



The Bullship Log

Monthly Meeting

Thunder Bay Grille

7652 Potawatomi Trail, Rockford, IL

October 11, 2021 7:00PM

Cocktails at 6:30PM

Please join us on Monday night for the October RYC meeting.

Bring your sailing stories, end of season advice, storage and haul-out tips as we meet to discuss how to wrap up another challenging year for flotilla planning. Let's hope we see more movement than the unfortunate vessel pictured at right. Items on the agenda will might include a potential Holiday get together, Adopt-A-Road, Club Officer selection for 2022, and any ideas for ice-yachting, winter shows or warm weather vacations.

Additional old business from September meeting will expand on suggestions for growing membership and strengthening participation in events, focusing on family friendly activities to attract younger people to get involved in sailing.



Preliminary Good Old Boat article, contributed by Allen Penticoff

This story begins with a Good Old Boat assignment to do a review of a Sabre 38 Mk 1 in Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin. I've had the privilege of combining several sailing vacations upon my own trailerable sailboat with a writing mission. I get to learn about a new boat, meet nice sailors and explore a new area's waters. This was no different in that regard.

Our MacGregor 26D has been towed to many sailing destinations over the years since we purchased it, new, in 1989. It has proven its worth in providing miles of sailing and miles of smiles. Several tow vehicles have come and gone, but *Thebote* has hung in there with trouble free service. Even its ancient 6 horsepower Johnson Sailmaster has pushed it along all this time.

This was not *Thebote's* first voyage upon Sturgeon Bay. Thirty years ago we had a wonderful two-week cruise of Green Bay that started at the then new Sawyer Park in Sturgeon Bay. The park is still the best place to launch a trailerable sailboat. Unlike our previous cruise, this one was only a week and dedicated mostly to exploring Sturgeon Bay, the body of water and Sturgeon Bay, the city.

Sturgeon Bay is a large funnel-like indentation in Wisconsin's Door County Peninsula from the Green Bay side of Lake Michigan. In 1880 a 1.3 mile canal was created to connect the bay to the main body of Lake Michigan to save ships the often treacherous passage around the end of the peninsula at Death's Door. The city of Sturgeon Bay has been the gateway, literally, to the peninsula for it was the only place a bridge crossed over the river-like bay for many decades. Even now there are only three bridges, all drawbridges, in Sturgeon Bay. These bridges will factor significantly in our cruise experience.

We had been urged to launch at Skipper Bud's Quarterdeck Marina and park our trailer in their crowded trailer lot. It was quite windy and it did not feel safe to raise the mast, so we stayed aboard our boat on the trailer there until sunrise the next morning - a splendid sunrise it was. But the shallow ramp there was not well suited for our 26-foot sailboat (they have a travel lift - the usual means of launching boats there). Long story short, I recommend launching at Sawyer Park and making arrangements for keeping your tow vehicle and trailer there for the duration. It is an excellent facility with six wide-deep launch lanes and docks.

After squaring everything away, we motored out the bay northwest bound to meet up with the Sabre 38 owners and find a reserved transient slip at the Harbor Club Marina (part of Skipper Bud's) just past the old steel drawbridge. But first one must go through the new Oregon Street drawbridge to get there, then the very low original steel Michigan Street bridge that is the city's pride and joy. This is the case for either launch ramp. The two bridges are quite close to one another, but operate on alternating 30 minute openings - so after passing through the first - you mill about between them for 15 minutes until the next one opens (info on procedures/times is available at both marinas). They do not open on demand (there are exceptions for big ships and emergency response boats), but you must request an opening unless it is obvious someone else has already made the call. The third bridge much further east is high enough that we could pass under without it opening - but it looked close (there are clearance markers on the supports). We went under that when we motored through the canal to the Lake Michigan entrance to have a look at the Coast Guard station there - and to say we'd done it.

Staying in a slip at Harbor Club was very convenient to both sides of the city. Facilities for boaters are excellent and there is a large popular restaurant there as well. A downside was the constant traffic on the old steel bridge - but it is your path over to the city on the other side too, as well as a source of entertainment in itself. Just past the bridge on the west side is the excellent Door County Maritime Museum.

The west side was once the town of Sawyer, now a part of Sturgeon Bay, but you'll still see the Sawyer name on many locations. On the east side, northwest of the bridges, is where you will find the shipbuilding industry - home to Palmer Johnson. During World War II wooden minesweepers were built here and sent around the

world. Today there is a massive building to construct the latest fast littoral ships for the U.S. Navy. If you happen to be out on Green Bay while they are testing one, expect to be hit by a large wake (it did not happen to us, but we've heard tales).

Downtown (east) Sturgeon Bay is an easy walk from the marina. It is a tourist destination with all the usual touristy things to do. A lovely new library is over that way as well. We toured the area with bicycles that we had rented on the west side by the marina. Our bike ride included a scenic pedal along the western shoreline out to the beautiful Potawatomi State Park (where there is a boat ramp, but shallow waters preclude launching sailboats there). Along the way we passed Waterfont Mary's, a popular beach bar and grill/resort. We stopped there on the way back to take in the lively ambiance and have a morning beverage. This same place is quite obvious from the water - where there is limited dockage for visitors.

Our sailing actually started aboard the Sabre 38 when we went out to do the undersail portion of the review. We learned the lay of the land as to where the water was of good depth relative to the buoy markers and land reference points. Later on we were able to sail our own boat very close to the western shoreline clear back to the marina while avoiding a shoal called Dunlap Reef. When heading out toward Green Bay, once clear of the last shallow area, one can sail at will on long tacks between the high bluffs on either side of the bay. This area is popular with local sailors for a day sail. We used it that way as well.

