

Cruising

-Bill Hoover, Editor

Down Bay 2000: Delmarva Circumnavigation – Part I

– Marc Cruder

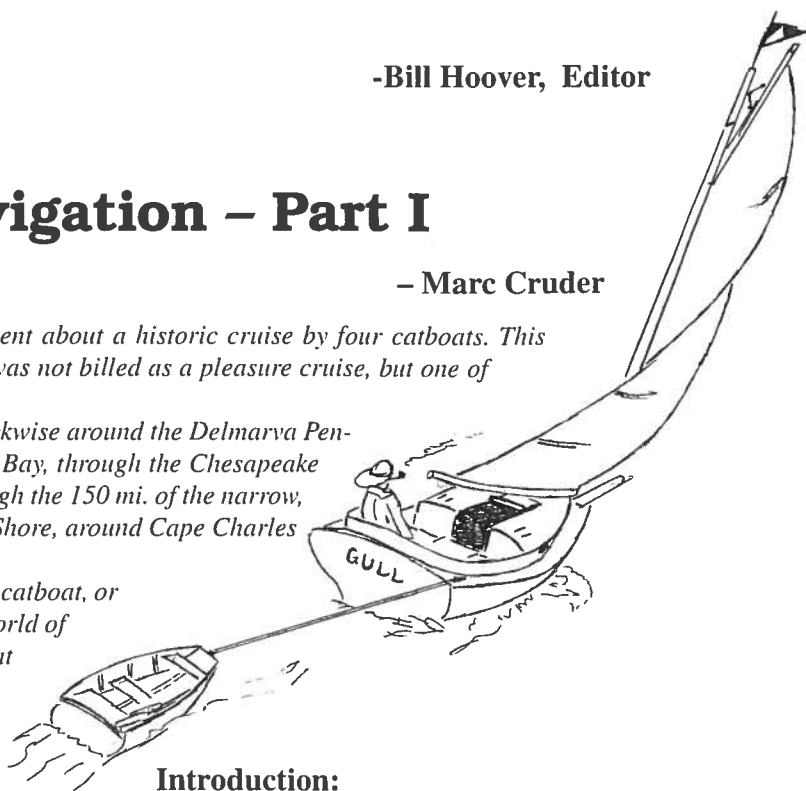
This edition of our Bulletin has the first installment about a historic cruise by four catboats. This cruise was a year in planning by Marc Cruder, for it was not billed as a pleasure cruise, but one of adventure and maybe, uncertainty.

Over 450 mi. of continuous sailing took them clockwise around the Delmarva Peninsula east of the Chesapeake Bay. They sailed up the Bay, through the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal, down Delaware Bay, down through the 150 mi. of the narrow, shallow channels of Delaware and Virginia's Eastern Shore, around Cape Charles and back up the Bay to home.

Much of this cruise was in inhospitable waters to a catboat, or any other sailboat. For the catboat cruiser there is a world of information and thought contained in this narrative that will be of use to both the weekender and the far cruiser. It shows that when prepared, we catboaters can go almost anywhere.

That all boats made the entire trip and returned in good shape and spirit is a great credit to Marc's planning and to the skill and perseverance of the four skippers.

(Dedicated to the late Washington Irving Tuttle and his Marshall 18 Dumpling, which inspired the current members of the Chesapeake Catboat Association to undertake this voyage anew.)

