

SMALL BOAT CRUISING

By George Hone



EXPLORE NEW CRUISING GROUNDS WITH MINIMUM EXPENSE AND HASSLE. GEORGE HONE EXPLAINS SOME OF THE ADVANTAGES OF GOING SMALL

BACK IN THE JUNE 2012 ISSUE of *Pacific Yachting* I wrote an article called “Trailer Cruising 101” that addressed some of the specifics of trailering a small cruising boat. The article focused on the “hows” and “what to dos” of selecting a boat, picking a tow vehicle, loading the boat onto the trailer, towing it down the highway and launching it.

In this article I’d like to address some of the advantages of a cruising a small vessel from a boating perspective.

Some Background In the last three seasons, my partner and I have spent a total of 11 months trailering our C Dory 22 up and down the West Coast of the United States and Canada. We have

cruised extensively here in our Gulf Islands spending six weeks wandering about nearby. We spent two months this summer in the Desolation Sound and Sunshine Coast areas, and trailered up to Port McNeill two summers back for a two-week exploration of the Broughton Archipelago.

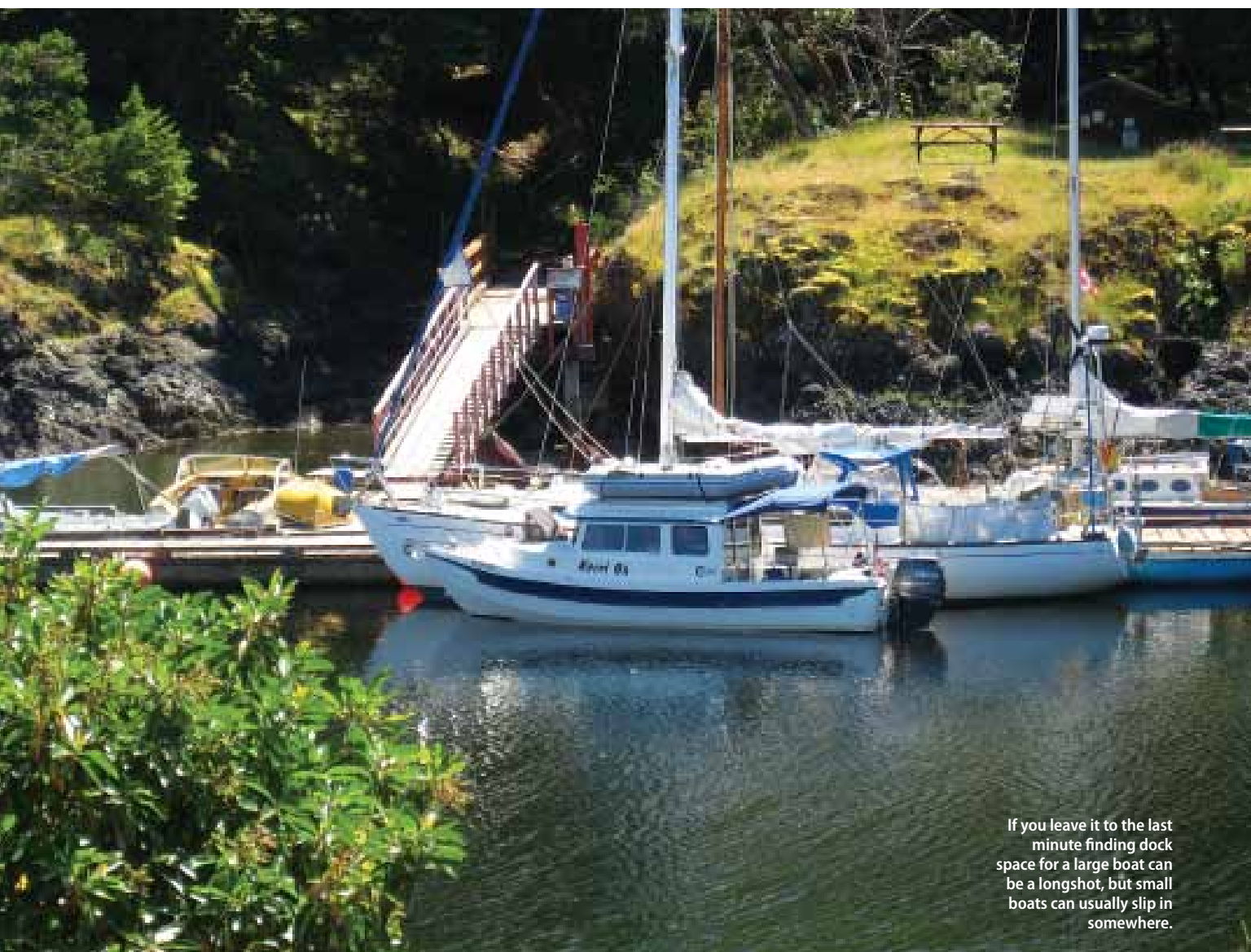
We’ve towed down the coast highway of Washington and Oregon, visited Rio Vista in the California Delta and gone as far south as Lake Powell in Arizona. We also spent five weeks in Coronado (across the bridge from San Diego) for the Christmas season.

