

SS27's First Cruise



In July of 2019, six of us began an 8-day adventure In the San Juan Islands aboard the Solar Sal 27. We did not spend a dime on fuel, nor did we ever plug into shore power – our vessel received 100% of it's energy directly from the sun. We typically made good 5 knots, running her 4 kilowatt motor at half throttle, drawing 1000 watts from the batteries and getting 1000 watts directly from the solar panels. Here is our story:

Day 1: With a vessel whose average cruising speed is 5 knots, we planned today to catch the tail end of the ebbing current out Guemes Channel. However, plans are merely a point from which to depart - we left Cap Sante Marina 3 hours behind schedule and the flood was in full swing! We draw less than 2 feet and were able to hug the shore to minimize the drag of the current in our face. We made it to Cypress Head and to our delight had the entire campsite to ourselves. We watched seals and otters play in the eddy lines, and an eagle landed in a tree directly above our camp.



Day 2: SS27 is quite roomy, having space for 10 adults plus a few kids on a day trip. She has comfy berths for 2 in the cabin, and adequate sleeping for 2 more on the benches. As a party of 6 we ferried camping gear to shore in our little dinghy. Not wanting to do this every day, we opted to spend at least 2 nights at each destination. On this layover day we motored a couple miles north to Pelican Beach for the short hike up Eagle Cliff and were rewarded with a stunning view of the San Juan islands. Back at the beach we lounged in the sunshine while the boys skipped stones and the girls inflated our new paddleboard.



Day 3: Our longest travel day – roughly 25 nm to Jones Island. Took us 4.5 hours travel time. Of course the currents were not with us for most of the day, but being in the interior of the islands they were not too strongly against us. We did punch our throttle up to 3000 watts to get across a choppy Rosario Strait. We also all got to experience the ship's head – the Laveo dry-flush system. This space-age device seals each use in a foil bag with a flourish that made the kids think they were astronauts. The adults were pleased to not have any holding tank odors and to never need a pump out. All of us were happy to stop for ice cream at Orcas Village.



Day 4: Being a weekend, Jones Island was not nearly as quiet as our last stop, but we did find a relatively out of the way camp site and enjoyed the sunny beach. While the girls paddled in the bay looking for jellyfish the boys and I hiked around the island. We enjoyed the views and lingered in some tidepools that were literally full of life. We also hung out with the island's relatively tame "parcour deer" who jumped from one fallen tree to another to another in order to nibble the tops of otherwise unreachable shrubberies.

On Jones Island I found myself having several conversations with curious mariners who admired our vessel. One gentleman claimed she "has the nicest lines in the harbor." This is not the first time I have heard such compliments. SS27 is literally a work of art – designed by Sam Devlin and impeccably built by his craftsmen in Olympia, WA.



Day 5: The flood up President's Channel to Sucia was in the late afternoon so we stopped at Deer Harbor for a hot lunch, some groceries, and of course more ice cream. Lovely passage to Sucia again hugging the shoreline to stay out of the not yet in our favor current. About 13 nm in 2.5 hours, maintaining our average speed made good at 5 knots.



Day 6: Lazy morning sitting on the beach in Shallow Bay watching a family of 4 otters play in the water while a love triangle of Great Blue Herring squawked it out and 3-4 eagles circled overhead. We hiked and played in caves carved out of the rock. I will never lose my amazement for the intricate and sometimes bizarre formations carved in the sandstone by eons of erosion. Smores again at the campfire again tonight.

Day 7: Family slept in and I enjoyed a solo hike along my favorite sandstone at low tide to my favorite place on the island. In the afternoon we hopped back in SS27 for quick jaunt to Patos Island. We tried to imagine what life was like there a hundred years ago as we explored the ruins of the civilization that supported the light house keepers and their families.



As we motored back to Sucia we noticed a crowd of tour boats off the NW corner of the island and were blessed by the presence of the resident Orca whales. We watched their playful antics for a while before our tummies told us time to get back to camp for dinner.

Day 8: Alas, all journeys must end. As we left Sucia we narrowly escaped being boarded by the “pirate ship” Lady Washington and settled in for the passage home. Wind counter to current made for choppy seas once again in Rosario Strait, but we made it across relatively quickly.



This was the first cruise of the Solar Sal 27. She exceeded our expectations, both in performance and comfort. She never came close to the limits of her batteries and charged up faster than we expected, both in the sunshine and on cloudy mornings. Underway there was plenty of space for 2 pre-teens, two teens, and 2 adults to spread out and not drive anyone crazy. The quite electric motor contributed to the sanity factor.