

A cruise in the Thousand Islands and Prince Edward Bay

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Prescott to Bath

It was a fine morning in the latter part of June when the little sloop poked her head out of Prescott harbour, turned west, and began her journey up the St. Lawrence River toward Lake Ontario. Full Circle, a Tanzer 22, with Ron and Burton aboard, was embarking upon the first phase of a cruise to the expansive waters of Prince Edward Bay, at the eastern end of the great lake. Ahead lay a journey of 70 nautical miles through the Thousand Islands to Bath, in the Bay of Quinte area, where the boat would be left until the remainder of the cruise could be resumed one week later with a new shipmate for Burton.

Clearing the breakwater at 0945, we set the main and genoa, intending to sail gloriously toward Brockville. However, with a steady 10 knot wind on the nose and net progress hampered by the need for short tacking up the river, matters were soon expedited by resorting to the iron jib, a 30 year-old "merc 7.5" outboard motor. Thus, for the sake of the itinerary (the cruiser's equivalent to the corporate accountant's bottom line), a noble attempt to slice peacefully westward under sail was transformed into the wearisome din of the vibrating outboard, which was to become the musical accompaniment for most of the passage in the Thousand Islands. Ron was to bear the brunt of the outboard's sonorous assault, remaining at the tiller for most of the trip's duration, with Burton adroitly taking refuge on the foredeck.

The main navigational channel to the west of Brockville is constricted for a distance of about 2 nautical miles, bounded by the north shore and a series of islands (the Brock Group), the first of the Thousand Islands encountered from the east. These Brockville Narrows, as they are known, are entered by small, slow moving craft with some trepidation owing to the strong easterly current and the uncomfortably close quarters with passing ships. In one particularly narrow portion of this channel, near McDonald Point, large ships sometime create severe surging along the shore due to water drawdown associated with propeller action, resulting in unusually steep waves which can make for some exciting hobby-horsing when encountered by a small vessel. West of the Brockville Narrows the navigable channel bifurcates into the main shipping channel, following the American side along the south shore, and the small craft channel, a very narrow buoyed channel winding through shallow waters off the Canadian mainland. Here keelboats such as Full Circle must remain within the channel to avoid grounding, thus precluding the possibility of setting sail in this area of prevailing southwesterlies. After transiting the Brockville Narrows without incident, it was decided to make for the small craft channel which would offer respite from the freighters and their steep wakes. The charts indicated that this channel passing through myriad

islands would provide some of the most interesting scenery, as well as several potential anchorages in the vicinity of Gananoque, the objective for this first day's run.

Progressing along this route we were delighted to discover the extent to which the natural world managed to maintain a presence in the midst of much human development. Although one can scarcely glance about in the Thousand Islands without the eyes resting upon some modest little cottage on a granite boulder or a garish summer residence broadcasting its owner's material ascendancy, the route still provides unspoiled vistas. There are marshy areas with their attendant avian wildlife. Graceful herons were seen in full flight, as well as rocky outcroppings in the possession of cormorants extending their wings to dry, and some stretches of wooded shoreline. One interesting feature is the placement of osprey nesting platforms at various points along the way on islands and in the water. The ospreys are able to build their nests on these wooden platforms set atop tall poles, where their eggs remain unmolested. This is believed to be helping the recovery of the local osprey population. Passing under the majestic Thousand Islands Bridge, the boat entered the granite splendor of Hill Island and its neighbors, winding through narrow corridors bounded by sheer rock faces and steep gravelly embankments bearing cottages and boat houses. Here the current increased, slowing westward progress.

Soon it was late afternoon, and time to seek an anchorage for the night. Such was found about 2 nautical miles east of Gananoque, in a small cove on the east side of Mulcaster Island, where at 1830 the anchor was dropped and preparations made for supper. Now, Full Circle being a rather spartan ship, equipped with an alcohol stove, and Burton an indifferent cook, meals aboard consisted of such sustenance as could be consumed raw or prepared with boiling water. Gastronomic circumstances aside, we settled in for a peaceful evening with the boat gently bobbing at anchor.

