

**Anacortes to Friday Harbor
Via Cattle Pass
August 27, 2011**

It has been said that “man proposes; Mother Nature disposes.” Last Saturday she did so, in spades, with lots of fog. The experience was a lesson in having alternative plans to propose at the last minute.



The proposed route, suggested by a group led by a retired Army Green Beret, was to launch from Washington Park in Anacortes, ride the strong ebb current down Rosario Strait, round Iceberg Point during the slack period, catch the flood current to have some fun penetrating Cattle Pass, ride that current up the San Juan Channel, enjoy a nice lunch in Friday Harbor, and ride the (free) ferry back to Anacortes. Timing is crucial, for the distance was great and the idea was to let the currents do a lot of the work.



The fog postponed launching by two nearly fatal hours. When it did lift, we did take off, turning the southeastern corner of Lopez Island within the hour before the ebb turned to flood. The fog obscured many of the features of the southern coast, but what we did see well (e.g. Castle Island) promised some rugged beauty awaiting anybody making the trip in fair weather. From my perspective, the swells of the Strait of Juan de Fuca were much more interesting than the “mere” waves of Rosario Strait, while the views of the Olympic Mountains were spectacular, even with the last of the fog. As the charts show, this coast has lots of inlets and bays, good for both exploring and hiding from hostile weather or boat traffic, with plenty of nice beaches.

We did catch the flood currents and used them to get into Cattle Pass, get through Cattle Pass, and, so some extent, ride up the San Juan Channel. Folks going through Cattle Pass have several options: hugging the Lopez shore line offers the least challenge, hugging the San Juan coast offers more, taking it on in the center

is an adventurous challenge for those with sufficient backup facilities. We hugged the Lopez coastline, taking Deadman Island to port.

We were crossing over to San Juan Island after passing Rock Point, heading for Pear Point when we saw the orcas! There were easily a couple dozen of them, just easing themselves down the San Juan Channel (i.e., on the east side of San Juan Island!) Several of the leaders even jumped entirely out of the water, a trick I thought they only did at SeaWorld!



Orca, Nine o'Clock!

Susan Conrad, 2011

We hove to, and maybe applauded. They responded by getting a bit closer; we were almost within their splash zones! We could hear their noises: they were serenading us! (The jury is still out as to whether it was their version of “Oh! Susana” or “Yankee Doodle:” the words were, of course, in Orcaese, but the tune did sound familiar.)



Leaders of the Pod

Susan Conrad

Getting into Friday Harbor, we had a quick snack and hurriedly got aboard the ferry that happened to be getting back to Anacortes. Once on board, we settled into the ship's hospitality. All's well that ends well!



This was an adventure that needs to be repeated each year. The next year we should plan to use the strong currents early in the day, as before, but have a backup plan, perhaps to walk onto the ferry for a ride to either Lopez Island or Friday Harbor and paddle to an area campsite (e.g., Spenser Spit State Park or Griffin Bay water park.) The currents in Cattle Pass range from nearly non-existent to rather strong; working from a base camp would ease the question of timing quite a bit. If base camp were at Spenser Spit, folks could travel to Shark Reef park, on the southwestern corner of Lopez Island, for some very good visibility of the Pass in all of its glory. Base camp in the area would also allow day trips along what must be a beautiful southern coast of Lopez Island.

All Hands did enjoy the trip. We hacked the fog, accomplished the trip's distance, loved seeing the orcas at such close ranges, and the "drama" of getting ourselves aboard the ferry at the last minute! 'Lookin' forward to next year!

**Your 5'16" friend,
Ron Frederick**