What we do is known on the road as “boater homing,” where in addition to using the boat for cruising, we treat the boat like a fifth wheel and go into state

parks, RV parks or even boondocking in small towns.

A Good Way to Travel The reasons that a trailerable, liveaboard cruising boat makes sense for me are many. The primary reason is portability—there is a big world out there. A trailerable boat allows me to follow the seasons. A larger boat moored in the waters of B.C. gets to be cruised repetitively in the same waters unless one is fortunate enough and the boat is capable of cruising for extended periods of time. Compared to a road vehicle, a large boat just isn’t very portable.

I tow my small boat with a half-ton truck, and since the boat’s length and beam are within allowable limits, no



If you leave it to the last minute finding dock space for a large boat can be a longshot, but small boats can usually slip in somewhere.

special permits are required and an ordinary tandem axle trailer is adequate. These allowable limits vary by province and by state, with beam being the deciding factor, but a boat with a width of less than 8.5 feet should not require a permit.

Once you get to where you want to cruise, any decent launch ramp is fine. We hauled once on the Colorado River north of Yuma, Arizona, on a makeshift packed dirt ramp, as the low water had left the normal ramp high and dry.

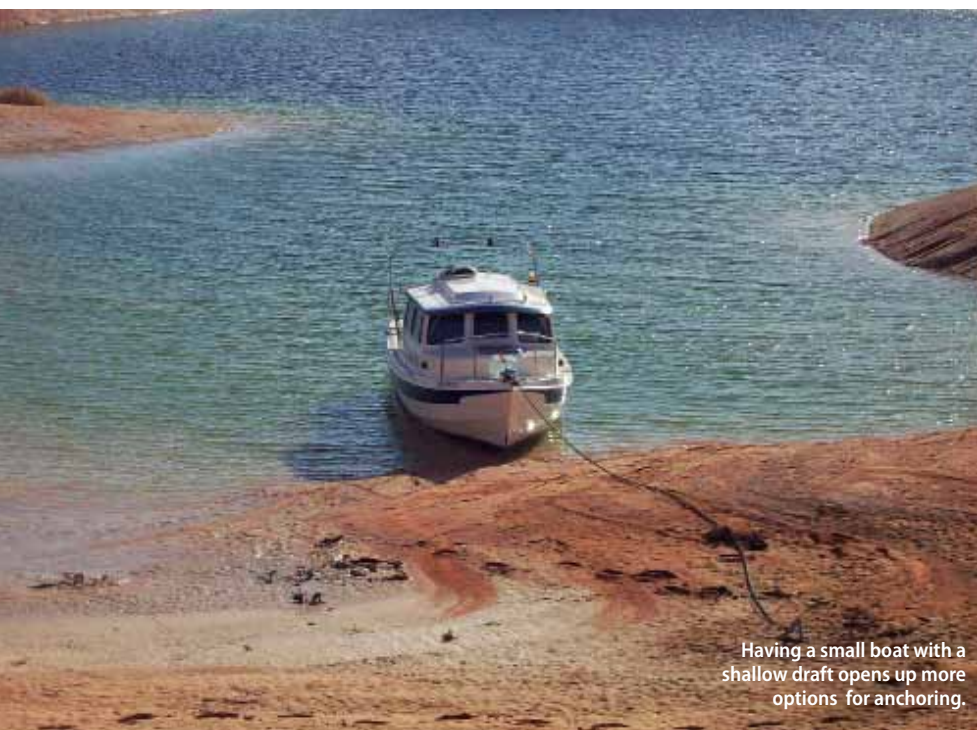
Picking the Right Boat The most important requirement I had for the various types of water I would be exploring was trailerability, the boat must be able to be towed without permits through all of Canada and U.S. Next on the list was a snug

pilothouse, as I have spent enough time in open cockpit sailboats and the ability to stay dry was a must. Then came a comfortable bunk for two, a small galley area and a raised dinette. The cockpit needed to seat two for sundowners comfortably. More visitors would need to perch on whatever was handy. A shallow draft less than two feet was desirable, as was a simplicity of systems.

