

Cruise Beyond Your Home Waters

Boating Tips

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Many boaters are comfortable cruising to Ocracoke or Oriental, Manteo or Nags Head. What about cruising to Lake Erie, Daytona Beach FL, New York City, Mobile AL, even Montreal Canada, the Bahamas or USVI?

An over simplification, you follow the road when navigating rivers, canals and ICW. With no road how do you navigate an open ocean or large lake like any Great Lake? What about tides and currents plus wind direction and velocity since they also affect the boat on its course line.

When venturing away from home, apply the principals used in learning to drive a car. At first, you didn't go far from home, Oriental. Eventually you ventured farther, Chesapeake Bay, out of state, off the familiar roads to the congested inner city freeways, the Great Lakes or Bermuda, not that they are congested.

In boating you gain experience through the use of new navigational tools; charts, GPS, tide charts, radar even celestial reading with a sextant. Through repeated use you became comfortable and confident.

In simple terms, the initial navigation key whether the road or water is knowing your beginning and ending points. Bermuda, for instance, is southeast of Eastern North Carolina. Old school, using a proper paper chart draw a straight course line between the two. With a compass, determine the course then go. Not so fast! Currents and wind aid as well as hinder your travel along that course.

Rather than fight the northern flowing Gulf current by heading south east, you chart a course east to go with the flow, go faster, until encountering the south flowing Atlantic current. Now chart a course south east to go with that flow. But what about winds, the trade winds? There are books and charts on that.

We now know the straight line may not be best for speed and fuel consumption.

Knowing your position on the globe or along the course line is critical. You must know when and where to change course and your exact location in case of an emergency. Are you on course? How do you return to course? How many miles to your next course change?

GPS is helpful yet a smart mariner relies on multiple tools. Smart mariners combine electronic charting with paper charting, taking regular readings from their GPS or sextant (celestial), and writing them, degrees, minutes and seconds plus date and time on the paper chart. GPS depends on power plus a strong signal while a celestial readings require a clear sky day and night, hence rely on both. Old navigators also used wave direction, smell – aroma of flowers or pine, presence of birds and type – shore bird vs sea bird plus objects in the water – leaves or fauns and limbs to aid in navigation. Experience!

Talk with boaters who have cruised in the waters you wish to explore. Learn what issues they had, what they found enjoyable at various destinations and gain their recommendations.

The most valuable initial step in cruising beyond home waters is you learning from experienced mariners and learn how to use all the navigational tools at your disposal. Gain experience by using them in voyages of increasing distance from shore and eventually you'll safely land in Bermuda.

This article is given courtesy of the Pamlico Sail & Power Squadron. The Squadron schedules boating education courses and seminars throughout the year. The winter is a great time to further your boating education. To learn more email our Education Officer at psps@gmail.com or contact Linda at 252-964-3009. For example, an Engine Maintenance Course begins in February.