

Up the Coast to Monterey

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Summary of Trip from Dana Point to Monterey, June 3 to June 10, 2001

Sunday, June 3: We left Dana Point at about 11 am after a month of general warranty work, repairs and modifications to *Four Seasons*. We arrived at The Isthmus, Catalina Island, in late afternoon after an uneventful passage, but lots of returning holiday traffic.

Monday, June 4: After a somewhat rolly night, we departed at 5 am for Bechers Bay, on Santa Rosa Island, Southwest of Santa Barbara. We had 25-30 knot winds in the afternoon, and upon arriving, the winds in the anchorage increased to around 40 knots with gusts to 45. This is an anchorage notorious for its high winds at night. We got a good anchor hold; in fact, we didn't move an inch all night even though the winds continued to scream until around 2 am.

Tuesday, June 5: When we went to raise anchor the next morning, we found out why we hadn't moved an inch. The windlass groaned and struggled and finally raised the Bruce anchor with a rock about 20 inches in diameter, almost perfectly spherical, nestled in the flukes. It fit like a dumpling in a ladle. We managed to get a line around the anchor shank, secure it to the cleat and let out the chain, tipping the rock back to where it belonged. No wonder we didn't move all night. A quick calculation, based on lots of estimates, gives the weight at about 1500 to 2000 lbs plus the weight of the anchor (110 lbs) and the chain (30 feet of 3/8 steel) and about 100 lbs of soggy, wet kelp. We have a 24 volt Maxwell windlass rated at 3500 lbs and it was just about "Maxed" out.

We expected that the trip around Point Conception and Point Arguello would be a little rough, and it was, but nothing like what we found just north of Point Arguello. We had 12-15 foot seas, 35 to 40 knot sustained winds with gusts to 45, and very confused, steep waves. Made for a very uncomfortable ride for the last 5 hours until we got into Port San Luis. Our speed dropped from 7.5 to 5.6 knots. From Point Sal to Port San Luis, we turned a little more north to quarter the seas, and while it reduced the pitching, it increased the roll and yaw. The speed picked up marginally but we were taking green water over the top of the pilot house every so often. The good part is, except for the salt, the boat is really clean! Making short passages north, never more than 85 miles in a day like we're doing is a benefit, since you know whatever nasty stuff you're in is going to end when you get to the next anchorage, and in a fairly predictable time. Not like the Baja where once you leave an anchorage, you might be committed for two or three days.

Wednesday and Thursday, June 6 and 7: Port San Luis is a delight. It is still blowing here in the anchorage, about 24 knots this afternoon, but it is not rolly or bouncy at all and it is warm. An unexpected treat is the schools of Dolphin that have come in to feed on the bait fish. They come right up to the back of the boat in pairs or threes, and we've seen some with very small calves right alongside like they were glued to their mama. There are otters, sea lions and seals as

well, a veritable Marine World right on our doorstep. There are also some very “sticky” flies, which are not so delightful, but Oh Well.

So here we sit, waiting for a weather window to go on north. Boats from both directions have told us it is still miserable out there, so we will wait it out. We have fond memories of Port San Luis having spent 9 days here in the fall of 1999 getting the transmission of the Marine Trader fixed. During that time, we ate at the Fat Cats restaurant nearly every day, and so we went in to Fat Cats for lunch this afternoon. Still the same. Huge amounts of food and very good.

Friday, June 8: We left Port San Luis at 3 in the morning, along with a sailboat, *OZ* which was headed South. We experienced moderate winds and seas, but they were building by the time we arrived at San Simeon at 9 AM. Around noon we heard the 57’ Nordhavn *Evrik* on VHF talking to a Southbound sailboat about the heavy seas. *Evrik* had left Coho anchorage at Point Conception that morning for San Simeon. They were just off Morro Bay and estimating 3 hours to go when we talked to them, but were already in heavy seas and getting worse, to the extent they were forced to slow down to 3.5 knots. 5 hours later, they arrived, exhausted.