The next morning Burton awoke to the faint sound of thunder and, poking his head through the forward companionway, made out distant flashes of lightning in the grey gloom. A thick fog was about, reducing visibility on the water to a hundred yards or so. Anxious to set off, fearing nasty weather, we breakfasted, performed our ablutions, and hoisted anchor at 0730. The morning was very quiet - no boats were out - and the water mirror-calm as we motored into the channel. Unable to distinguish land features or see very far ahead, we picked our way slowly through the fog, Burton sitting on the foredeck with the chart and binoculars in his lap, straining to see the buoys marking the way and obtaining fixes by identifying their numbers. We came into Gananoque for gas and immediately set off again, taking the small channel running north and then west of Bostwick Island, and by mid-morning emerged into the large basin between Howe and Wolfe Islands. Here the breeze began to gather softly from the east. Weary from the constant drone of the outboard, and anxious to experience some sailing, sails were set and the motor was silenced. With still a misty prospect before her, Full Circle began her slow, quiet glide through the waters of the Canadian Middle Channel toward Kingston.

Entering Kingston Harbour early in the afternoon, the mist began clearing and the breeze picked up to 10-15 knots, offering the prospect of a brisk sail before putting in at Kingston. We enjoyed a lovely afternoon's sail, jogging between Simcoe Island and the Kingston waterfront, even joining in the Easter Seal Regatta sponsored by the Kingston Yacht Club, sailing alongside the tallship St. Lawrence II. Late in the afternoon we entered Confederation Basin where Full Circle was to be moored for the night. The total distance run from Prescott to this point was 53 nautical miles, all of it against the current (a pretty good run for one and a half days under the auspices of an old outboard motor, consuming a total of about 20 L of gas - a larger sailboat with a diesel inboard and a determined skipper would probably have completed the trip within a single day).

Captain and crew spent the remainder of the day walking about downtown Kingston and visiting the Marine Museum of the Great Lakes, with its wonderful collection of ship models and marine artifacts conveying a wisp of local history. The day was capped with a restaurant dinner and a sampling of local ale. Unfortunately, sleep in the crowded downtown marina did not come easily with the background din of human activity, and some loud music emanating from a nearby night club.

The next morning found the lake off the Kingston waterfront calm and shrouded in fog, with visibility less than one kilometer. At 0730 Full Circle was cast off her moorings and motored into the lake, embarking on the last leg to Bath. Passing under the ominous walls of Kingston Penitentiary, we wondered about the eyes gazing from that place upon the sight of a small boat moving freely on the lake. A course was then plotted to Bath through the North Channel between the mainland and Amherst Island. As we neared the eastern tip of that island a southerly breeze began to stir, and soon Full Circle entered the channel with filled main and genoa. By the time we were abreast of Collins Bay, in mid-morning, the wind was blowing 15 knots from the southwest, gusting to 20 knots. Tacking up the channel we rapidly closed the distance to Bath, feeling pangs of regret at the prospect of the journey ending so soon. With the wind now blowing a steady 20 knots, we decided to continue past Bath to the western end of Amherst Island, before turning back and finally putting in at Loyalist Cove Marina, where Burton's wife, Lisa, would be waiting to take us back home. Soon the gusts exceeded 20 knots and the seas began building as we approached the exposed waters of the Upper Gap, with Full Circle fairly flying under reefed main and genoa, crashing through the waves and casting spray to the wind. It was sailing at its best. Sailing such as Full Circle rarely experienced in her home waters off Prescott where, though the wind blows there as anywhere else, the seas are rarely big enough to thrill, and the lack of searoom checks her ability to run freely. Turning her prow back toward Bath she ran with the seas lashing at her stern.

As we neared our destination, preparations began to make ready for entering the small harbour. It is the custom on board Full Circle to bring in all sails and secure the main under its cover before entering a port, particularly when the wind is up, lest the wind catch a corner of improperly stowed sail at an awkward moment while motoring into the tight confines of a slip. Thus, about a half mile from the harbour entrance the

