

Exploring Cape Cod and the Islands – Part IV

Previous sails from my home port of Lewis Bay have taken me east to Chatham, west to Falmouth, and southwest to Martha's Vineyard. Looking further afield, and for a bit more adventure, I decided to explore the Elizabeth Islands which stretch southwest along Buzzard's Bay. These are "big boat" waters where the "afternoon hurricane" whips up winds of 15 – 20 mph and builds up steep waves as it pushes up into the narrow entrance to the Cape Cod Canal. I had three or four days free and the weather gods were favorable so I would head where wind and tides allowed. The ultimate destination was Cuttyhunk Island, 15 miles southwest of Woods Hole. The Elizabeth Islands are sparsely populated but privately owned, making going ashore limited.

Day 1

Possum, Wayfarer 275, was launched out of West Falmouth harbor. Expecting winds of up to 15mph, I set up with a double reef and the moment I exited the harbor into Buzzard's Bay was immediately glad. Already at 10 am it was blowing whitecaps. I beat upwind following the coast to the Woods Hole channel and pulled ashore on Nonamesset Island across from the busy Woods Hole harbor to eat lunch and contemplate the rest of the day's course. With no safe anchorages on the west side of the islands until Cuttyhunk, I decided to cut through Woods Hole channel and go down Vineyard Sound where there would be a bit less wind and waves and several choices of stops for the night. Tacking back and forth between Naushon I. and Martha's Vineyard was exciting, wet, and exhausting. Menemsha Harbor on the southwest end of Martha's Vineyard seemed like a good place to spend the night. I approached the narrow harbor entrance on a screaming broad reach only to be stopped dead by the ebbing tide. Once inside the breakwater and "out of the storm", I could explore the area. Larsen's Fish Market on the dock served great clam chowder and steamers with seating on lobster traps overlooking the quaint harbor filled with both working and pleasure boats. I asked the dock boy for local knowledge, "Where can I anchor for the night?" "You can't, no anchoring allowed. You'll have to tie up here for \$3 a foot." \$45!! I took my chances in an out of the way cove that gave me the needed 6 inches. It was a beautiful, moonlit, warm night. No tent needed, just a bug net.

Day 2

The forecast for today was light easterly winds. That would do fine for making my way across Vineyard Sound to Cuttyhunk Island. Aware of the strong currents running between islands and in and out of harbors, I had strapped on the Honda 2hp. I was headed out while the current coming in to Menemsha harbor was running at 7 knots, a rushing river. I cranked up the Honda and headed to the channel. I hit the standing waves and went to crawl speed and then, much to my embarrassment, the motor died in front of dozens of jetty fishermen. Possum shot backward with the flow. Paddling to the shore, I realized the problem; I'd forgotten to open the breather valve on the gas cap. I made another go at the channel. Engine full bore, I hit the rush and truly could have crawled out of that channel faster. Finally out, I tied to the biggest mooring ball I'd ever seen and hoisted full sail to make for Quick's Hole, the cut between Nashawena and Pasque Islands. There was strong current running in the cut and I thought using the motor, but there was a 30 footer beating against it as well. "If he's not motoring, I'm not motoring. I'll take the challenge." Neck and neck we inched forward for about 45 minutes, eventually coming out into Buzzards Bay. After a brief stop on little Penikese Island to check out as a potential anchorage I headed west to Cuttyhunk.

Cuttyhunk, the end of the line! Beautiful harbor, friendly locals (all 18 of them), and a great (and free) anchorage. The harbormaster said no problem tying up for a while to explore the village and get some supper. "Let's start with half

dozen oysters, then a lobster roll to go". The anchorage was pleasant and protected. I slept like a baby rocked in a cradle.

Day 3

Today's forecast was the usual SW at 15 building to the "afternoon hurricane". Since the next day was predicted to be stormy, discretion called for heading home. I would make the downwind 22 mile run back to West Falmouth harbor. After one last stop at the pier for coffee and pastry it was time to head out. I started with a single reef, but after about an hour a second became necessary. I followed the shoreline enjoying the view of the islands and other boats. Has anyone else noticed that sailboats, big ones that is, are motoring more often than sailing? I find that odd.

It was a thrilling wing on wing sleigh ride with bursts of speed up to 9 knots. I thought I'd poke into Woods Hole but by then the following waves were 4-5 feet and the wind was 20. Time to go home!

The Elizabeth Islands definitely calls for a repeat visit, next time with a few other Wayfarers.



Possum loaded and ready for adventure



My six inches of water in Menemsha Harbor on Martha's Vineyard



Sunrise in Menemsha Harbor



Most of the Islands are treeless. Some are used for grazing.



Cuttyhunk Harbor



Village of Gosnold on Cuttyhunk Island



Oysters on the dock



Some kind of altar to the sea gods?



Anchored for the night in Cuttyhunk



Some classic yachts in these waters



Wing on wing for the ride home



Oops!



Weepecket Island



A fast ride home!



Wind and waves build in the "afternoon hurricane"



Martha's Vineyard Gay Head cliffs