Saturday, June 9: After consulting our weather router, Walt Hack, of Ocean Marine Nav, Inc, listening to NOAA Weather Radio, getting three weather faxes, and using Dial-A-Buoy for the latest buoy information, as well as contacting Dave Tamblyn in Alameda (thanks, Dave) for an Internet update on the Wave Action Models, we decided it looked OK to leave early Saturday morning. Winds were zero in the anchorage when we pulled up anchor at 1 AM and headed out—and got our heads handed to us on a platter! Winds had *not* subsided overnight, as they were advertised to do, instead they were 30 knots on the nose as we went around Piedras Blancas, and built steadily through the morning. The buoy reports indicated conditions were lighter North, but by 6 AM we were in steady 40+ knot winds, gusts to 50, and 15-20 foot seas. (Note: In our 7+ years of cruising, these were the highest seas we ever encountered.)

Every so often we would take a large “mouthful” of green water through the anchor aperture on the bow that would charge down the foredeck and up against the Portuguese bridge, finally dissipating against the pilot house windows. We lost four of our “un-losable” mats that we keep on the bow for the dogs to walk on, and the curly water hose we keep up on the bow unwound 25 feet of itself out of the bow scupper before I noticed it and retrieved it. We were down to about 5 knots, far below our planned estimate of 7, for several hours. That persisted until about noon when the winds gradually began to subside and by the time we got to Monterey they were in the low 20s. Still fairly high seas, but much less steep. It was a long day. We estimated 12 hours to do the 85 miles to Monterey, and it took 14. Average, about 6 knots. Considering we averaged 6.4 all the way up the Baja coast, this proves that conditions were worse even than Baja.

What we have learned, among other things, is that you cannot rely on any of the weather reports or the buoy reports for local conditions. Local conditions can be better (infrequently) or much worse. The buoy reports for the area we were in were saying 15-25 knot winds, gusting to 30. We saw sustained 40+ winds, gusting to over 50. This is quite a difference. The predictions were for lower seas and lower winds to the north, but that never materialized. Instead, it got worse.

The boat was a bit of a mess. The law of entropy works rapidly in heavy seas. Books flew off the shelves, cushions flew off the settee, and the dogs were miserable. Getting them out for a pee break was a challenge, as we couldn't turn around in this stuff and head down swell like we normally do. The seas were just too big and too close together. The best we could do was to slow down, put their life jackets on them and drag them forcibly out to the bow and around to the doggie box, scream "Go hurryups!" at them, and drag them back in. If we were in this stuff for days, it would become a much bigger problem, but it's manageable for 12 hours.

All in all we came through this just fine. The boat, as always, handles stuff like this with aplomb. I made up a saying, "If you can't predict the weather, you'd better get a Nordhavn." Every three hours or so, I would go down to the engine room and pet the Lugger Diesel, which was chugging faithfully along without a care. We were okay too, but having the dogs aboard adds another dimension to the problem. Although they don't get sick, they can't figure out why their world is turning upside down on them, and they can't find a place that isn't banging around. They have adapted amazingly well, even so. Cody has learned to crawl when he wants to get around. Heidi just spends most of her time in her corner bed.

Sunday, June 10: Deep breath time. We are at a berth in Monterey, partaking of the marina ambience and the delightful restaurants here and resting up. We hadn't eaten anything since we left San Simeon at 1 AM, mostly because we couldn't stand up in the galley, so we were starved. We went to a restaurant on the wharf, then hooked up the satellite TV dish and watched CNN for about 15 minutes. We fell into bed at 7:30. We slept 12 hours, and I have only a vague awareness of when the boat next to us left, heading south at 4 AM. Usually a large prop digging the water right next to me gets me out of bed in a hurry. Wind and seas are still high, and the predictions are not improving, so we may stay here a few days.

Are we having fun yet? I guess we must be. Next stop, Half Moon Bay, then home at last. But I can't wait to get back to Mexico next fall. It is undeniably true what other cruisers have told us: once you see the Sea of Cortez, you don't want to leave. Next year we will spend a longer time exploring the Sea and the West coast of Mexico.

The End