Any vessel I own needs to have a personality, and for me the C Dory has personality in spades. This is very much a personal thing, so find something that speaks to you. Many visitors remark on how “cute” it is. That’s fine I am not offended. It is a cute boat. It is imminently capable also. I found the C Dory able to do all I have asked of it in the three years I have owned it.

Simplifying Systems Another good thing about small boats is they tend to have very simple systems. I have aboard a GPS and radio, two VHF’s and compass and an iPad with GPS backup, but the rest of the boat is simplicity itself. I use outboard power for ease of maintenance, and I can just take it to a mechanic’s shop and drop it off if anything goes wrong.

The boat has robust hydraulic steering, and one faucet with cold pressure water. Hot water is available by turning on the butane stove to heat it. There is no TV unless we want to run a DVD on the laptop. There are no bow or stern thrusters, no wifi or email antennas, no onboard shower, no generator, no built-in head with associated holding tank plumbing and issues. In place of an enclosed ▶



Having a small boat with a shallow draft opens up more options for anchoring.

Open up your Cruising Options A small, simple boat can get you into all the same places the bigger boat can get to, and in a lot of cases it'll get you places the big boats can't.

We get into places that look interesting, and many times are not accessible at low tide. We have even paddled our way into some spots. Sure we get tossed a bit more if the weather is rough but as we notice, we cross open water in about the same time as bigger boats. Few people cross the Strait of Georgia when the weather channel is calling for small craft or gale warnings. We all seem to cross when the wind goes light. So with a little common sense, a big boat isn't necessary for safety.

Having a shallow draft also opens up anchoring options, and a short length overall will keep costs down when you pay for mooring. Also, in the summer around Desolation Sound or the Gulf Islands marinas often get filled up early in



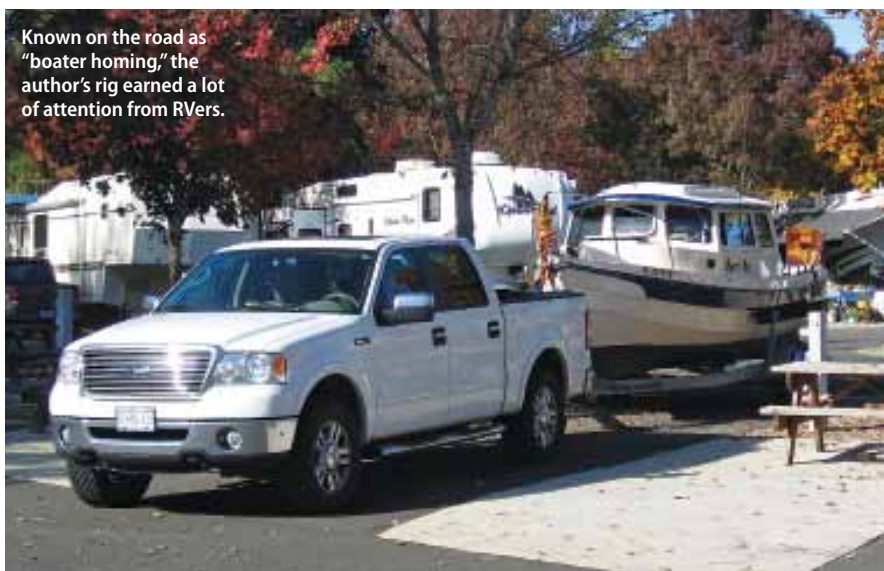
head, we have a porta potty in the cockpit, which we pump out at the appropriate marinas.

Simple power requirements mean a two-battery system, with one house battery and one start battery, and a small solar panel to charge them while we are on the hook. The batteries are charged while underway by the outboard, and when we take a slip overnight, by shore power.

Making do with Less We mostly cruise marine parks, state parks and provincial parks where facilities are usually quite good, or we stay in RV parks on the road, or take slips once in a while at a marina. For us the lack of onboard facilities is not a worry.

