

## **Salts on the Sound**

### ***Scott Brumenschenkel***

I set sail with a couple of old salts yesterday and am the wiser for it. Having sailed with Bob Woodruff the previous Sunday on a familial flotilla across Edgartown Great pond to the south shore beach it occurred to Bob that an excursion in my slippery melonseed skiff might be just the thing to draw his Friend Mait Edey out after a recent bout with Lyme.

So it was that we gathered near Norton point on the morning of August 30th to cast off from my dog auger mooring and venture into the Vineyard sound. Despite an inauspicious encounter with a branch of floating red oak that tangled my mooring lines we were on our way by 10:20 with Mait at the helm, Bob on the sheets and me serving as a spray guard for what promised to be a wet beat to windward across middle ground.



I don't recall anyone declaring a destination, but with the wind near 15 knots from the west-southwest we soon found ourselves

over the confused swells of middle ground that were exacerbated by the ebbing tide. As I eyeballed the decks of my 16' melonseed skiff, *Selkie* awash with encroaching waves I scanned the faces of my shipmates for signs of trepidation and saw only smiles. "My she's fast" and "nice balance" was all I heard as we skidded across the sound with two fingers on the helm. I swallowed my fear and deferred to the 150 years of collective sailing experience sitting inside *Selkie's*. Apparently they had a better understanding of this craft's capabilities whose design evolved empirically to serve to serve the 19th century crabbers of the Chesapeake Bay.

Savoring the seeping wet encountered on such craft Bob and Mait collectively made the call to pop into Lackey's cove and show me their favorite refuge for shelter from a southwester. We threaded the rocky gates of the cove with me taking to the bow to site any submerged surprises, but the overcast day revealed very little below the surface. Fortunately we entered the cove without incident, noting the calm provided by the bulk of Naushon Island and a sandy bottom ideal for anchoring before we headed back into the sound for a romping broad reach back toward the Vineyard.

The wind and waves were building as we hummed across the sound followed by what looked to me like three and four foot rollers from my perch on the foredeck. Mind you my *Selkie* only has about 16 inches of freeboard, and while my shipmates peered forward I kept my eyes aft while waves from the west lifted us up and forward in an oscillating motion that was both exhilarating and tenuous.

Our jaunt back across the sound was fast, exactly how fast I can't say but my best estimate is that we covered about nine nautical miles in a little over two hours. I deferred Bob's offers to take the helm as I was enjoying the sleigh ride and basking in the performance of my little melonseed. As Tashmoo opening drew near I took the helm and quickly realized why Bob was eager to pass the task. *Selkie's* long shallow rudder was under considerable strain and required a deft hand as we surfed down the face of the swells and lulled in the troughs. The channel entrance bubbled with confusion as we rounded the rocks and surged into Lake Tashmoo.

The steady push of the south west wind turned fluky as we entered the calm of Tashmoo and made our way toward the boat ramp. "Beautiful boat", were the first words I heard from shore as we dropped anchor and struck up a conversation with a couple of sailors visiting from the Finger Lakes. Wet, chilled and a little beleaguered we stood silently for a moment admiring *Selkie's* nimble form when Bob quipped "that was a bit hair raising" as Mait countered with "Nary a hair was raised."

Having a beautiful small craft is a major handicap when you are trying to get your boat out of the water and get home into dry clothes. I had no less than five people approach me and inquire about *Selkie* as I furled her sails and made her shipshape for our journey back to New Hampshire. Oh the suffering!

A two hour jaunt across the sound hardly rates as a major nautical adventure and yet for me it was a magical two hours. I was honored and inspired to have Mait and Bob at the helm sharing their knowledge, offering suggestions for improvements, while praising *Selkie's* abilities. The anonymous boat builders who serviced the crabbers of the Chesapeake Bay got it right with the evolution of this design, and I am thrilled to find she can handle the often messy waters of the Vineyard Sound. Mait and Bob thank you for taking me where I would not have ventured and opening my eyes to the capabilities of this sweet little boat, and I look forward to our next adventure.