boat was turned head-to-wind, the genoa furled and the main lowered. Burton then stepped onto the cabin top where he began to fasten the sail cover on the main, the boat pitching and rolling in the waves. Meanwhile, Ron was in the cockpit attempting to start the outboard as the boat began drifting toward the shore. While Ron worked the starter cord trying to coax the motor into life, Burton's concern grew as the shore loomed ever closer. Stepping down from the cabin top to render assistance, the boat lurched before his foot found the cockpit bench - the usual landing place - causing him to miss his step and instead take a much longer stride from the cabin top to the cockpit sole. Now, it so happens that Full Circle's mainsheet tackle is fixed to a swivel pin located in the center of the cockpit floor. As circumstances would shape events, Burton's bare foot landed on that very pin. At the exact same moment, Ron's right elbow was rocketing backwards, in mid-pull on the starter cord, finding its mark in the center of Burton's chest. The motor roared to life, and Ron was able to pull away from the shore. Meanwhile, a bewildered Burton came to terms with the aches in his chest and right foot, climbed back onto the cabin top, and finished the job of fastening the sail cover, leaving bloody foot prints all over the non-skid surface. It was a gory ship that motored into Loyalist Cove that day. Full Circle was made fast to a dock, the dinghy pulled into the cockpit, and everything secured until the following week, when the adventure was to continue.

Bath Point to Smith Bay

One week after the first leg of the cruise, on a sultry Friday evening, a new crew comprised of Burton and John arrived at Loyalist Cove Marina and unloaded gear and provisions from the car. Burton gave his wife Lisa the cruise plan and a farewell kiss. We then turned to see Full Circle peacefully moored to the long center dock. It took little time to open her up, check her out, stow the gear, have a drink and listen to the weather forecast. On the verge of a grand adventure, we slept fitfully in spite of the fairy-tale peacefulness of this little harbour.

A sparkling morning arrived. We breakfasted at the ominously named Last Chance Café and in short order made sail. A fresh southwest breeze swept us along the North Channel to the opening of the Upper Gap. As Full Circle came about on to a starboard tack a large freighter was seen in the distance easing down through the gap toward us. We assumed that the ship was going to continue north across the channel in order to dock at the nearby cement plant. On the next port tack the freighter appeared very much closer but we still felt safe. Soon, however, terror struck. The freighter began to sweep around ever so gradually toward us. There is nothing so daunting as the sight of the perfectly symmetrical bow of a rust-streaked behemoth coming right at you with "a bone in her teeth". Which way to go? John screamed at Burton to get on the VHF. Burton, in crisp tones, "large freighter, this is the small sailboat in the Upper Gap. You are bows-on to us. What is your intention? "Over". Laconic reply: "small sailboat, this is the Tadoussac. Hold your present course, we're gonna pass behind you. "Out". Towering over Full Circle the steel giant slid gently astern on her way up Adolphus

Reach.

Much relieved, we then began our purposeful assault against the three foot waves which were marching into the Upper Gap from across the vast reach of Prince Edward Bay. Tacking between Indian Point, Bluff Point, Cressy point, and Grape Island, Full Circle tediously worked her way up into the bay. Despite constant demands on our seamanship, we felt a sense of awe and humility confronted by the great sweep of horizon and limitless expanse of open water which appeared to brim and overflow toward our small craft. It was also exciting to imagine that back as far as two centuries ago large sailing vessels and fishing boats had plied this very same water highway, providing links between loyalists in the area and centers of industry and commerce served by ports along both sides of Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River. Finally, we were into the bay and began wearing our way westward, conning along the cliffs toward Mary's Cove. Tired of tacking, we decided to pay the price by taking a long and patient beat far out into the bay. This earned us the luxury of an uninterrupted passage westward toward the ghostly smudge of Waupoos Island in the distance. As the wind fell just off the southeastern tip of the island, Burton emerged from the cabin with the dinners he had prepared, which we enjoyed while drifting with sails furled.

Dishes done, we motored along the western face of Waupoos Island, admiring the rural landscapes while searching for a decent anchorage. Just before rounding Pickerel Point into Smith Bay, looking to starboard toward the ferry crossing, a cluster of pristine hulls and stately masts were seen quietly sitting like a covey of geese. Eschewing the complications of social contact and the stress of anchoring close to other craft, Full Circle was motored cautiously into the southwestern pocket of Smith Bay. Passing a few quiet cottages to port, soon there was nothing but mirror-like water, lush trees, and fair skies ahead. One hundred meters from shore, and twenty plus nautical miles from departure, ground tackle was slipped quietly down through two feet of clear water and at least six feet of waving fronds growing from beneath. The engine was reversed and the anchor set. A stunning silence prevailed. There is a quiet joy in reaching such a place, and state of mind, which is seldom encountered in daily life ashore.

