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### ***Harbor Discovery - San Diego to San Francisco***

By Marianne Wheeler

Would someone really volunteer to bash north, beating up the coast from San Diego to San Francisco? Why, of course. But, it would have to be a tough, no-nonsense sort of sailor, ready for a challenge. The kind that eats nails for breakfast. Our coast is legendary for grueling upwind sailing and motoring relentlessly against a cutting north-west wind. For this hardy crew, it would turn out to be a mixed bag - San Diego to Channel Islands Harbor would be easy, flying the spinnaker much of the time. From Santa Barbara to San Francisco it would be mostly sailing against the wind and the waves. The plan was to stop often on the way north, mainly to learn how to find, approach, and enter harbors along the way, but also to rest every night in a protected marina.

Bill, Bob, Jim, and Sid were the hardy crew that flew to San Diego to meet *Chaparral*, David Kory and me, April 18, 2008. They brought along their gear, plenty of provisions and raving good spirits, ready to take on whatever the elements had in store. Aside from many nautical items they hauled aboard, like additional charts, an electronic star finder, a beautiful sextant, a personal E-PIRB, a handheld GPS, and many sailors' books, I noticed a large French coffee press. Was there a chance for airborne grounds going north?

We left San Diego through treacherous kelp fields, their floating, sneaky vines ready to hold us back by the propeller, and headed for Oceanside Harbor. The winds were light, time to break out the pink and blue asymmetrical spinnaker and that in turn made us break out into wide, persistent smiles. Blue sky, blue water, the sun in our face, we sailed as fast as the wind blew, watching the beautiful Southern Coast go by. Arriving in Oceanside in the early afternoon, we had time to explore and sample the restaurants.

Next morning, we motored for a while and when the wind came up we set the spinny again, beam reaching warm and mellow all the way to Dana Point. We entered a busy harbor with fairways jammed full of all kinds of vessels. Threading our way through traffic we looked for and found our guest slip and tied up unscathed. After sharing salami and cheese appetizers and a good bottle of Cabernet, we headed out to shops and restaurants and up a lofty hill for a sunny, see-forever-view of the far and wide Pacific.

More days of spinnaker sailing and jib reaching followed as we wound our way up the coast. In Long Beach, we stayed at the Harborlight Marina near the Queen Mary and were startled by the grand, old cruise ship's reverberating baritone horn sounding long and low on the hour. In Channel Islands Harbor, military men checked us into the marina, handed us a dye-tablet and trusted us to put it into the head holding tank. Anywhere else where this is required, like on Catalina Island, the officials sternly come aboard to execute this procedure to ensure that no refuse is dumped without leaving a bright, neon-yellow telltale puddle in the water. Fines are high and any culprit will be unwelcome far into the future. In Santa Barbara, it was an easy walk from the harbor to State Street, leading directly into the heart of this idealized Mediterranean-styled world.

Harbor-hopping was interesting and a lot of fun.

The northbound crew had meshed well, connecting easily and sharing great camaraderie sailing the boat, or walking about on shore. With so many restaurants at every stop there wasn't much use of the galley, but lots of discovering memorable breakfast spots and fine food dinner places instead. On top of it all, these sailors had a love in every port. As soon as we neared a harbor, a gleam appeared in their eye and as soon as the boat was docked, nothing could hold them back. Crusty or not, they dashed off to indulge their held-back passion, forgetting all about the French beauty of a press onboard. They were off in pursuit of a hot, heart-racing coffee buzz at the nearest Starbucks. Ahhh!

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### *Bob and Bill off shift*



Santa Barbara gave all a good rest before we set out to round the notorious capes, again, Point Conception and Point Arguello. But, this time we would have the wind and the waves against us. The weather had been consistently clear with winds of 15 to 25 knots and the extended forecast was much the same. We changed out the big jib for the Kevlar “blade”, a 75% upwind sail, and put back the double-reef in the main. The plan was to leave Santa Barbara at 2100 hours that evening so we would reach the Points after midnight. Conditions often calm down at night and in the early morning hours, and that’s what we hoped for. The Marina was strangely calm, no wind here, and the crew seemed quiet. We all had an early dinner, another shower, and a nip of Bill’s Pusser’s rum, which he had stashed under the settee bunk and almost forgotten. After checking

the weather one more time, we decided to go. It was 6pm and we were ready.

It turned out to be a long, cold night as we sailed and motored north, with conditions not calming a whole lot. The crew, wearing all the layers of extra clothing available, took turns steering Chaparral through long trains of large waves, spray flying. It was a long, wet, tiring haul before we left the flashing lights of the Points behind and we still had half a day to go before we could duck in at Morro Bay and recover.