Not only does having simple systems offer you the freedom from breakdowns, but also the freedom from the inconvenience of undersized and hard-to-use facilities. Many fellow cruisers point out their enclosed heads with hot water

Known on the road as "boater homing," the author's rig earned a lot of attention from RVers.



WHEN I REPLY WE'RE A 22-FOOT POWER VESSEL, I'M USUALLY TOLD THAT THEY CAN FIT ME IN. MANY TIMES WE GET A PRIMO SPACE NEAR THE RAMP.

available, but it may only be available if plugged into shore power. If you do shower in there, the whole compartment generally needs to be washed down, with water all over the toilet and counter. We see these same folks going ashore for showers. So for some, having a separate enclosure to shower is just wasted space that forces you into a bigger boat.

the day. If you have a 40-footer you will probably need reservations. This negates the chance for spontaneity or serendipity to enter your cruise.

When I call a marina late in the afternoon regarding a slip, I often get told, "sorry we're full. Uh, how big are you?" When I reply we're a 22-foot power vessel, I'm usually told that they can fit me in. Many times we get a primo space near the ramp.

Keeping Costs Managable The stress and strain of dealing with a bigger boat is only one issue. Money is required to keep it going. In most cases a lot of money. Which for many of us means you need to keep working to keep boating.

By going small you can literally cut years off the time it'll take you to be able

to cruise longer than the week or two you have now. We met people this summer trying "to do" Desolation Sound in a week out of Vancouver! You may "do" Desolation but you haven't experienced it. You could spend a week in Pender Harbour. We did. You could spend a week in Gorge Harbour or Heriot Bay; we did that too. When staying at anchor we are generally limited by ice in the cooler and the need for fresh groceries.

One of the other things I appreciate is when it's time to refuel. Getting three to six miles per gallon, we generally cruise on \$100 to \$150 a week for gas. This past summer I was refueling behind a 35-footer that took \$575, when I overheard, "Is that it honey? We can finish the trip on that?" "Uh no sweetie, a few days more" "Oh..." I think the conversation continued later on.

Fuel is one of the bigger expenses on many boats and I feel if the fuel burn impacts your happiness quotient, or your partner's well being, it is too high a price. Many of us go cruising to experience nature and wilderness, and to have adventures that in many cases our modern life insulates us from. By having a boat that is luxurious, it almost appears that folks are attempting to tame the experience, by bringing their condo along with them.

The Secret Weapon The secret weapon on a trailerable boat that is overlooked by a lot of people is the ability to drive the vessel to wherever you want to cruise. Let's say you have a week available in the summer and you want to go to Desolation Sound. You could move the boat via truck and ferry on a prior weekend, arrange either moorage or land storage, and return later for your cruise.

Leaving your boat in storage is possible at many great cruising locations around the coast as well as lakes inland. We had a friend in San Diego take our trailer to his house to store while we cruised the area. We recently wanted to attend the C Dory rendezvous in Sidney at a time when the boat was in for maintenance. Time was tight so we couldn't get to the event from Nanaimo by water. However, it was simple to get the boat and trailer down the island to Sidney, launch at a local ramp and enjoy the event. On the return to Nanaimo we stopped in Cowichan Bay at the roadside for an overnight camp. It was a beautiful evening and a quiet road so it was very pleasant.

Having the ability to stop the boat at a campsite and use it as an RV is reason

enough to get a trailerable boat. We now have "RV friends" we've met along the road, and we've found many of the same issues in RVs as we see in boats. In conversation with retired or long-term RV owners, overwhelmingly they recalled with affection their earlier and smaller units. One guy on his second million-dollar Prevost coach said, "you know nice as this is, I miss my tent trailer. I had more fun, I have a leak in my transmission that they tell me will cost \$8,000 to get at and fix." Wow. This was in Tucson, Arizona, and we were parked next door. The whole idea of dragging a boat around was new to this guy, but he kind of liked the idea.

I feel that more and more trailer cruis-

ing is going to become the norm as many people realize the costs and stresses of keeping and running a boat bigger than they really need.

So What's Next We're leaning toward a grand circle of lakes and rivers from Washington, Idaho and B.C. for next summer. Have you any idea of the incredible number of lakes and rivers we have on this continent? We will run out of years available before exhausting the waters to explore.

I like what Henry David Thoreau said many years ago in his book *Walden*. "Simplify, simplify." He was rich by making his wants few. I feel that this is the key to success in many endeavors. ☛

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