Practical reality soon prevailed. John decided to explore the nearby shore to find an environmentally appropriate location for digging a temporary latrine in preparation for the next morning's inevitable post-breakfast "cry of nature". Though Full Circle is equipped with a "porta-potti", its use is vigorously avoided wherever suitable alternatives exist. Burton's homebuilt dinghy, Pooh (a literary rather than functional name, chosen by son Daniel), which had exhibited marvelous seaworthiness tethered astern throughout the day's voyage, was drawn alongside. Even though Burton demonstrated how to board his diminutive prize, nothing he said could have prepared John for the bottle-like jouncing, wig-waggly passage he was to encounter before reaching shore. But it didn't take long for the little lady to teach John how she must be handled. Soon John could be seen rowing near the shore, which had appeared welcoming from a distance, but which was now encountered as a tangle of low-hanging scrub, reeds, and slippery black, partly submerged logs and branches. A small opening was found. Pooh entered, but was immediately clutched by branches which seemed to

try willfully to yank the oars from John's now sweaty palms. Finally, the gauntlet run, a small sandy beach was reached and the necessary preparations completed, some distance up and over the bank into the woods.

After a long, eventful day, and stunning sunset, it was going to be a great night for sleeping. We checked the anchor, listened to the weather, cleaned our teeth and turned in. Surprisingly, there were few mosquitoes. Soon we began to sense the gentle, womb-like shifting of the hull. Our breathing began to slow, as it usually does before the sleep "that knits the raveled sleeve of care". KA-BOOM...WHEE...(cheers, laughing, and clapping!). Burton shot bolt upright, striking his head on the vee berth ceiling. John, struggling from his sleeping bag in the quarter berth, exclaiming, "what the...{you can imagine!}." It was a pre-July first fireworks party at the nearest of those few quiet cottages along the shore. The unlawful festivities continued far into the night...

Smith Bay to Long Point Harbour

There is nothing like the dawning of a new day, especially as first seen when emerging from the cabin of a sailboat moored far from shore, and far from the mundane responsibilities of regular life. No wind yet, but it sure looked pretty. Burton stumbled out, quickly boarded Pooh, and skillfully rowed her toward pressing matters ashore. He returned soon after, scowling, and began scrubbing his hands and feet using biodegradable soap. In his haste to make waste he had stepped bare-footed on a very large, decomposing bird carcass. Such is the grand stuff of cruising memories! A breakfast of porridge, banana, and fresh-brewed coffee set a positive tone for what was going to be a spectacular day of sailing and discovery.

Anchor weighed with rode neatly stowed, we motored quietly out of Smith Bay, studiously avoiding the temptation to act out a variety of pay-back options which came to our minds while passing the now quiet cottages. After rounding up abeam Morrison Point on a heading for South Bay, "cat's paws" began to appear on the water; as these merged together into a rippled surface, indicating a light, shore breeze, Burton ecstatically ordered the raising of the main and genoa. This marked the second magic moment of the day. There is nothing like the experience of raising sail, though shipmates experience it time and again. To the wonder of the fresh morning scenery was now added a wondrous transformation aboard. One moment the hull seemed heavy, moving sluggishly through the water, and the sounds of nature were drowned by the motor's drone. The next moment, when sails soared aloft and the motor died, a sudden silence prevailed, punctuated only by the soft rustling of sails and watery whispers. The hull accelerated and drew more firmly into the water.

Full Circle and her boys were now truly underway. Soon after, the quiet beauty at the mouth of Black Creek was seen to starboard. As we sailed past this inconspicuous spot it was hard to imagine that many years before large sailing ships had been built right there at Cooper's Dock, and that not far up the creek Milford and Port Milford had been bustling centers of trade.

