



THEY TELL IT LIKE IT IS IN THE CAYMAN ISLANDS.



VENTURE IN OSWEGO, NY, WITH STILL DISTANCE TO GO TO COMPLETE THIS EPIC JOURNEY.

# Alaska to Nova Scotia

BY TONY FLEMING

PART 2 – FROM THE PANAMA CANAL TO NOVA SCOTIA

## MOTHER OF A SEA TRIAL HOW ABOUT SOME MORE INTRO SAY THREE LINES TOTAL

Following our transit of the Panama Canal, Venture headed northeast through the Caribbean Sea to Grand Cayman Island 600 miles away. The weather was rough on this 60-hour leg and we encountered many ships heading south towards the canal. Only 15m above sea level, Grand Cayman was not visible to the naked eye until we were only a couple of miles away. We found that Sunday is a day of rest unless a cruise ship comes to town. Shops and supermarkets remained shuttered all day but we were able to refuel from a truck which came to the dock alongside the boat. A couple of days later we were again underway for the 500-mile trip to Key West. North of Cuba the Gulf Stream runs at 2 1/2 knots from west to east; an opposing easterly wind, blowing up to 30 knots, created unpleasantly short seas. Sometime in the middle

of the night we picked up something on the port propeller. We backed down to get rid of it but nothing surfaced and we could still feel a tremor on the port shaft. We pulled into Bight Marina in Key West, Florida, just after noon on June 5th, relieved to be at rest in nice smooth water. A diver took a look at our port propeller and reported what looked like a gigantic fuzz ball which turned out to be the remains of one of the big white cargo bags used to transport bulk cargoes such as grain or powdered materials. We could not believe that we had been able to move in anything other than circles with that giant encumbrance on the propeller. After a couple of days in the quirky town of Key West we continued north for Fort Lauderdale on the coast of mainland Florida. It was almost a culture shock to suddenly find ourselves in

the heart of the first major American city after so many weeks spent in remote places. The Intra Coastal Waterway (ICW) runs all the way from Miami in Florida to Norfolk in Virginia and provides a slow, but protected, inland route for much of the Eastern Seaboard. We were running a few days late on our schedule so we headed once more out into the open Atlantic through the lock at Cape Canaveral with the launch towers of the Space Center clearly visible on the horizon. Here we were again in the grip of the Gulf Stream and our speed measured by GPS increased from 9.5 knots to 14.7. The warmer water contributes to the propagation of thunderstorms and we were enveloped by a short-lived monster with ominous black clouds rent with jagged bolts of lightning. The anemometer recorded gusts as high as 60 knots and whipped the black surface of the sea into a seething white froth. For sixty hours, Chris and I worked alternate watches with 3 hours on followed by 3 hours off. We re-entered the relative security of the

ICW at Moorehead City south of Cape Fear in North Carolina just as dawn was breaking. The ICW alternates between narrow canal sections with open areas so extensive that land is barely visible on the horizon. But, even in these inland seas, the dredged channel zigzags randomly across the featureless water and may only be 50 yards wide with depths as little as 2 ft just beyond it. We left the ICW at Norfolk and made a 14-hour overnight passage through the Chesapeake to Burr Yacht Sales close to Annapolis. With our main navigation computer on the blink, the journey was a challenge, with numerous buoys and shipping to contend with. We spent a few days at this excellent facility undergoing routine maintenance and planning how best to lower the radar mast for the upcoming canals. After leaving Burr Yacht Sales early on the morning of July 1st, we travelled up the Chesapeake Bay and through the Chesapeake and Delaware Canals into Delaware Bay. We entered another short canal to reach the town



THE TOWN OF LUNENBURG, IN NOVA SCOTIA, CANADA, WAS FORMALLY ESTABLISHED IN 1753 AS THE FIRST BRITISH COLONIAL SETTLEMENT IN NOVA SCOTIA OUTSIDE OF HALIFAX.





