

A Voyage of a Lifetime: Circumnavigating Cape Cod

by *Bob Kovach, NSYC Secretary*

Early this June, members of the NSYC completed a 500 nm voyage that fulfilled a dream of Rear Commodore Frank LoPresti. An accomplished sailor, Frank has often sailed to Provincetown, as many in our Club have done, by way of Block Island Sound, Buzzards Bay, and the Cape Cod Canal. But why not return "on the outside," around Cape Cod and back via Nantucket Shoals? The answer, demonstrated empirically when Frank attempted it twice before, was plain: heavy winds on the nose, boisterous seas, nearby shipping lanes and notorious fog, as well as shifting shoals. Prior to the Canal's operation this region was the graveyard of the North Atlantic, claiming a ship a week. Going outside is not a prudent option.

Still, the challenge of a Cape Cod circumnavigation was born in Frank's mind: to voyage around the Cape and accomplish what few dare to do. What about a circumnavigation in which the Cape was rounded FIRST, with a return via the Canal? Now the winds, at least, would be more favorable. As for the other dangers, the wide Atlantic would provide sea room for any necessary escape.

Frank confided his dream to me during the ride home from a Bridge meeting this spring. Would I be willing to take part in such an adventure? "Without doubt," I said, but could Nancy join us? "Of course," was the answer. Frank would recruit the remaining crew--we thought five would be ideal--and we would sail in early June. When matters settled, Past Commodore Warren Greenhouse had signed on and I knew we had an excellent group. We met our fifth crew member a few days before departure, but he had to drop out at the last moment. We would be a crew of four.

Thus it was that at 0900 on Sunday, 1 June, Frank's J-40 "Resolve," enormous quantities of gear and provisions having been crammed aboard, departed the Club's dock and headed out into the Sound in a 10-kt westerly. Our plan was to maintain a flexible schedule: anchor off Charles Is. for the night, perhaps, then arrive sometime late Monday at Block's Old Harbor and wait for a weather window before bravely setting out on Frank's planned course to go outside the Cape to Provincetown. Then, if all went well, we would return in leisurely fashion via the conventional Canal route, Block again, and Montauk, where Warren, Nancy and I would depart and Frank would resume sailing with his lovely wife Jodi.

Not long after passing Execution we set a spinnaker and added two knots to our boat speed. Auspiciously, we found ourselves in perfect synchrony. If the predicted winds held, we could sail all night, and on favorable currents reach the Race to hitch a ride on an ebb tide and reach Block by sunlight; no need to stop before Block. Setting up four-hour watches, we settled into a well-executed run that had us docked in Old Harbor at 0600--the only pleasure boat in the early season harbor.

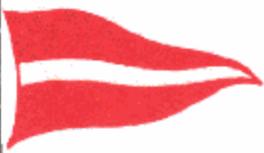
Breakfast at Ernie's, a walk to the Spring House and across to view the Great Salt Pond, then a weather check on our hand-held. Excellent conditions for the next two days, said NOAA, with worsening weather to follow. We looked at each other, decided to forego any further exploration, raced back to "Resolve," and were soon clear of the harbor heading for an Atlantic rendezvous at a convergence zone ESE out 50 nm, the first of a series of waypoints that we strung together like pearls on our chart.

Bright, clear blue skies; crisp, clean, bracing air; 15-kt. breezes perfect for broad reaching; sea-kindly motion, full off-watch rest; excellent meals--this was not the harrowing journey one might have expected as we encountered no fog or rain, saw very little shipping, maintained safe depth beneath our keel--in short, experienced two glorious days and a star-filled night of sailing a course that tight roped us off the shoals and just outside the shipping lanes. Such sailing in this location happens with the same regularity as tranquil days off Cape Horn.

All was glorious until we rounded the tip of the Cape on our approach to P-town. As darkness approached, so too did dirty weather and breaking seas caused by a shallowing seabed, conflicting tides, and growing winds--fair weather was over. We followed a trawler around the breakwater into P-town and were quietly docked by 2100 just as the skies were opening up. We were safe and secure and had reached our prime destination in record time--far earlier than we had expected.

The rest of the trip goes fast: days of P-town rain but lots of seafood; a boisterous sail across Cape Cod Bay; Sandwich, Mass with tons of lobsters aboard and Frank's family members joining in; transiting the Canal and a night at Cuttyhunk; across Buzzards Bay back to Block, only to be hit by a storm as we approached the island. Making it safe into Old Harbor once again, then a wondrous sail around Block to the Pond and anchorage in stifling heat ashore. Dinner at The Oar and steamers aboard and mussels at Montauk.





Unforgettable moments include: the main halyard slipping from my hand in the rough seas approaching P-town, it swinging in a wide arc off to port, my heart in my throat afraid we'd lose it up the mast, but Frank expertly turning the boat so that it swung back into my grasp--whew!; the best steamed possible--freshly caught and perfectly made in "Resolve's" galley; Nancy's helming for three hours in five-foot seas on Cape Cod Bay; Warren's gourmet creations--The man can take a dandelion and make a scrumptious meal out of it!--as well as his fresh-caught Bluefish--AND his fresh-caught 30' yacht and government buoy!; Neptune's revenge as we crossed our track approaching Block as the 52-kt. gale bore down on us and we made it safely behind the High Speed Ferry into Old Harbor; and smiling Jodi taking our congratulatory photo at Montauk. A happy ship and a happy voyage--and Frank's dream fulfilled.

But, dear Club member, a word of warning. Do not try such a passage without propitiating the gods. You only get this kind of weather around the Cape by reciting the proper incantations, in their proper order. We share tales of the voyage with you but ...the rest remains a secret.



At the mast



Under the bridge

PICTURES FROM OUR VOYAGE



Sailors on the bow



At dockside





At the helm



Victorian ideal



Lunch in the cockpit



Resolve in repose