A light breeze inched Full Circle past majestic McMahon Bluff and into South Bay, where a cluster of small homes and docks appeared on the north shore. Concerned about depth and possible uncharted hazards, sails were struck and the motor was started. Gently idling toward the head of the bay, with the weedy bottom clearly visible, we spied a church steeple, and soon after, a high steel dome. This looked like the top portion of an old lighthouse rearing up through the treetops. Why would a lighthouse be located in such a place? To find out, we anchored well out, and fitting our two hefty frames into Pooh, we made a top-heavy trip to shore. Arriving at a grassy spot, we secured the dinghy to a rock, leaving her hidden in the tall grass, and scrambled up to the top of the bank where we found a wide swath cut through a small field of hay as if it were a passageway. Following this brought us to a church beside a park-like area, in the center of which stood a full-scale lighthouse. An adjacent building held the Mariner's Park Museum. Entering, we were drawn into a charming representation of the nautical history of Prince Edward County. We learned that the lighthouse had originally stood on False Duck (or Drake) Island. It was first lit in 1828 and extinguished by government decree in 1965. A year later it was reconstructed in this park to honour the many local farmer-seamen who braved the dangerous waters in this area, reputed years ago to be the shipwreck capital of the Great Lakes, with over two hundred ships lost.

We returned to Full Circle over one hour later, Burton rowing Pooh and John taking the safer option of swimming out in spite of the cold water. Once back aboard, we felt humbled by the museum's collection of pictures and models of great old ships, and the captions that described the early sailors' heroic service and seamanship. Anchor weighed we elected to hoist sail and run out past Platt Point. The steady southwest breeze held all afternoon, carrying us on a spectacular quarter reach far out to the tip of Long Point.

After rounding Point Traverse we made a short beat along the eastern face of the point to reach the small harbour. Over the past few hours we had felt transported back through time, not only because of the museum visit, but also because of the solitude of the unspoiled shoreline along which we were sailing. Suddenly, we were rudely thrust into the twenty-first century as we drew close to Long Point Beach. Radios blared from pick-up trucks ashore, and the cigarette-lipped operator of a PWC was buzzing about, one moment ahead, astern, then abeam. Several minutes later, the red KL4 buoy marking the way into Long Point Harbour hove in sight. With John spotting at the bow, Burton gently eased Full Circle's three and one half foot draft and eight foot beam into the seemingly impossible narrow cut through the sandy beach, entering the small bay. We prepared to anchor in the middle of the bay, the government dock being fully occupied by commercial vessels. Thankfully, a rafting-up opportunity was offered by Wayne, owner of Duck's Dive. His huge steel trawler is used to transport recreational divers and their gear out into Lake Ontario, where they explore the many shipwrecks in the area.

That evening we went for a stroll around the small harbour, past the quaint homes of a few commercial fishermen still operating in the area. Beyond the small enclave we arrived at a small point and came upon a shingle beach guarded by a defunct clapboard lighthouse, where out on the lake we witnessed the glorious reflections of a red sunset on the now mirror-calm waters. Returning, we saw in the shallow water at the head of the bay the flashing back of a gargantuan fish writhing over something beneath, either in mortal combat, or perhaps engaging in something more pleasant. In any event, like everything else on the cruise, it was certainly more entertaining than watching television.

Later in the evening Wayne returned with our water containers full, and we had a good gam over a few beers to cap the day. It was learned that the Duck's Dive headquarters at nearby Point Traverse are located in the original log house built in 1834 by Captain Walters. This man not only sailed tall ships, but also farmed three hundred acres and transported his cattle far out in the lake to pasture on Main Duck Island. The work ethic was certainly strong amongst those early settlers. Sleep came easily that night after this eventful leg of the cruise.

Long Point to Main Duck Island

Early morning ablutions and breakfast were rushed since Wayne was revving his huge diesels and checking all systems prior to transporting a large group of sleepy-eyed young divers to a dive site. These arrived in small groups every couple of minutes, screeching to a halt at the end of the wharf in clouds of dust. Before casting off, Wayne indicated on his chart the heading which Full Circle should take to avoid hazards leaving the harbour and out between Timber and False Ducks Islands. There is nothing so valuable as local knowledge.

Resolving to return next year to this anchorage, we sailed Full Circle in Wayne's wake, out to the northeast tip of False Ducks Island. Burton then took an electronic fix and disappeared below to plot a course to Main Duck Island, our next destination. Having little experience in blue water sailing, we decided to navigate using both the ship's compass and John's hand-held magnetic compass rather than relying on a GPS Waypoint. Steering by compass would now be feasible since Full Circle would soon be clear of the magnetic anomalies found within Prince Edward Bay.

