

Whittier Soundings



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Winter Boating Prince William Sound Style

By Chris Pallister

My “friends” not only look at me like I’m crazy, but they also usually blurt out, “are you nuts,” when I mention that I’m going boating in the dead of the winter. Well; yeah I am. And I love them too.

I know what they’re thinking; Pallister nearly won the Golden Anchor this year. How much more proof do you need that he’s a fool? (No offense intended to prior worthy Golden Anchor award winners). They’re also thinking that this time of year the days are cold, dark and short. Worse, winter storms blow through the sound on a very short intense cycle, bringing endless snows, and winds and seas that can be ferocious. They’re right about all of that. But many don’t realize that when it’s zero degrees in Anchorage, it is often above freezing in the sound and dead calm. There’s nobody else out, the wildlife is plentiful and less spooky, and the scenery is unbelievable.



Winter twilight-colored skies, blazing stars and northern lights are alone worth the extra effort it takes to enjoy winter cruising.

When the night skies are clear with a bright moon, the snow-covered mountains take on a ghostly blue color in the dead of the night.



It so beautiful it causes shivers to worm up your spine. The price of admission is worth it.

It does take considerable additional effort to safely enjoy winter boating. Paying close attention to weather during the summer boating season is critical, but even more so in the winter. Winter weather brings the added danger of freezing spray

which can cause dangerously heavy ice buildup on vessel topsides potentially increasing instability and the threat of capsizing. To contend with freezing spray, you must carefully study weather data and, once afloat, anticipate weather patterns. You should also constantly develop and update alternate plans or bailout routes much as pilots do as they continuously look for safe landing sites in case something goes wrong. I would advise anybody who is considering winter boating to take the Aux Weather class and to study available information on how to handle freezing-spray conditions.

Filing float plans or carefully informing contacts where you will be is doubly important in the winter for a couple of reasons. First, there is nobody out there to help you if you get in trouble, so somebody needs to know your location. This requires that you leave a detailed float plan and then stick to it. If you must deviate from the float plan, don't do so unless you can communicate with somebody that you are modifying the float plan. Second, if you get in trouble in the winter, the weather is apt to be foul and the visibility near zero. In addition, the days are so short as to make searches very difficult. It is critical that responders can quickly zero in on your likely location.

You must have equipment readily available to remove snow and ice. We carry plastic snow shovels, ice scrapers, rubber mallets, windshield wiper fluid, and even ice melt. Mountaineering back-country snow shovels are excellent for removing snow. They are incredibly strong, light, small, collapsible, easily stowed and they are plastic which protects boat surfaces. Aluminum or wood baseball bats are great tools, primarily for beating piscatorial victims into submission, but they can also be used to "gently" knock ice loose.

Heavy snow must be removed from the topside for the same instability reasons freezing spray presents, although a good layer of snow, a poor man's insulation, on deck will keep the interior of the boat warmer. But, you do not want the snow to partially melt, leaving behind a heavy layer of ice which can be difficult to remove. A push broom is handy for removing fresh snow before it compacts.

While the threat of hypothermia is always present in Prince William Sound, that threat is

compounded in the winter. At least in the early part of the winter, water temperatures aren't much colder in the winter than they are in the summer. However, with air temperatures 40 to 60 degrees colder than in the summer, it is all that more important to keep from getting wet. In other words keep your butt out of the water. However, because snow that falls in the sound is often closer to slush than powder, and it commonly rains in the winter, getting wet is often unavoidable. Good clothing, preferably modern synthetics, silk, or wool; no cotton, not even your undies; and lots of changes, is important. Of course, you need all of your typical summer foul-weather rain gear.

You can winter boat in your inflatable if you are even more adventurous than me, sleeping in a clammy tent sunk in a snow bank, with a fire smoldering in the bottom of a water-filled pit. Yep, that's just what all of us young kids in the Auxiliary are going to do. For us decrepit old geezers that can't stand the rigors of real adventure, I would recommend a nice snug boat cabin with an excellent heat system. Now we're talking, hot chocolate, warm slippers, warm bed, maybe a snuggle bunny if you're lucky; you just don't appreciate how nice those are until you experience them in the middle of the winter in Prince William Sound. Seriously, a good heater is not only a great comfort making winter boating much more enjoyable; it is also a very crucial piece of safety gear. It can ward off hypothermia, prevent ice and snow from building up on deck, and also keep windows clear if there is good air circulation.