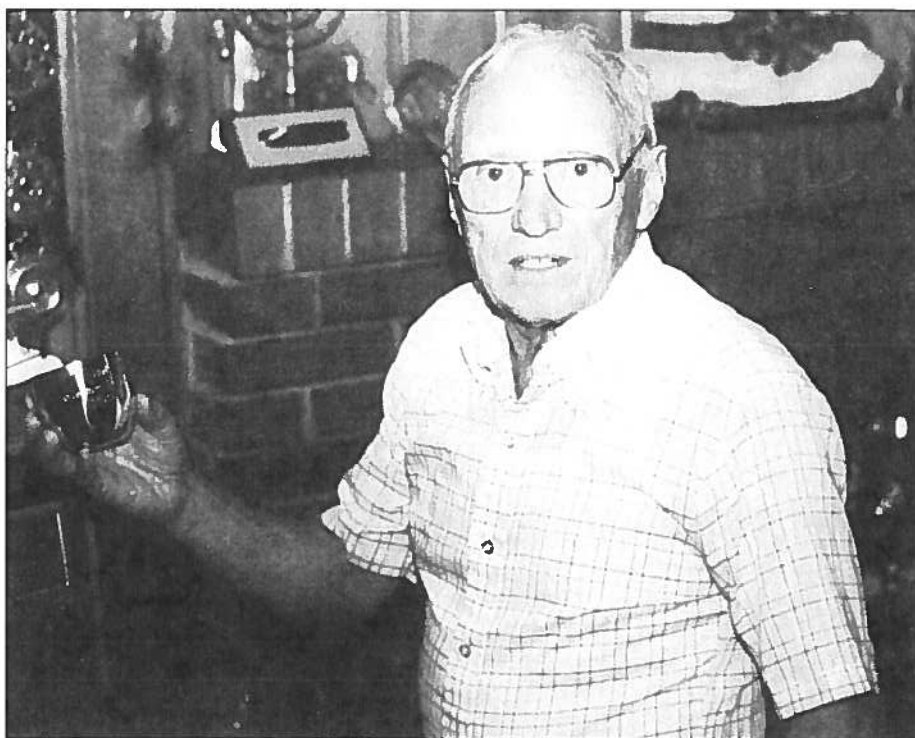


Introduction:

The Chesapeake Catboat Association (CCBA) has been making one week “down Bay” cruises for 10 years now, and we haven’t run out of things to see and places to go. To mark the decade of long cruises, I sensed we should do something special for the millennium year. Events in my personal and professional life began to weave a path several years ago that led to making this trip. Putting the pieces together, I had a firm feeling that fate had a hand in events around me and knew this was the next voyage of record for me and those choosing to follow.

Circumnavigation has been on my mind since I was kid and my father talked about Joshua Slocum and his solo circumnavigation of the globe. As a Coast Guard Academy cadet, I read that account and, reacting to the structured “lock down” I was in, dreamed of the freedom to do the same. As time went on, the impracticality of such an endeavor, coupled with going to sea in real ships, framed the scheme in less than idealistic terms. I knew enough to not dream about doing it in a small boat. When the requirements of everyday living took over, those dreams took a back seat.

Some 15 years later, my Coast Guard career took me to the Chesapeake Bay, where I met the members of the CCBA and learned the ways of the Bay. The club dates back to around 1969, and one of the icons when I joined in 1991 was Washington Irving Tuttle, known as “Tut.” Aside from being an active sailor in his younger years, word had it that



Washington Irving Tuttle was the first to circumnavigate the Delmarva by catboat.

Tut had solo sailed around the Delmarva peninsula over the course of a summer. The long cruises were just starting up under the able leadership of then Herreshoff 18 sailor George Pacharis, who made no bones about pushing the distance you could cover in a catboat in a week (See my first experience in *CBA Bulletin No. 97*). Tut's alleged voyage, passed by word of mouth, started me thinking circumnavigation again.

By 1998, I knew I'd be leaving my Coast Guard career to move on. CCBA member Dave Bleil finally sat down with Tut and got a verbal account, later published in the club's newsletter and currently on CCBA website <www.toad.net/~smarc>. The account is in Tut's words and discusses his inspiration as a book written by local writer and photographer Robert De Gast, who made a circumnavigation in 1975. I found a copy, considered our annual experience of Bay sailing, my own transits between Southern New Jersey and the Chesapeake (see *CBA Bulletin No. 97*, pg. 117), and looked at my Coast Guard retirement timeline to find year 2000 looking good for a variety of reasons. So after the spring '99 cruise, I announced my plans. It was an attainable goal because I could do it during my transition out of the Coast Guard and before starting my next career. The trip included the concept of circumnavigation, although on a much smaller scale than my first introduction to the concept, and Tut (via Robert De Gast) proved it could be done by catboat. All the elements were there and the die was cast.

When George Pacharis moved up to a Nonsuch 26, I eased into planning the long cruises in 1995, for what was usually a collection of smaller traditional catboats. I slowed the pace a little and increased participation beyond the hardcore group that started with George. Most were retired and could arrange the one-week block of time. The core group simply made the time. To my pleasant surprise, although I was prepared to make a solo trip (with kids), several members expressed interest, signed on and completed the trip. Others came for the first few days and saw us off at the C & D Canal before returning to the Bay to complete their own cruises.