Favoured by a reliable southwest breeze, Full Circle carried us safely along the twelve nautical mile course. It being a hazy day, in a very short time the large silhouette of Timber Island was reduced to a smudge on the horizon astern, and we stared nervously ahead at the vast lake before us. After a quarter reach of less than three hours, Main Duck Island emerged fully formed through the haze. This landfall was far different from that which we had experienced the previous year in John's Drascombe

Lugger Gail O' Wind (Gam, April, 2002). In that instance the visibility had been very good. The island had presented itself in tiny blips on the distant horizon. These had grown together gradually into treetops, light tower, and finally, discernible buildings and cliffs. But, hey, any safe landfall is significant! It brings a mixture of feelings including excitement, relief, and pride in the navigational accomplishment, tempered by humility before the forces controlling wind and sea.

Soon Full Circle drew abeam the well-marked range into School House Bay on the north face of the island. Sails were struck and furled. We then motored cautiously through the channel and deep into the narrow harbour, passing two American cabin cruisers moored at the small dock. Midway between the two shores, one clad with trees and shrubs, the other curtained by tall reeds, the hook was set. Brimming with the feelings which all novices experience after completing a blue water passage, however short, and delighted by the discovery of such an idyllic anchorage, we sat still for a moment, quietly listening to the symphony of surf, gulls and frogs.

After lunch, we struck out on a hike westward across the island. Fortunately, we had decided to wear long pants as we encountered many areas of dense poison ivy. Making our way inland from the south-facing strip of boulder-strewn beach, we wove through some dense brush, finally emerging into an open field. We surmised that this must have been where the early settlers had pastured their cattle. Being energetic hikers, we soon caught up with a party of three Americans from one of the cabin cruisers in the harbour, all attired in swim suits, bearing gifts of exposed legs to the poison ivy festooning the edges of the foot path. After a brief exchange of salutations we marched on, contemplating the next few days' prospect for those ill-fated legs. Reaching the far side of the island, we explored a large abandoned cottage, took photographs of the lighthouse at the northwest corner, and pondered whether a large overgrown pool-like area surrounded by a low cement wall might have been the site of a fish hatchery reportedly built somewhere on the island over a century ago. Later in the afternoon, we explored the northeast corner of the island, searching for the gravesites and buried gold mentioned in historical accounts of shipwrecked French soldiers and sailors who supposedly perished here over two centuries ago. We also looked for the remains of a schoolhouse built to educate the children of the few families who tended the cattle on the island throughout the winter. A short hike away we stood on a high bluff, looking out at the vast lake, and thinking about anecdotal accounts of the lonely settlers at Christmas time trying to stay in touch with loved ones on the mainland by floating letters in sealed bottles across to the shore of Amherst Island whenever winds were favourable. A little prior reading, fuelled by our vivid imaginations, had elevated a simple hike into something far more memorable. Once again, sleep came easily as Full Circle lay quietly at anchor.

Main Duck Island to Kingston

John was torn from a deep slumber by the sound of thundering surf, and Burton's awed voice asking, "do you hear that?". We were comforted somewhat by the VHF weather

report, which stated that the wind was fifteen knots from the southwest, the temperature would be high, and there was no impending change in the weather. Still, we knew that such a "moderate breeze" (as described in the Beaufort scale) blowing over the long fetch of the lake throughout the night's duration, plus the day ahead, would produce white-capped waves considerably higher than one meter.

Moving stiffly, as is the manner of anxious people, we stowed our bedding, conducted hasty ablutions, and with dry mouths, downed a hasty breakfast. A course of "True North" was set from close aboard the green MS1 buoy at the mouth of the channel to a point just west of the flashing green K9 buoy at the entrance of the Lower Gap, thus keeping us well off Melville Shoal. This leg would give us about fifteen nautical miles of blue water sailing. In spite of the slight haze that morning we believed that later in the day it would be possible to con the remaining seven nautical miles to reach Kingston. After a quick visit to the disgusting toilet building near the dock, the outboard was started, and the anchor weighed.

