islands but given the unpredictable weather conditions at this time of year, and our busy schedules, I couldn't have asked for a better cruise.



Back at the Killarney Dock – fish and chip stand in the background



This is most of the gear we took on the cruise!