General Planning:

1. The Basic Itinerary: Using De Gast's book *Western Wind, Eastern Shore*, Tut's notes, the U.S. Coast Pilot, an internet tide predictor and a variety of cruising guides, I started planning the trip. Key issues were miles/day, when to leave and where to stop.



Prior published circumnavigation accounts.

Distances per day were an average of 25 mi., which is a little on the long side, but geared to key locations where facilities could be found. Some of our stops were very remote, and if we got into trouble, I wanted to know help was available. Previous experience on the Delaware and a drive down to the mouths of the main rivers on that coast made me look to New Jersey, instead of the barren Delaware inlets. Coast Guard Stations along and inside the barrier islands charted a good path for us on the eastern side of the peninsula. The search for interesting places we had not visited before completed the picture on the Chesapeake Bay side, which included a nice stop on the Western Shore instead of familiar anchorages on the Eastern Shore. Just before the trip, I came across a recently published account of a circumnavigation by Howard "Bud" Schindler, who did it in 1987 at the age of 62. Bud's book, *Between 2 Bays and the Sea*, although newly published was dated, but generally reinforced the information we had. Doing it by catboat and with other catboat sailors alters a few base premises these previous authors could not possibly be aware of or account for in their own experiences. Mr. Schindler is a local Maryland resident who contacted me upon our return. He was not aware of Tut's previous circumnavigation and intrigued with CCBA having completed the trip. According to Schindler, he and De Gast are the only known published sailing circumnavigators, but I'm sure others have made the trip (maybe not by sailboat). Mr. Schindler is currently promoting his book locally.

2. Equipment and Lessons Learned: Preparation unique to this trip was not really considered as all participants were seasoned on CCBA long cruises. This one would just take an additional two weeks if all went well. Our one-week cruises have tested our mettle in the Bay before, so many practices are CCBA standards and the skippers all have been around enough to obviate the need to discuss minutiae on boat prep. There was only one exception – *Bugs*. As explained by *Gull's* Bill Hoover: "The big fear and item for pre-cruise discussion was the matter of the terrible biting green fly and the mosquito. In his Delmarva cruise account, Tut Tuttle mentioned being driven



Matthew sporting the "Hoover bug hat."

out to sea to escape the bugs. De Gast and Schindler made an effort to leave a month early to avoid miserable times in the Virginia Inside Passage (V.I.P.), so we took all this quite seriously. We had netting, including the famous hat/net I discovered at the Surplus Store, and plenty of bug juice on board all boats.”

Some in the group also live by not taking too many showers and maintaining a regular regime of cigar smoking, which they believe keeps the natural oil in their skin and makes them less desirable targets. And although green heads swarmed the boats at various times while underway, they didn't seem to be landing and biting. Then they would disappear. Mosquitoes were around now and again, but not enough to talk about. Matthew put the “Hoover Bug Hat” on the first day through the V.I.P. for a few hours, and *Gull* reported never rigging his netting. Long pants and loose-sleeved shirts provided the extra protection from our winged friends and from overexposure to the sun.

Some other items worth mentioning when anticipating a long cruise are collected below as CCBA standards based on our own long cruises or on other members years of cruising. Some will be familiar to experienced cruisers but are repeated here to give those contemplating leaving their local anchorage a “leg up.” These include:

VHF: Whether portable battery type or permanently installed, VHF is your connection to others around you as well as bridge tenders, commercial traffic and the Coast Guard. If in a group, regular comms are reassuring, particularly if visibility drops or someone in the group is having a problem. If you use a portable, bring extra batteries or have a way to charge what you've got. A good permanent installation with antenna can also get telephone comms via the marine operator, although cell phones are now the norm.

Weather Info: Small battery operated radios available from Radio Shack are great extended listening sessions. They also keep you from running down the VHF battery if all you have is a portable, which once a trip inadvertently gets left on and is dead when you need it. I found the “Weather Cube” to have better reception than my portable and much more expensive VHF.