Burton steered through the channel and John made ready to unfurl the genoa while within the relative calm of the island's lee effect. Very soon after, under sail, Full Circle heeled and buried her hull more firmly. She was now taking the full force of the "moderate breeze" on her port quarter, rolling and swaying from side to side in the waves as she went. Being a rather tepidly intrepid pair of sailors, now having emerged from the moderating influence of the island, we became conscious of having passed the point of no return, and charged along with the waves toward Kingston. John's helming was still in the exacting mode of trying to hold the bow perfectly on course. It didn't take long for him to give up this struggle and steer more intuitively, guided by wind on cheek and the sun's sparkling reflection off the waves. Every half hour Burton took a GPS fix and popped below to plot their position on the chart. On the first occasion, he suggested that John steer a touch more to port. Following this, he emerged smiling after each fix.

Looking out over the stern as the boat dropped into a trough the following seas seemed to swell above the horizon, Pooh on her fifty foot tether occasionally disappearing behind a watery hillock, and the odd wave emitting a very audible "whoosh" as it passed obliquely under the little sloop. About midway across, we began to peer through the haze off the starboard beam trying to locate an expected image of the sixty-five foot light tower on Pigeon Island. Unfortunately, visibility was too obfuscated. However, we did see a ghostly shape in the distance which eventually materialized into an acutely heeled sloop pounding along on a close reach. As time passed, the wind lessened and we began to feel more confident. It was hot in the exposed cockpit, and so we stripped and took turns lowering ourselves from the swimming ladder astern, dragging in the cool row of the wake. The miles passed quickly with two scholarly gentlemen discussing all manner of lofty subjects, with naught but wind and waves to hear the brilliant pronouncements. Finally, what great relief and joy we felt when Amherst Island emerged from the haze. Another landfall for our treasure chest of cruising memories.

The Lower Gap was safely coned, and with ever darkening sky, Full Circle was headed toward Kingston. When the wind began to freshen, Burton wanted to take one more exciting tack, so off we flew, crashing toward Four Mile Point on Simcoe Island. Returning, we spied the brig St. Lawrence II. Like a pair of bloodhounds we decided to give chase. However, it soon became apparent that our small craft was no match for this majestic adversary. Turning back toward Kingston we began a roller-coaster downwind ride over Penitentiary Shoal.

As we flew eastward toward the harbour entrance several dinghies from a sailing school fleet blew over in succession. Time to start the motor and round up to take sails down. By now there was a chill in the air, the wind was screaming, the sky was very dark, and the steep white-capped waves were charging along in close order. Failing to swing around to port, Full Circle wallowed back downwind and finally managed to swing up to starboard into the wind. This enabled Burton to drop and furl the sails. It was a real struggle, with the old Merc' coughing, and the boat bucking like a bronco in the vicious chop. John, thankfully, steered toward Flora McDonald Basin, and Burton called on channel 68 to request directions to a mooring.

After tying up, we decided to go jogging through the downtown core, combining sightseeing with much needed exercise. We became very hot during the late afternoon climb up the steep hill that rises northward from the basin. As we coasted back down hill we began to anticipate the relief of showering and washing a three-day pile of dirty laundry. A few minutes later, staggering into the damp and dark wash facilities, arms laden with dirty laundry and fingers grasping soap and coins, we were met by the angry faces of women from other boats. They had just been informed that there was no water, but that a plumber had been called and water would be available "in one hour without fail."

Ever optimistic, we stuffed our smelly things into one of the machines and made for the nearest pub where we might pass the time more pleasantly. One hour later we returned to learn that repairs would take yet another hour. John went "ballistic", demanding to speak with the "top guy". The suave gentleman in charge quickly materialized, promising repairs "within the hour". Back to the pub. Later, with a distinct spring and swagger in our step, we returned to find that our laundry had been removed from "our" machine. Pointedly questioning the busy women surrounding us, we were given, in no uncertain terms, the simple cut-throat etiquette which prevails in marina laundromats. Finally, a machine became available and we chastened adventurers gave ourselves up to the wonderfully rejuvenating showers. Later, with dryers fully occupied, we draped wet laundry all over Full Circle. Hunger struck and we quickly returned to town for fish and chips and more ale. Much later that evening, with a little stagger in our swagger, we returned to Full Circle, still in her full regalia of damp laundry, to sleep off the day's exertions.