The morning sun brightened the mood all around. The seas started to lay down for a rest and the wind finally needed a breather. We crossed the wide Morro Bay and aimed at the tall cone of Morro Rock. A bit ragged around the edges, we docked alongside the Morro Bay Yacht Club and climbed off the boat. The sea otters eyed us curiously as we lined up at the showers and the laundry to dissolve thick crusts of salt.

### *Morro Rock*



### *Sea Otter*



We had arrived on a Saturday, just in time for the famous “Second Annual Kite Festival and Parade”. After some rest and a hearty meal, hold the salt please, we took on the festivities and checked out the town, walking with a decided swagger.

In the evening, a beautiful sunset spread tranquility and a soft, golden glow over the harbor. As darkness came, the sky remained high and clear, letting us star-gaze late into the night.

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With an early departure for Monterey, a warm east wind treated us to a nice, but short sail. It was too good to last and we motored most of the day against 10 to 15 knots from the north-west. When the wind increased in the afternoon, we sailed, short-tacking close to shore. In the evening, the wind came down, again, sometimes to only 4, or 5 knots. We knew we had to motor around Point Sur that night and it looked good, even with the waves running high.

It was already dark as we moved along our rhumb line, clicking down the miles, when suddenly the wind started to howl. Almost in the blink of an eye, it went to blustering blows and gale-like gusts. That was not in the forecast! Soon we were beating into the waves, taking bursts of spray over the bow, slapping our face at will. Here we go again - it was night and we had to round a point, and this time Big Sur had it in for us.

Conditions slowed the boat down and steering became difficult. The apparent wind speed registered in the mid-30's. It would take another big effort of the crew and the boat to get where we wanted to go. The wind whistled through the rigging and down on us, and like clockwork, buckets of chilled water emptied every minute, or so, over our soggy, huddled shapes in the cockpit. We took it, but left our chins down. The waves were not unusually high, but broke in short intervals, making *Chaparral* pound into them with a shiver and shake. She took it, letting the waves push her around and slam into her side.

We saw the light of Point Sur flashing quietly on the dark shore ahead. Making only 2 knots over ground at times, it seemed as if we would never reach it. When we finally had, it stayed abeam for what seemed like an eternity. As *Chaparral* collided with the seas, the crew had to concentrate on the job at hand. Gritting our teeth, gripping the tiller hard, we held our salt-blinded eyes fixed on the dancing compass needle. We couldn't get any wetter, but still flinched under every dowsing that came aboard. As *Chaparral* confronted the waves and the wind



ripped through the night, the crew held on, cold and weather-beaten, wishing for each half-hour shift to end. Whose idea was this, anyway? High above, in the vastness of the night sky, a million bright stars sent down their light to us. It was a beautiful sight, and yes, I had wanted to sail this coast, once again, apparently forgetting how hard it can be.

We slept well in the harbor of Monterey. We slept almost all day and the following night, right through the incessant bark of the local attraction, an ornery herd of sea lions. They line the breakwater, lying on top of each other, or float on their back flipping a flipper, barking and belching around the clock. They seem to own the place and many boats were covered with netting to keep them off.

### ***Fueling***

With about ninety miles to Brickyard Cove, we topped off the diesel and forced ourselves into the still wet foul weather gear, fragrant with the scent of old seawater. There is no doubt in our mind, why they are called foulies with a smell like that.

The weather remained reliably windy and against us the rest of the way home. We stayed close to shore, out of the worst, watching for rocks and breaking surf, or any hazards that might be in our way.

Night-sailing along land takes getting used to. In the dark there is no depth perception and it is difficult to judge distances. You can't see where you are going and lights along the shore can be very confusing. What looks like a red buoy may turn into a green one and you realize it's a changing traffic light. We followed the GPS course most of the time, but if we'd become anxious about hitting anything, we fell off and went further out to sea.

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We made it home safely and put the good ship *Chaparral* in her slip. The crew, tired but smiling, had to say their good-bys. Bill still wants to buy his own boat, Bob still dreams of his catamaran, Jim still wants to go chartering, only in warmer climes. And Sid still wants to go cruising, but only with a dodger and an auto pilot. All plan to do less motoring upwind.

I believe they definitely have become strong, life-long members of the saltwater-people, a small, crazy, seafaring tribe.

I also believe that David Kory and his lap-top are the best weather forecasters for any sailing adventure in the world.