At the mouth of Sturgeon Bay on the northeast side there is the George Pinney County Park with an excellent ramp and ample trailer parking. But it is quite exposed. If you wish to avoid all the bridge openings and get right out onto Green Bay, this may be the place to start - with adequate precaution. Door County has other excellent state park/ramp combinations to begin your cruise. Wisconsin requires a state park entrance fee for their ramp use, but no ramp fee. Get the annual pass, which is reasonable if staying more than a day.

Something I never quite got accustomed to was the actual north-south orientation of the bay. It always felt like it had an east-west axis. Because of this, the weather reports would say the wind was out of the south - we'd expect a beam reach, when in fact we had to run or beat. I think this is because the mental image is - "Green Bay west, Lake Michigan east," forgetting that the peninsula has a NE-SW orientation. In writing this report, I had to call the mayor's office to learn whether they refer to the cross bay sides of the city as north/south or east/west. The latter is their common reference. Trust your compass, not your mind's eye.

With a nice southerly breeze we departed Harbor Club Marina and headed out the bay, at first planning to overnight at the shallow bay called "Sawyer Harbor," at the mouth of Sturgeon Bay. However, some calculations showed we could make it to the first Green Bay harbor town, Egg Harbor, before running out of daylight. So off we went sailing along the west side of the Door County peninsula. There are shallows and islets that need to be navigated clear, so it is not a set it and forget it cruise if you are staying in close. The last few miles needed the help of the Johnson to make a timely arrival. We tied up to the municipal pier - and stayed there the entire night. Nobody ever came and asked for money. Not to say it is free, but nobody was around to pay. The downside of this convenience to shoreside facilities is that the wall is adjacent to a public parking area, where the public comes and goes at all hours. Nearby is excellent anchoring just offshore which may be the better choice. It would probably be worth renting a transient slip if you wished to do more than just a brief hop ashore. Landward you will find touristy things, a very well-stocked liquor department in an independent grocery as well as good restaurants and coffee shops. All quite walkable. An attractive park overlooks the marina from the bluff.

The following morning we had to wait for the fog to lift. This delayed us going out, and in going further north to Horseshoe Island, a favorite stop that was a bit beyond getting there and back in the days we had remaining. The weather forecast influenced a decision to more or less head back to Sturgeon Bay. Winds were out of the north, which would mean a slow beat to elsewhere, then a shift to southerly winds again would cause a slow beat back. With a noonish departure, we headed due west from Egg Harbor out to previously unvisited Green Island.

A speedy beam-reach out to the island found it to be uninhabited, densely forested and with rocky pebbles lining its southern beaches. There is a long underwater spit that extends out to a western mark. We passed in close on the deep north side, rounded the mark and approached from the south. Dropping our bow Delta anchor in the rocks and tossing a mushroom anchor ashore to pull us in, we stepped off the swim ladder onto a lovely beach of colorful smooth stones. We had the island to ourselves, so we hiked the deserted beach to the end of the spit, but did not explore inland where we were later told that there are ruins of an old lighthouse keeper's home. Today there is an automatic light at the eastern end. We enjoyed the short stay on the beach, sunning and relaxing. It would be a good spot for an extended stay, but we needed to move on.

We sailed back to Sawyer Harbor. Found a way in and anchored in its northeastern corner. Those with a deep fixed keel may need to give it a pass, but it does offer good protection in seven feet with good holding if you can find a path in. There were a lot of fishermen and the occasional skier using this bay.

The following day, we daysailed out of Sawyer Harbor to explore areas north and south of the mouth of Sturgeon Bay, then returned for the night to our previous anchorage. Late in the day we sailed and motored back to Harbor Club to obtain some ice. As we were tying up to the outermost pier the steel bridge suddenly opened and a Coast Guard rescue boat was seen approaching fast - with a big wake. I called to my wife, Ruth, to get on the dock and help fend us off the inevitable wallowing we were about to experience. It was all we could do to keep our boat under control as the wake hit (this happened again - to others after we were tucked inside at a slip the following day). With ice aboard and some shoreside facility use (private restrooms), we headed back to the calm quiet of Sawyer Harbor a few miles away for our last overnight anchorage.

Since I'd hemmed and hawed about staying at Harbor Club again - when we did finally decide to stay our last night in a slip there, we'd missed the opportunity for getting our former slip that was out towards the breakwater. Instead we were between a speed boat and the bridge. At least it was handy to use the facilities. As we had use of our Suburban sans trailer, we drove around town. We had a beer in an ancient bar (Wisconsin has a lot of them) then dinner in the exceedingly interesting Greystone Castle bar/grill that is decorated with dozens of mounted fish and game. We luckily found two seats at the crowded bar, but had to wait a long time for our order to arrive as it was a Friday night and the dining room was packed. The hour and a half wait was worth it for the excellent food (giant fried mushrooms and fish) and the experience. Greystone Castle is walking distance from the Harbor Club Marina on the west side.

On takeout morning I'd already fetched the trailer (which had been moved) and parked at Sawyer Park in advance - being a short walk back to the marina. We did have some time, but no wind, so we undertook a motoring tour through the low drawbridges, under the third and out the canal and back. I'm glad we did this, in part to say we'd been from one side to the other and to see the accomplishment of the canal and observe other marine resources along the way. Particularly if one was intending to stay and use Lake Michigan, one could moor at Skipper Bud's Quarterdeck Marina - which has excellent facilities and a huge boatyard. We discovered a couple of mooring fields too - a spot perhaps for our old steel cutter if I ever finish restoring it. There was a fair amount of charter fishing boat traffic in the canal, but there was room for all since it had been widened to 125-feet in 2016.

Pulling out at Sawyer Park we hit the road for home, five hours away.