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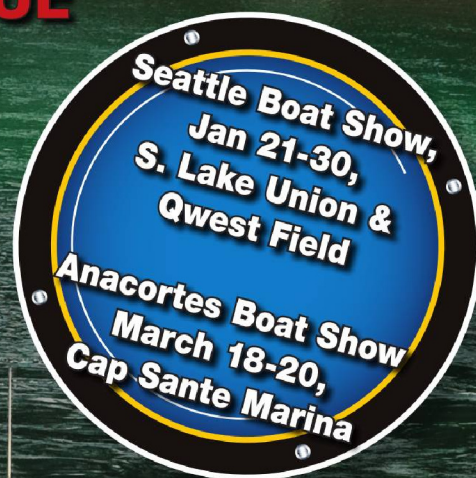
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2011 SEATTLE BOAT SHOW ISSUE

DESTINATIONS

Hammersley Inlet



AT THE RAMP

Bryant 210

NW CLASSICS

38' Ocean Alexander "Pamela J"

Cover Photo by C-images.net

DESTINATIONS



By Gary Brower

Hammersley Inlet Time Out for Family

It's a sunny day and I am sitting on the deck of a 41-foot President Motor Yacht sipping South African port with my parents. Needless to say, I am feeling lucky — but not for the reasons that you might imagine. During this all-too-brief respite from my work-a-day world, I am thinking back to an earlier voyage that occurred in simpler times.

Throughout my life I have been blessed to “grow up around boats.” Over my lifetime I have lived, worked and played on everything from an eight-foot dingy to a 65-foot ex-freighter, and virtually everything in between. As part of my nautical heritage, I have had the opportunity to enjoy tugboats, canoes, steam ships, commercial fishing boats, RIBs, ski boats, charter boats, dinghies, cruise ships, jet skis, motor yachts, landing barges, kayaks and a lightship, just to name a few.

It's hard to believe now, but for a couple of years when I was in school, our family did not even own a boat. Being a boat brat, this situation weighed heavily on me and demanded a remedy. So when I spotted a broken-down 15-foot runabout for sale I jumped into action. Immediately I set out to “sell” my parents on the idea of purchasing this “classic” boat, for the paltry price of just \$499. Eventually my dad relented and



Hammersley Inlet from the air; Hope Island appears in the foreground.
(Photo courtesy of Jim Harden and the Shelton Yacht Club)

we were the proud owners of a 1960s-era Glasply junker with a 35-horsepower Johnson outboard of approximately the same vintage.

My father was a tugboat captain by trade. He had spent the early portion of his career towing logs around Puget Sound so he knew the local gunkholes, interesting locations and scenic sites. With such a rich cruising area to explore, we made a number of memorable trips on this less-than-glamorous launch. But for me, the most memorable trip of all was a family journey though Hammersley Inlet.

An Inlet to Remember

Hammersley Inlet is a six nautical mile arm of water that leads to Shelton, Washington. Located near my hometown of Olympia, the historic town of Shelton is also a pleasant cruise from Tacoma or Seattle. More specifically, Shelton is situated in South Puget Sound, perched at the end of Hammersley Inlet on the southeast corner of Oakland Bay.

The town of Shelton and the associated lumber mills were originally constructed to support the early logging industry in the area. Located on Railroad

Avenue, the Mason County Historical Museum includes exhibits from the town's early pioneer and logging days. Over time, logging activity near Shelton has diminished, but Shelton is still famous as the Christmas tree capital of the world.

This area is also known for Taylor Shellfish Farms, where clams and oysters are grown in the nutrient-rich tidelands of the sound. If you look closely, you may see historic oyster dikes in some areas of Oakland Bay. These antiquated dikes were once used to grow the popular Olympia oysters.

If you venture into town, visit the Simpson Logging Company's Shay Locomotive No. 7 and the Peninsular Railway caboose which are both on display in the city center. If you visit during early fall, you may catch a glimpse of salmon as they migrate up the small creek that winds slowly through the center of town. Other popular activities include exploring the shoreline, shopping for antiques, and enjoying a hearty meal at one of the local restaurants.

If you plan your trip for early June, you may catch the Mason County Forest Festival. In the past, the festival has included a car show, logging exhibition, and beard growing contest. While you are there, check out the Paul Bunyan Parade, and for the young (or the young at heart) spend some time enjoying the Kiddie Parade.