CRUISING ALONG ONE OF THE MANY NEW YORK CANALS WHICH ARE ALL PART OF THE ICW.

and marina at Cape May where the northern shore of Delaware Bay meets the Atlantic Ocean. The following day we followed the New Jersey shore and, even before we reached our turning point at Sandy Hook, the distinctive Manhattan skyline rose above the horizon. On the morning of July 3rd we moved the boat 20 miles into the heart of New York city, passing the elegant Statue of Liberty, before tying up in the Liberty Landing marina alongside a

Fleming 55. Here we celebrated July 4th before continuing up the Hudson River, which provided the first leg of our overland route to the Great Lakes. We spent the first night in a marina at Haverstraw and the second up the narrow Roundout Creek. Here we tied up in the very centre of the historical district in the small town of Kingston which, until it was burnt to the ground by the British in 1777, had been the

capital of New York state. The third day on the Hudson we passed through the industrial town of Albany before tying up alongside the dock wall in Troy where we made our preparations for the transit of the 30 locks that stood between us and Lake Ontario. We used the davit to lower the yacht mast which brought our air draft to just below 6m. After considering various alternatives, we decided to use industrial-strength garbage bags to protect our fancy fenders from the rough lock walls. They may not look too classy but I can recommend them as being practical and certainly cost effective!

Over the next seven days we meandered our way up the Erie to Three Rivers where we turned into the Oswego. Refining our technique along the way, we negotiated a total of 30 locks without any problems but Venture's generous side-decks made the job much safer and easier. At times our progress was almost dreamlike through still waters that reflected a mirror image of the forested banks.

We exited the last lock at Oswego at the northern end of the New York State Canal system to see ahead of us the vast expanse of Lake Ontario. Although we had taken a leisurely pace, spending two nights each in three different places, it had taken us just 12 days to make the passage from New York to the Great Lakes.

The lake meets the St Lawrence Seaway in an area known as the Thousand Islands. In fact, the actual number of islands is closer to 1,800, which vary in size from little more than rocky



VENTURER PASSING THE ELEGANT STATUE OF LIBERTY, BEFORE TYING UP IN THE LIBERTY LANDING MARINA ALONGSIDE A FLEMING 55 FOR 4TH OF JULY CELEBRATIONS.

outcrops to several acres. As scenic as it was, this was our entry point into the Great St Lawrence Seaway, which opened as recently as 1959 as a joint venture between the Canadian and US governments.

Between Lake Ontario and Montreal there are seven major locks controlled by either Canada or the United States. The locks are considered a kind of no mans land because, even though you may have crossed the border – at this point nothing more than a line on the map in the middle of the seaway – and entered a Canadian lock, you are not allowed off the boat and have not officially entered Canada.

We sailed across Lac Saint-Louis, being sure to stay within the channel which wandered back and forth across the open waters of this large lake. It is essential to keep within the red and green markers as the depth can be less than one metre outside the channel. The port and starboard markers can be as little as 400m apart in the middle of a lake several miles wide.

The following day we followed the curved Canal de la Rive Sud which terminated in the locks of Saint Catherine and Saint-Lambert. After leaving the last lock we had to take a sharp turn and proceed upstream against a 7-knot current to reach the marina in the old port. For Venture, with her twin screws and powerful engines, this was not a problem but for a less powerful, single screw boat it could be a much more challenging situation because the adverse current also sets you sideways.

We were allocated a good slip in the Marina Port d'Escale in Jacques Cartier Basin in the old port of Montreal where we spent two nights before heading down river to Trois Rivieres, so called because the St Lawrence river splits into three channels. The tidal range in Trois Rivieres is 1m but in Quebec, 67 miles downstream, it can reach as much as 5.5m. We timed our departure for 1130 and with the current behind us we reached speeds as high as 14 knots at only 1100 rpm.

Two impressive bridges mark the approaches into Quebec and here the river narrows with a consequent increase in the speed of the current. High bluffs on the port side, crowned by the ancient Citadel, mark the location of the battle in 1759 between the British and the French which changed the history of this part of Canada.

The entrance to the old port of Quebec lies downstream from this point just before a prominent line of massive grain silos. The actual entrance is a narrow slot in the seawall which, with a 3-knot current sweeping past, had to be entered with resolve. This led to the outer basin but, mindful of the great tidal range, we still had to pass through a lock to reach the inner basin.

