

# Sailing on Folsom Lake

by Monty D

I went for a hike last weekend along the bottom of Folsom Lake. I say bottom because Folsom Lake is very low right now, I'd estimate the water level is about 75' below the full mark and where I was walking now I was sailing last summer. A few foundations from buildings that were inundated when the Dam was built back in the 1950's are now above water again. The town of Mormon Island, once a mining town but largely abandoned by the 1930's lies at the bottom of the southern section of the lake along the original American River. My walk took me across the peninsula that divides the lake into a north and south area. During the summer we frequently take Marone, one of the three Tradewinds boats at Folsom lake, across the lake and anchor near the peninsula. At higher water the peninsula becomes a series of small islands, a mini-archipelago with few footprints.

As I stood in a spot where we frequently anchor, now far from water, I looked up, imagining the boat floating there about 20 feet over my head, and was reminded of a day out on the boat with some friends and their two children, ages 9 and 12, or thereabouts. None of them had been on a sailboat before and it was the kids first time on a small boat. With the kids in ski vests, our 9' plastic kayak on the side deck and lunch in the cooler we pulled out of the slip and into the cove. The kids and I went up on the cabin top and hoisted the mainsail then clambered back into the cockpit to unroll the jib.

Due to topography and the microclimate there is usually enough wind to sail in Browns Ravine, where the marina is, but in the summer the main body of the lake is nearly windless. We did a few tacks in the cove, the kids somewhat amazed to be moving with only the wind, then started out for the peninsula, our destination for the day. Once out in the lake with the boat near motionless and the sails flapping uselessly we fired up the iron genoa (9.9 HP 4-stroke Yamaha) with a single pull then furled the jib and dropped the main. Mom and kids went forward to sit on the bow as we motored along at a dignified pace, at 24' Marone is the smallest boat in Tradewinds but fairly large in Folsom lake. It was a hot day and the shore near the ramp was crowded with ski boats and jet skis as we cruised off into the lake and away from the noisy throngs. With one of the kids at the tiller I assembled the shade over the cockpit to mitigate the heat of the sun. About halfway across we put the boarding ladder in the water and cooled off by jumping off the bow into the water. The kids had been through swimming lessons and were competent at playing in the water at the beach but their pfd's gave them a little more confidence as they jumped in the fairly clear water over 100' deep. The water temperature of Folsom Lake in the summer is decidedly refreshing compared to the air temperature.

After three or four trips over the side we restarted the motor and finished trip (total travel time is about 30 minutes.) With Debbie at the helm I went forward and prepared the anchor. The youngest eyed the 12 pound Danforth anchor and asked, "Are you sure that anchor is big enough?" As Debbie backed down towards the island I lowered the anchor and explained how the anchor would dig into the bottom of the lake and hold us securely.

The girl remained dubious until I had her cleat the rode and Debbie applied full reverse, and we didn't move.

With the motor stopped and raised out of the water we all jumped in, 20 yards from our own personal, deserted island. And what, I ask you, can be more exciting than a deserted island? For two or three hours the six of us floated, lounged, snorkeled, kayaked, and explored the island. Really, just the kids and I explored the island, the rest of the adults were content to lie on the floats in the water, snooze in the cockpit, or sun on the bow. On this particular island, no more than 8 acres in size, we found several fishing lures and a couple of water logged tennis balls.

Our friends had some evening plans so mid-afternoon we hoisted the anchor and motored back across. By now the lake was choppy with the wakes of the ski boats and the bow plowed through with satisfying splashes for the children seated on the bow.

The friends helped unload the boat then set off as I cleaned the boat and arranged motor, halyards, and covers. The nice thing about going to the lake on an anchored boat is that everything stays clean, no muddy footprints. A few bucketfuls of water and some brushing and the boat is clean.

My own kids are late teens now and have been on Tradewinds Sailing trips to Tahiti but they both still find time come out to the lake with me. They're both competent at getting the boat in and out of the slip and at anchoring as well as sailing and motoring. We've been doing this since I started sailing with Tradewinds almost 8 years ago.

Of course there are other places to go at the lake, up the north or south forks of the American river you can almost always find wind to practice your sailing (albeit with fairly short reaches between tacks), or find new coves and beaches to explore. There are several coves you can anchor overnight in. For many adult sailors the journey is the reward but I've found with kids the sailing aspect soon fades in excitement, but give them a destination, a place to explore, and time in the water and they'll always look forward to it.