Cell Phones: This is now getting faster and more reliable than the VHF, although I still recommend both, that way you have back up. Like the portable VHF, bring an extra or even high capacity battery, and have a way to charge onboard. The function “* CG” will get you the nearest Coast Guard Station, and is faster than using Channel 16.

Charts vs. Chartbooks: On the Chesapeake Bay we're spoiled because of the publication of fairly detailed chartbooks that, although carrying a disclaimer against being used for navigation, nonetheless are. For routine trips on the Bay, these are sufficient, but I always carry more than one, published from different sources. On trips into unfamiliar water NOAA charts or equivalent with corrections are recommended. Of course, electronic charts are all the rage, but we simple catboaters are used to charts and a magnetic compass, although one of our regular trailer sailors brought a hand held GPS, it is frowned upon by the traditionalist membership. After all, down here the locals have a saying: “If you ain't been lost, you ain't been nowhere.”

Multiple Anchors: Unless you are sure about your bottom and you don't expect weather, you need two anchors, even if they are the same type. Some carry a “lunch hook” for light duty, and then a larger anchor for overnight service. This is a topic that we've had a lot of discussion on, and none of it scientific. Anchors are a personal thing. Some prefer the traditional Yachtsmen; others a Bruce. I carry a folding Norwegian-made grapnel for almost all duty, but carry a suitable Danforth for long trips and soft bottoms. They all have their place...properly set. Conditions may necessitate different anchoring schemes, so always have proper ground tackle, with sufficient chain for weight and plenty of line for sufficient scope. “I'm Sorry” after you've dragged into somebody's boat just doesn't say enough, and besides, everyone in the anchorage will sleep better if they can avoid those emergencies on deck in the middle of the night without clothes on.



Marc and Matthew Cruder with new haircuts are ready to go.

Sufficient Engine: Unless all you are ever going to do is fall off the mooring and sail in a little cove, then it doesn't matter. However, if you are ever going to go anywhere seriously, then in many cases you should consider more than the minimum the manufacturer recommends, simply because you can't predict the situation you'll find yourself in during a long cruise. In this day and age, there is no reason to be stuck in a cove or creek or be blown onto a lee shore because you can't keep the boat moving against wind and sea. I can think of at least one situation during this cruise, where insufficient engine would have made us a permanent navigational mark for future cruisers. If you still opt for the small engine for whatever other consideration, and I know there are some traditionalists in the organization that like the challenge being at the mercy of the elements, then be sure your anchoring capability is up to speed. You better just hope you can deploy it in time and that it holds. Mother Nature is unforgiving to the ill prepared and could care less about profit margins and what the market says.

Extra Fuel: There should be enough fuel onboard to unhesitatingly run two full days of daylight or about 20 hrs. For the outboard sailors, that means a few extra cans. On long cruises, in addition to my 3 gal. container, which I use as a day tank, I usually carry two additional 5 gal. storage cans. On this

trip, I carried one more 5 gal. can on deck with a hose rigged, so I could switch tank to tank right in the cockpit. On the inboard side, *Gull's* two cycle Vire acted much like my Yachtwin.

Bill writes: "Burning 1/2 to 3/4 gal. per hour, depending on the power setting, we were never in the position of a fuel shortage. Most stops had fuel, and we all topped off at most opportunities. *Gull's* fixed main tank holds 10 gal. of pre-mixed gasoline. In addition, two 2 1/2 gal. portable gas containers are carried, constantly topping up the main tank from the two spares, and then filling them from the beach, seldom requiring more than a 5 gal. purchase."

Dinghies: Whether inflatable or hard, these are a necessity for several reasons. The first is to get ashore when there is no other way to do so. One of the members brought a dog on this trip. Owing to his own dinghy casualty early in the trip, he used one of the others to get the canine ashore. Secondly, we really used them in the V.I.P. shallows in order to run out anchors and kedge off. In a soft bottom that would sink you deep enough to not be able to walk, the dinghies kept us from getting stranded. Besides, the kids need something to play with once you get to that nice secluded cove. Lastly, of course, it is your lifeboat.

Provisioning and Meals: On this subject I will defer to Bill Hoover, who has consistently over the years proved to be the master. Here are his comments relative to this trip with my edits: "Strangely, I (Carolyn a big help) provisioned much like for a weekend cruise, only more so. I've cruised *Gull* so much that provisioning has been second nature. I have always eaten well on board.