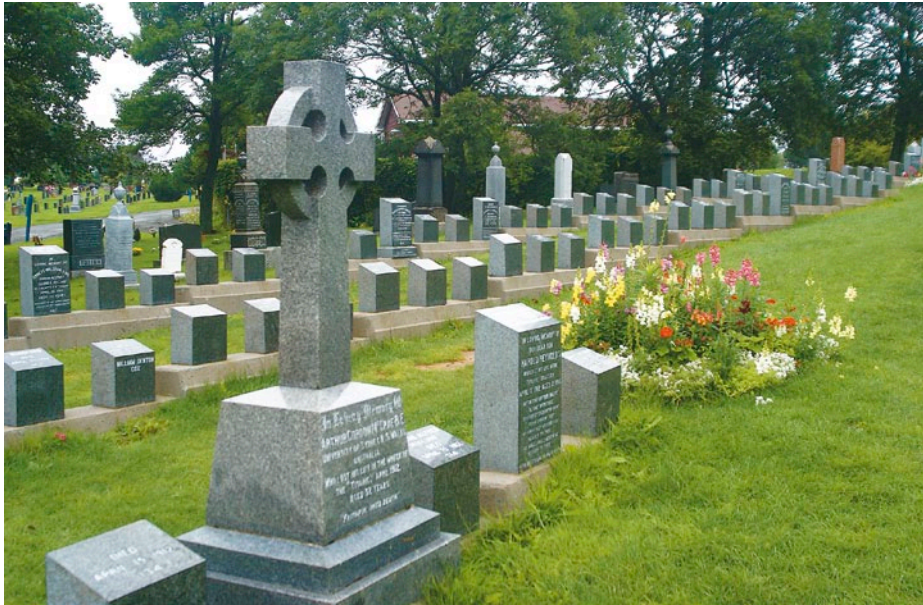
Having retired early on the first night we were awoken at 10 pm by a barrage of strange sounds to find that the wall of silos bordering one side of the inner and outer harbours was acting as gigantic movie screen. The huge images, accompanied by surround sound on a massive scale, depicted the history of the city of Quebec celebrating its 400th anniversary.

The following day we walked through the old town and toured the Citadel from which there are magnificent views over the city and up and down the St Lawrence River. Although almost everyone we met spoke

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THE WELL MAINTAINED GRAVEYARD AT HALIFAX FOR MANY OF THE TITANIC VICTIMS.

good English, French is the universal language here – so much so that it is hard to believe that you are not in France. We stayed in this fascinating city for a week. On our day of departure, 30-knot headwinds conspired with downstream currents of 7 knots to produce steep waves and sheets of flying spray, added to which were strange areas of exceptional turbulence. These we attributed to the mixing of fresh and salt water which we now encountered for the first time

since we had travelled up the Hudson. The water temperature dropped from 22 degrees in Quebec to 9 degrees once we reached the seawater. We spent the night in the small marina at Cap a L'Aigle (Eagle Cape) and the following morning awoke to a beautiful, still dawn. The estuary, now averaging 10 miles wide, was calm as we headed northeast and kept a look out for the distinctive Prince Shoal lighthouse marking the mouth of the Saguenay fjord. With wa-

ter depths of up to 305m, the area is known for the sightings of up to nine different types of whales including the highly endangered white belugas. We turned into the fjord past the town of Tadoussac and wound our way between the steeply forested banks. Water depths plummet to 275m right after the entrance and remain 100m right up to shore. The downside of this spectacular topography is the scarcity of places to anchor and we spent the night in the marina at L'Anse St Jean where Venture towered over the surrounding boats. The huge swathe of land lying to the south of the St Lawrence River is the Gaspesie Peninsula whose steep coast was lined with green hills on which there were literally hundreds of modern, three-bladed windmills. It was near here, at 49 degrees 18 minutes, that we reached our most northerly point since leaving Mexico. Averaging 80 miles per day, we stopped every night at small ports like St Anne des Monts and Riviere au Renard (Fox River). Most were snug harbours protected by a fortress of high walls made up of rocks the size of a refrigerator – stark evidence of expected weather conditions. Now in the North Atlantic we passed the landmark of Perce Rock so named because of the large hole pierced right through it. (Note – perce is French for pierce. – Tech. Ed.) We circumnavigated the nearby Iles Bonaventure which is a national park famous for being home to the second largest – but most accessible – gannet breeding colony in the world.

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TOP & ABOVE: ILS BONAVENTURE IS A NATIONAL PARK FAMOUS FOR BEING HOME TO THE SECOND LARGEST GANNET BREEDING COLONY IN THE WORLD.