As you navigate away from Shelton, you can visit nearby Hope Island State Park which is located just outside of Hammersley Inlet. The marine park is only accessible by boat and provides five buoys for moorage. Limited camping facilities are available, with space for up to four tents. Once you are on the island, you can enjoy miles of pristine beach and quiet hiking trails. Take yourself back in time by viewing the remnants of an old homestead farm.

Looking Back in Time

As I look back in time to the trip in that old Glasply runabout, my memories are vivid: Dad pointing out picturesque islands, harbor seals precariously perched on log booms, and driftwood on the beach baked white by the salt and sun. But the thing I remember best is our lazy trip through the inlet.

With an extensive knowledge of tide and current, my dad had planned the trip so that we approached Shelton just prior to high, slack tide. This meant that as we arrived, all of the water from Oakland Bay would soon be released back into the sound through the narrow passage of Hammersley Inlet. With such a large amount of water flowing through such a small channel, the ebbing flow created a vigorous five-knot current through the inlet.

The boat had been running good the entire trip, but after a full day of cruising, we were growing tired of the constant, high-pitched, drone of the engine (and the engine was probably ready for a rest as well).

As we killed the engine and floated with the tide, we were abruptly thrust into the peace and quiet of nature. The only sound to be heard was the resolute "gronk" from a local crane.



Relaxing aboard the Time Out with parents Patricia and Captain Nicholas Brower. (Gary Brower photo)



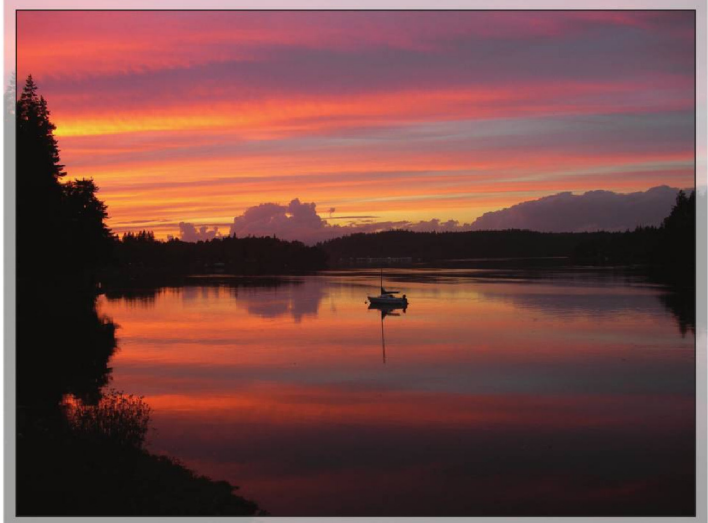
The "classic" runabout from the author's youth. (Gary Brower photo)



Welcoming steps lead to an attractive picnic area on the south end of Hope Island. (Megan Brower photo)



Hammersley Inlet on a calm misty morning.
(Megan Brower photo)



The end of a beautiful day in Hammersley Inlet.
(Photo courtesy of Jim Harden and the Shelton Yacht Club)



A roadside sign near the yacht club promotes Shelton's world-renowned Christmas trees. (Gary Brower photo)

It was a fine fall day and we watched the sun sparkle in the water as it warmed our faces and revitalized our bodies.

As the tide began to ebb, we were propelled through the narrows of the inlet by the tidal stream. The water was shallow, and all along the way through the inlet we could see the round, well-worn rocks on the bottom sliding away beneath our keel. The water was crystal clear, as my dad explained, "because it is purged from the inlet twice a day by the tides."

At first we watched the fish and other wildlife, but as time rolled on we just snacked on granola bars and talked. We discussed a number of topics, none of which is important enough for me to remember these many years later.

My mom and dad are growing older, but I appreciate the time we spent working, playing and just "hanging out" around boats. Partly because I enjoy boating, but mostly because it gives us a common interest, something we can share. In the end, what we were sharing was the most precious commodity of all — time. And time can make even a humble 15-foot run-about outshine a 41-foot motor yacht. ⚓



Colorful kayaks ply the tranquil waters.
(Megan Brower photo)

IF YOU VISIT

Use NOAA Nautical Chart: Pacific Coast #18457: Puget Sound-Hammersley Inlet to Shelton. You should note that the inlet has a controlling depth of about 8 feet.

Oakland Bay Marina is located in Shelton and offers 109 slips (with guest moorage), gas dock, marine pump-out facilities and a boat ramp. You can contact the marina staff at 360-426-1425.

The Mason County Historical Museum is located at 427 W Railroad Ave. For additional information you can call 360-426-1020.

Hope Island Moorage Information is available by calling 360-902-8844. ⚓