I used one good-sized Coleman ice chest for the cold; the rest was in a large sea bag and under the port cockpit seat. All spare bottles and cans went under the starboard cockpit seat. You cannot run *Gull* out of storage space.

The only cold I brought were five frozen steaks (eaten the first five nights), two plastic crocks of butter, four Cracker Barrel cheeses, four packs of lunchmeat, and a quart of milk. I would replace drinks each night; usually a small can of V8, two ales and two or three Diet Pepsis. There was plenty of room for ice, and four 10 lb. blocks* fit nicely, with ice seldom a problem along the way.

*Ice frozen in cardboard milk cartons lasts a few days and then becomes a source of cold water. Remember blocks in any form last longer than cubes or chips.

Gull has a permanent 8 gal. fresh water tank going directly to the sink with a hand pump. This was full, and for spares, I had two, 2 gal. camp-type, tough, plastic water containers. Water was never a problem, though I used it sparingly, as usual, and filled my spare containers twice on the trip, emptying them into the main tank before filling. The main tank's sink pump arrangement is very efficient and allows for sparing and easy use of water.

On weekend cruises I always fix a nice buckwheat pancake or French toast breakfast, usually having another catboat's crew aboard to share. I had the ingredients on this trip, but decided two things different - cereal for breakfast, and no more brewing ground coffee (all time consuming), with the idea to

get up and get going. Milk for the cereal was fine with the quart in the icebox (replaced once on the trip) and I used powdered milk* when this ran out. We also carried small cans of condensed milk*, which are great for pancakes. A bunch of bananas (bought on the green side) lasted for days and was replaced only once on the trip.

* Non-refrigerated PARMALAT® is available in small containers at most grocery stores. These keep until you open them. Individual containers are perfect since you only use a little at a time anyway. They are the best tasting substitute I've found for the real thing.



The initial raft-up at Fairlee Creek.

Folgers Instant Crystals® were perfect for coffee, and water was boiled in just a minute or two on my fine Glowmaster® butane stove*. I used only a couple of butane cylinders on the cruise. How nice to have good coffee, quickly.

*This single burner stove is one of the best on the market for ease of use and BTU output. I have a double burner gravity feed (so no maintenance/safety issues) alcohol stove that works fine, but can't boil water like that Glowmaster®.

I had planned to make a sandwich * for lunch before setting out each day but did it only once due to the press of getting underway. We arose at 6:00 a.m. and were underway at 7:00 a.m. That was OK, for I usually ended up eating a chunk of cheese with a couple of pieces of lunchmeat with my ale. I seldom eat lunch at home, so this was little change. When you are single-handed, you do things much differently from when there is another hand, even a small one, to hold a course while you fix lunch or do other things.

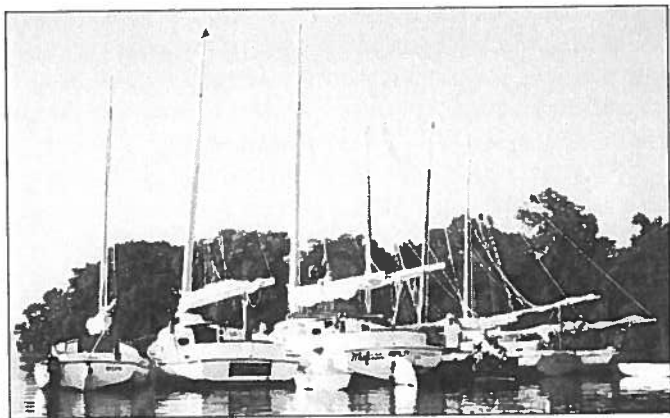
* Luncheon meats are the easiest thing for lunch. A good assortment package will last a good five days of lunches if you keep them cold after opening. Another option I've used is canned items like sardines and tuna fish. They don't need to be kept cold and are easy to open and eat when you are single-handed. For dinners, along with my five steaks*, I cooked stewed tomatoes and new potatoes. As my old stand-by, I had Lipton's dried, sauced and flavored pasta packages. They make a great dinner and Carolyn gave me small cans of chicken to add. This makes a hearty and easily stowed and fixed dinner, and extras can be saved in a Ziploc® on ice. The few nights I cooked this, I was so hungry, I ate it all.