Diesel heat is best. Not only is there more energy in diesel than in an equivalent amount of propane, gas or alcohol, it is safer and less expensive. Electric heat is great because it is dry, but it unfortunately requires a continuous power source such as a generator with the associated noise and high expense. With all heat sources, pay close attention to carbon monoxide poisoning which can be more of a problem in winter boats which are often poorly ventilated in an attempt to limit heat loss. Have, use, and trust your carbon monoxide detector. If it starts squealing, don't just take the batteries out; yeah, I know you have all

done that before. Find and fix the problem. If it is the heat source, my personal preference is to be chilly over dead.

While adding immeasurably to the joy of winter boating, heating a boat creates some additional problems, at least one other which is also potentially dangerous. Heated air holds more moisture than cold air. That means a heated boat interior can become very humid, particularly because windows, doors and vents are usually closed to keep the heat in. With high humidity and poor ventilation, any cold surfaces will quickly condensate.



Windows will fog as fast as you can wipe them dry and, if it is cold enough outside, a layer of ice can form on window interiors. Besides making you uncomfortable by drizzling water down your neck and other unmentionable places, fogged windows can make navigation dangerous, particularly in the common winter low-light conditions.

It is an ongoing struggle to keep windows clear in the winter. In addition to the typical circulating or defroster fans there are some other solutions for defogging windows. Insulating windows by installing custom-made interior storm windows or applying clear heat-shrink plastic over them helps.



However, if either of these techniques is used upon a windshield, then defrosters won't keep ice and snow off the outside of the window because there is now an insulating barrier between the heater and outside glass. One solution is to apply an electric defrost element on the interior surface of the windshield, much like the electric defrosters common on car rear windows. They are available, but tend to be expensive and consume a large amount of electricity, so you must have a good DC power source to operate them. At some point, the law of diminishing returns applies. However, there are low-tech solutions to the fogging problem. Many commercial anti-fog compounds are available such as products by Rain X and 20/20. A thin film of Dawn dish detergent smeared on the inside of the window will keep window fog at bay for a few hours.

Remember that you are often contending with significant harbor winds in the winter. Often, the most difficult part of winter boating is getting out of the harbor.



With winds whistling off the Whittier Glacier, avoiding bouncing off other boats or the breakwater can be a significant challenge. Heck, I have trouble with that in the summer, but it is even tougher in the winter. The Harbor Master's office is happy to send somebody down to help you with lines, both coming and going, but remember if you arrive in the late evening, there may be nobody to help you secure lines while docking in the wind. If that is the case, and winds are howling, just tie up to the fuel dock, but make certain you notify Shoreside and move your vessel as soon as the wind dies down or you have help.

Prepare your boat for docking well before you enter the harbor. You do not want any surprises as you fight your way down a fairway into the nose

of a westerly. Get out plenty of fenders and get your dock lines prepared. Much to my chagrin, one thing I learned very quickly was to keep all the dock lines in the cabin. Do not secure or store them on deck or in the cockpit. Why? Because they will freeze!



You ever try to tie a frozen nylon line around a dock cleat or slip a frozen eye through a deck cleat? Doesn't work too well and you're likely to be crashing into the dock or your neighbor as you struggle with the lines. And, you might hurt a dock hand heaving a heavy frozen line. I have a heated cabinet originally for drying boots and gloves that I also use for my lines during the winter. The lines not only thaw, but completely dry out. By the way, fenders also get very hard from the cold. It doesn't do any good to store them inside because they get hard almost as soon as they get cold again. But remember that they are hard and will break if hit against the dock with too much force. So go easy if you can.

Also, if it has snowed in Whittier while you were out, the dock cleats are likely to be buried under snow and ice. It is important that the cleats be exposed before you try to dock, particularly if the wind is blowing. Calling ahead to the harbor can hopefully alleviate that problem.

Another major problem is dealing with frozen dock lines.

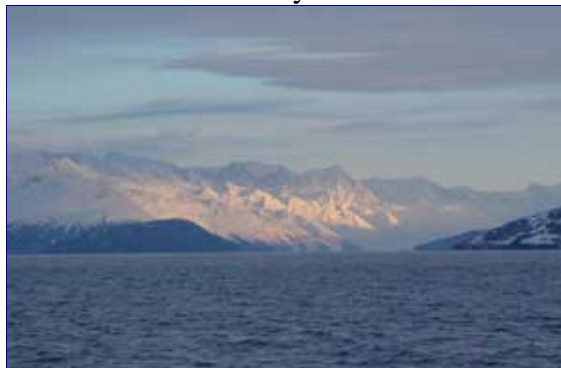


It is often nearly impossible to release mooring lines from snowed-over and frozen dock cleats. Pouring warm water over the cleats helps, as seawater does on warmer days.