Return to Prescott

The next morning we were a groggy ship's company setting off from Kingston to bring the old girl back to her berth in Prescott. Having had to motor all the way up from Prescott initially, we were determined to return under sail, with notions of being pushed along by the brisk southwesterly which normally blows in this area. As it turned out, it was a merciless sun that prevailed, with a very light westerly to slowly push us down river, sails spread wing-and-wing, toward our destination. This manner of proceeding required a great deal of concentration from the helmsman to keep the sails full, and it was John who was to be primary bondsman to the tyrant tiller during this leg of the journey. As the morning progressed and the sun intensified, the heat became almost unbearable in that exposed cockpit, and with no relative wind to refresh us, we slowly baked as she ambled toward home. Thus the decision was made to put in to Gananoque for a hamburger and some ice cream at lunchtime. As we left the expanse between Wolfe and Howe Islands and entered the narrow channel toward Gananoque, we began encountering heavy boat traffic, with the usual confusion of wakes from the many powerboats frequenting the area. On reaching the town, we tied up at the public dock by the Customs reporting station, which faces the open river. Burton left John with the boat and made his way to a nearby restaurant to fetch lunch. As Burton waited at the counter for his order to be prepared, he casually glanced out the window overlooking the waterfront. To his horror, he beheld Full Circle bobbing furiously and bashing into the concrete wall of the dock, John doing all he could to keep her from leaping out of the water (a rather unlikely contest between a 160 lbs man and a 3000 lbs boat!). Burton tore out of the restaurant, determined to save his beloved from dashing herself to pieces, reaching her in time to witness the last two thuds of her port bow into the concrete wall as the waves began to subside. John explained that two large powerboats had emerged from a nearby marina at full throttle, trailing huge wakes as they passed close to the waterfront docking area. We were later informed by a local that such incidents are very common on the Gananoque waterfront, where visiting boats are frequently pounded against the concrete wall because of the wakes from passing powerboats. Those who know better usually opt to tie up at the marina located within the breakwater at the western edge of town. Fortunately, no one was injured and Full Circle did not suffer serious damage.

Setting off again toward Prescott we entered the Gananoque Narrows, a narrow buoyed channel from which deep draft vessels such as keelboats must not stray. Here we encountered a large tour boat heading into Gananoque at full speed, making a huge wake. With little room to maneuver, Full Circle was forced to take the steep wake on her beam, causing her to roll violently, her mast whipping from side to side, severely straining the rigging and nearly swamping the cockpit. Throughout the remainder of our journey in the Thousand Islands we encountered heavy powerboat traffic, with Full Circle dancing wildly when caught in the confused seas heaved up by numerous converging wakes. During this time we lived in constant dread of rapidly approaching powerboats whose operators, often seemingly unaware of the rules of the road and the dictates of courtesy, would come screaming toward us with their roaring engines, in many cases refusing to yield to a boat under sail until the last possible moment (if at all - in several encounters we were forced to yield to the oncoming powerboats). Sun-baked

and weary from the onslaught, we reflected upon the irony of having braved the howling winds and swells of Lake Ontario, and yet, experiencing our most unnerving moments in the protected waters of the scenic Thousand Islands.

That evening we made for a quiet anchorage off a small island located about mid-way in the channel running along the north side of Grenadier Island. Having set the hook and begun preparations for dinner, a local cottager motored by in his skiff, giving a friendly wave, which we took as the kindest gesture in a nerve-wracking day, setting all to rights again.

The next morning gave us a bright sunrise with the promise of another hot day. Again, a gentle breeze pushed us eastward, at a slow pace designed to make us roast more effectively in the cockpit. By mid-morning John's tiller hand was blistering from the sun, and we alternated for brief stints at the helm, seeking relief by draping a towel over head and shoulders, and wrapping another round the exposed hand. We looked with envy at the larger sailboats encountered along the way, sporting dodgers and biminis offering their occupants shady respite from the sun. From time to time we would take turns trailing from the stern ladder in the cooling waters. Transiting the Brockville Narrows a man on a personal water craft buzzed around us for a while, and then cut across our stern, inches from our dinghy tow. We finally passed to the east of Brockville, gratefully leaving the noisy, traffic-burdened Thousand Islands behind us, and entered the wide, less heavily trafficked final stretch of river to Prescott. And so it was, that by mid-afternoon, we arrived safely, entering Prescott harbour with almost 250 nautical miles under our keel. She had come full circle.