*Although we didn't use it this trip, *Gull* has a nice barbeque grill that is hung from a homemade bracket to a stern cleat. It works great and shows that catboats can do what the big boats do. In the past others have brought meats marinating as we sailed, and as Bill did, used them for the first few nights out.

Other than to cool the drinks, the big reason for ice aboard was for those fine Myers's Rum and tonics* after a long hard day's sail. I had plenty on board to share, usually with Marc.

*This has become a CCBA staple. It is not as filling as beer and combats the dreaded scurvy when served with the requisite generous wedge of lime. On the subject of beer, because of preservatives, etc., few can be enjoyed unless chilled. One beer I have been drinking a long time, since my Cadet days, is Genesee Cream Ale. It tastes the same at room temperature as it does cold. When the ice runs low, you can still have a good tasting beer. Available in 30-pack cans and easily stowed in a cockpit locker, it's always in the inventory aboard *Sylph*.

The biggest food surprise of the trip was that we ate dinner ashore so often. I had counted on just a few dinner stops, but starting with Chesapeake City, we were usually able to tie up to the town bulkheads and go ashore to the local restaurant and see the place. As a result, we were in seafood heaven from Lewes on around to Slaughter Creek, where they "catch 'em." Crabs, oysters, clams; we did them in great numbers. Details to follow.



The Fairlee Creek gam.

Purpose and Motives

Robert De Gast was an artist with altruistic purpose. He has written several other books whose themes seek to capture life and scenes on the Bay before they disappear. His book is a black and white photo essay of a part of the world largely untouched by civilization's march of progress, with an extensive bibliography and well-researched historical tidbits about the areas he visited. Dutch born, he chose a Dutch-built, Sparkman & Stevens-designed keel/centerboard sloop in which he was comfortable; however, it was not necessarily the shallowest draft vessel (2 ft.-4 in. board up). His stops were only on the Eastern Shore, as that was his key plan. His departure time in May was geared to being ahead of the insect population on the lower Virginia Eastern Shore marshes.

Howard "Bud" Schindler was an inspired follower of Robert De Gast, so taken by the account in *Western Wind, Eastern Shore* that an exact retracing of De Gast's steps was his goal. His attention to this detail follows to choice of vessel (although with less engine usage), month of departure and stops along the way.

Enter catboaters, who are as eclectic as their vessels, and more than moderately independent of mind, as you can see from the cruising preparation suggestions. That said, the previous accounts were used as references but not absolute guides to make such a voyage. On top of that, we had Tut's version of things by catboat, so the thinking was immediately altered from the norm. Starting with the vessel, we knew it was a shallow passage and the catboat fit the bill. Our auxiliary power, with sufficient horsepower, meant we were not completely at the mercy of the wind. Case closed. Departure was keyed to our own experience on the Bay. The weather does not settle down until June, and it is also when the kids get out of school. I had two children to work into this scenario, a 7 and a 10 year old. So June it was, regardless of what the insect population might do to us later. The start date was further refined based on fair tide calculation in the C & D Canal and down the Delaware Bay. You can do without this and make it, but it is just tougher going and a waste of time and fuel. Coast Guard stations where current local knowledge and an occasional shower could be obtained dictated stops. Finally, circumnavigation would still be accomplished even when straying from the Eastern Shore in the interest of safety or new adventure.

Epilogue – Part I

With the above as background, a core group of four gaff-rigged cats continued on to make the circumnavigation after an initial raft up of six traditional catboats, one sharpie schooner and one Nonsuch. We had our ups and downs with the weather, but felt we were prepared and certainly committed. The cruise went only two days over the original plan for a total of 20 days, divided almost evenly into thirds in terms of sailing, power sailing, and powering. Two lay days were added, one for mechanical breakdown and repair, and one to wait on weather. Noelle was with me for the first three days, while Matthew was with me for 14 days out of the remaining 17 days. They both were encouraged to keep a log and each had a throwaway camera to take pictures of their own. Stay with us as the next installment takes us up and out of the Chesapeake Bay, down the Delaware Bay and through the Maryland portion of the Delmarva Peninsula, including the ocean passage.