There are also a few things to keep in mind about Whittier winter services. The Whittier Tunnel runs on a much reduced winter schedule. The Shoreside fuel dock is only open for a few short days a week so call ahead and check their schedule. It is very important to keep your fuel tanks full during the winter, so it is worthwhile to pay Shoreside the call-out fee to refuel your boat after regular hours. Do not let your boat set in the harbor with depleted tanks. They will condensate, particularly in the winter, ultimately causing all kinds of havoc with your fuel and fuel system.



The Harbor Master's office is open daily but they also operate on reduced winter hours. Freshwater at the docks is only available at one location near the bottom of the ramp next to the Harbor Master office. When you have filled your water tank, don't forget to leave the water running because if you shut it off the line may freeze.



By the way, I'm always looking for winter boating compatriots. I just know there has to be a couple more adventurous boaters out there. Do I have any takers?

District Conference 2008

Through winter weather and blizzards the District 17 Auxiliarist made the trek to Homer Alaska for the 2008 District Training Conference.



Yes, Alaskans are a hardy group, and visitors Mary Larson of Georgia and Michael Cupit of Vancouver Canada must be included among those with the same determination. Difficult as the trip may have been, there was a fantastic turn out this year.

Homer Flotilla members met everyone arriving in the hotel lobby, passing out conference information, goodie bags, and name tags with welcoming smiles.



Friday started with the opening ceremonies, with Danny Cole, FC Homer Flotilla as MC. Dennis Novak, Homer Mayor Pro Tem; Sue Albright, DIRAUX; Commodore Michael Robinson all gave welcoming speeches.



Terry Robel, of Sen. Gary Stevens' office, presented a citation to the Coxswain Academy Crew of 275594, involved in rescuing the Homer Chamber of Commerce members off FV Halibut Endeavour during the 2007 Academy.



Mike Cupit of the Canadian Coast Guard Auxiliary gave a presentation on their operations, equipment and funding. His presentation was informative and interesting. It made us aware of the same goals but operational and funding differences between our programs. Thank you, Mike, for a great presentation.

After a small break the day continued with the awards luncheon where several members received awards and the current year district staff officers took the oath of office.



The Division Board meetings were held during the afternoon, discussing current and future business.



Division 1 Meeting



Division 2 Meeting



Division 3 Meeting

Thank you to all the division board staff for your hard work and dedication

Saturday and Sunday a variety of training in various Auxiliary missions was offered.



New Member Orientation



Instructor Workshop



Plan Today or Fail Tomorrow



Aux Data Presentation



Program Visitor Workshop



TCT Refresher



5 Star & UPV and CFVE



Public Affairs



Vessel Examiner Workshop



Public Education Workshop



D-17 RBS Workshop



Navigational Charting & Search Planning Techniques



POMS & Operations Workshop

The schedule provided flexibility for members to attend many of the classes of interest to them.

Fun Night's theme "Rescue and Survival" brought a variety of costumes but the big part of the evening's entertainment was team competitions in rescue and survival.



The competition used all the skills necessary for a boat crew to perform a SAR.

After the competition, the Flotillas presented LCDR Sue Albright, DIRAUX, with going away gifts.



The presentations and gifts varied from fun to serious. Sue will be retiring this year and the conference presented the best opportunity for all Flotillas to thank her for all she has done for the D-17 Auxiliary.

Sue, you will be missed. Thank you for your dedication to the Auxiliary.

The formal dinner and awards was well attended by members and distinguished visitors. After a great meal awards were presented.



All photos courtesy of Stewart Sterling

Congratulations to all receiving these awards.

Make plans to attend the 2009 D-17 Training Conference to be held in Anchorage Alaska.

Boating Safety Organizations Join to Speak with One Voice in 2008:

The Office of Boating Safety has requested that all Auxiliarists follow their lead in transitioning from using the term "PFD" to using the term "life jacket" exclusively for all non-regulatory purposes, both internally and externally. This change is part of a national thrust being spearheaded by the National Safe Boating Council with the full support of the Coast Guard, all state boating authorities, and affiliated organizations and associations to promote life jacket wear. The Coast Guard reminds you..... Boat Responsibly and Always Wear Your Life Jacket.

[Posted: 16 JAN 2008. Source: Stu Soffer, N-MS]
(Reprinted from the National Auxiliary web site)

FSO-MV



Tony Hillegeist

The primary function of the Marine Dealer Visitation (MV) program is to promote safe boating for the recreational boating public through the aid of the marine dealer, a primary contact with the novice boater.

The MV provides a point of contact with the marine dealer and provides information regarding Public Education courses, vessel examinations, Auxiliary membership, and to distribute Coast Guard, Auxiliary, and other available boating safety handout materials through the marine dealers.



<http://a1700204.uscgaux.info>

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