Here, tall cliffs provide nesting sites for over 50,000 of these dazzling white birds with their 1.5m wingspan. We parked the boat at nearby L'Anse a Beaufile and the following morning took a taxi back to Perce and boarded a tour boat out to Ile Bonaventure so we could visit the gannet colony. It was now time for us to leave the province of Quebec and enter New Brunswick where the people are known as the Acadians and speak a dialect of French. We headed for the small port of Ecumina, which is dedicated to commercial fishing and has no special amenities for cruising yachts. The friendly harbourmaster

showed up in his truck to collect the princely sum of \$9 for the night's mooring! Nearby, as a chilling reminder of the risks of this profession, was a memorial dedicated to the 35 men who lost their lives in a single storm in June 1959. An easy run across the Northumberland Strait brought us to Charlottetown, the capital of Prince Edward Island. The day after our arrival, on August 14th, there was a parade down Queen's Street led by a pipe band in kilts and full Scottish regalia. Our impressions of Prince Edward Island were of an undulating, pastoral landscape whose rich, red soil was intensively

cultivated with extensive fields of the potatoes for which the island is famous, along with crops of maize, wheat and barley. A forest of modern windmills occupies the northern shore. We had been told that on no account should we miss out on visiting the Bras d'Or lakes which lie at the heart of Cape Breton Island. These lakes are a leftover from the last ice age 10,000 years ago. Limited access to the sea through narrow channels on the northeast coast keeps the salinity in the lakes to less than 60% than that of the adjacent ocean. We entered the lake through the scenic St Peter's Canal, opened in 1869, and tied up in St Peter's marina located just around the corner. The following morning we followed a winding route across the large lake at a leisurely eight knots and made our way to the small town of Baddeck which was, for thirty-seven years, the home of the inventor of the telephone, Dr Alexander Graham Bell. Although born in Edinburgh, Scotland, Dr Bell moved to this small town in 1885 after being shipwrecked with his family on the coast of Newfoundland. North easterlies were blowing at 30 knots as we headed down the treacherous coast of Nova Scotia. Once around Cape Canso the wind and waves came from aft and we had a comfortable ride, surfing at speeds in excess of 15 knots. Our only companions in the grey seascape were the elegant gannets clearly in their element as they skimmed the wave tops. Our next major stop was Halifax, where we tied up in downtown Queen's Wharf Marina. Halifax is the capital of Nova Scotia as well as





PART OF THE OLD HISTORIC QUEBEC CITY.



CRAB FISHING IS BIG BUSINESS ALONG THE NORTH ATLANTIC COAST.

being the largest Canadian city in the maritime provinces. Founded by the British in 1749, the city has been witness to several the major events of the 20th century. Following the Titanic disaster in 1912, ships left from here to retrieve the bodies – many of which are buried in three of the city's cemeteries. On a grey,

rainy day I visited the Fairview Lawn Cemetery which is the final resting place of 121 victims. It is a peaceful yet sombre place to reflect on that famous tragedy now almost 100 years in the past. During WW2, the huge harbour was the assembly point for many convoys carrying food

and supplies to wartime Britain. After three days of sight-seeing, we headed back out into the Atlantic and down the coast of Nova Scotia to the historic town of Lunenburg. Founded in 1753, the town was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1995. Among the many interesting vessels tied up along the waterfront was the 57m barquentine Concordia being prepared for her departure for Europe with groups of students. Sadly, eighteen months later, this fine vessel capsized and sank off the coast of Brazil, fortunately without any loss of life.

Our last stop in Nova Scotia was the historic town of Shelburne where, it seemed, every other home was flying the British flag. I was told this was because the town was celebrating the 225th anniversary of its settling in 1783 by loyalists from New York who, being unhappy with the outcome of the War of Independence, had left the fledgling United States. Many of today's residents are descendants of the original loyalists.

We still had 800 miles ahead of us to return to Annapolis but our journey to Nova Scotia was over. Since leaving Juneau we had travelled 12,500 miles – 9,429 of them in five months. Along the way we had pushed through ice floes in Alaska and been south of the Equator in Galapagos. We had anchored in remote bays and tied up in urban marinas. We had been miles offshore in both the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans and covered hundreds more through inland, fresh water canals and lakes. This had truly been the mother of all sea trials for the new Fleming 65. **PPB**