

The Pirates' Cruise

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P/C Don Mercer, Vancouver Squadron, and his wife Susan had sailed their brand-new 40-foot North Pacific sedan trawler over to Nanaimo from False Creek, looking forward to taking part in the Nanaimo student cruise. They, and many other boaters, were disappointed when the cruise was cancelled due to the threat of heavy weather.

On Sunday morning, though, Susan suggested a harbour cruise, and she soon had John and Doreen Hinksman and my wife Annie and me, hastily jumping aboard.

The "harbour cruise" soon became "just a peek outside" to see what conditions were like. Don is very proud of his boat's handling, with its four-and-a-half foot displacement, and *Simbuvo* took the rather lumpy conditions beyond Protection Island in her stride. Nothing ventured, then, but to pull out the student cruise materials, much to John's delight, since he had spent some hours preparing for this back in Toronto, and to start work conning the way.

Down Northumberland Strait we motored, transiting Dodd Narrows against a stiff current. Conditions deteriorated in the Stuart Channel with heavy rain and increasing wave height. Our skipper concentrated on quartering the waves, and *Simbuvo* easily handled the rough water. As we made the turn into Ruxton Passage, we took the waves beam-on, while the crew leapt about, securing loose objects which threatened to become airborne. It was comforting to hear that *Simbuvo* will recover, theoretically, from a 105 degree roll.

We found smoother conditions in



Picture of the cove plaque and *Simbuvo* at the dinghy dock.

Pylades Channel. By now, the crew was feeling peckish, prompting the skipper to call for a lunch stop at Pirate's Cove on De Courcy Island. The Cove has a tricky entrance with a hidden reef, but a local cottager, evidently tired of pulling boaters off the hazard, had set up a private range. Mooring alongside a floating dinghy dock – don't do this in season – we explored the area, sought out the Pirate's Treasure Chest and sat back to enjoy Susan's delightful lunch of local mussels, and fried won tons.

The trickiest part of the cruise was yet to come: the passage through False Narrows, which appeared true to its name. Multiple ranges, ahead and astern, guided us along a meandering track amidst some serious reefs. Skipper Don, coolness personified, tweaked the autohelm and sailed

us through without incident. I rarely saw Don put his hands on the wheel.

Back in Nanaimo Harbour, Don wasn't finished with this cruise. I mean, a new boat, after all. He took us the length of the harbour, thus completing Susan's original intention.

The decision to cancel the student cruise was a wise one. Conditions in many areas would have been most unpleasant for smaller vessels with little displacement. As it was, Don and Susan sailed back to Vancouver the following day and experienced a very rough ride. But *Simbuvo* carried them safely to harbour. ■■■