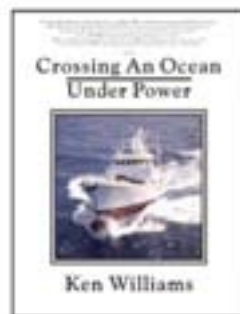


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Also by the Author: Crossing An Ocean Under Power



Before you start reading, a brief introduction....

My name is Ken Williams. My wife Roberta and I founded a computer game company called Sierra On-Line. I'm a software engineer, turned CEO, who ran the company for 17 years, before selling it and retiring semi-young. Roberta had the fun job. She designed games (Kings Quest, Phantasmagoria, etc), while I was the corporate bureaucrat.

We have owned a succession of boats throughout our 35 year marriage, starting with a little ski boat, and now "graduating" to a 68' Nordhavn named Sans Souci. We have two grown sons, DJ, who lives in Cabo and Chris, who lives in Seattle.

I should also introduce our dog; Shelby, a Norwegian Lundehund. Shelby has traveled many thousands of miles with us on our

various "adventures." Shelby crossed the Atlantic with us on a Nordhavn 62, and recently traveled a couple thousand miles through the Bahamas accompanying us on a small power catamaran. We've been planning a circumnavigation to start "soon", and the primary focus on route planning has been: "Which countries will let us in with Shelby?" We don't leave home without her and have the only Nordhavn with a "doggy door!"

I should also say a bit about this book...

This book was composited from my blog during our trip from San Diego to Costa Rica in 2008. Whenever we are traveling I send an email every few days describing our journey. The blog started as an email home to friends, and grew, during our Atlantic crossing to include over five thousand boaters.

Within minutes of sending out each blog update I usually receive back questions and opinions. You'll see some of those questions, with my responses, scattered throughout this book. Amongst my thousands of readers are many very smart people, and I believe you'll find their comments the most valuable part of this book. Please note that I have published my reader emails exactly as they were sent to me. They sometimes contain grammatical or spelling errors. Relax, and don't worry about it. I wanted to print them as they are, because it helps portray the personalities of the writers. Boaters (or, cruisers as they like to be called) are fun people, and I am confident you'll see this in their writings. I did edit them a bit, but only to cut them down in size, and to remove last names.

And, I'd like to thank...

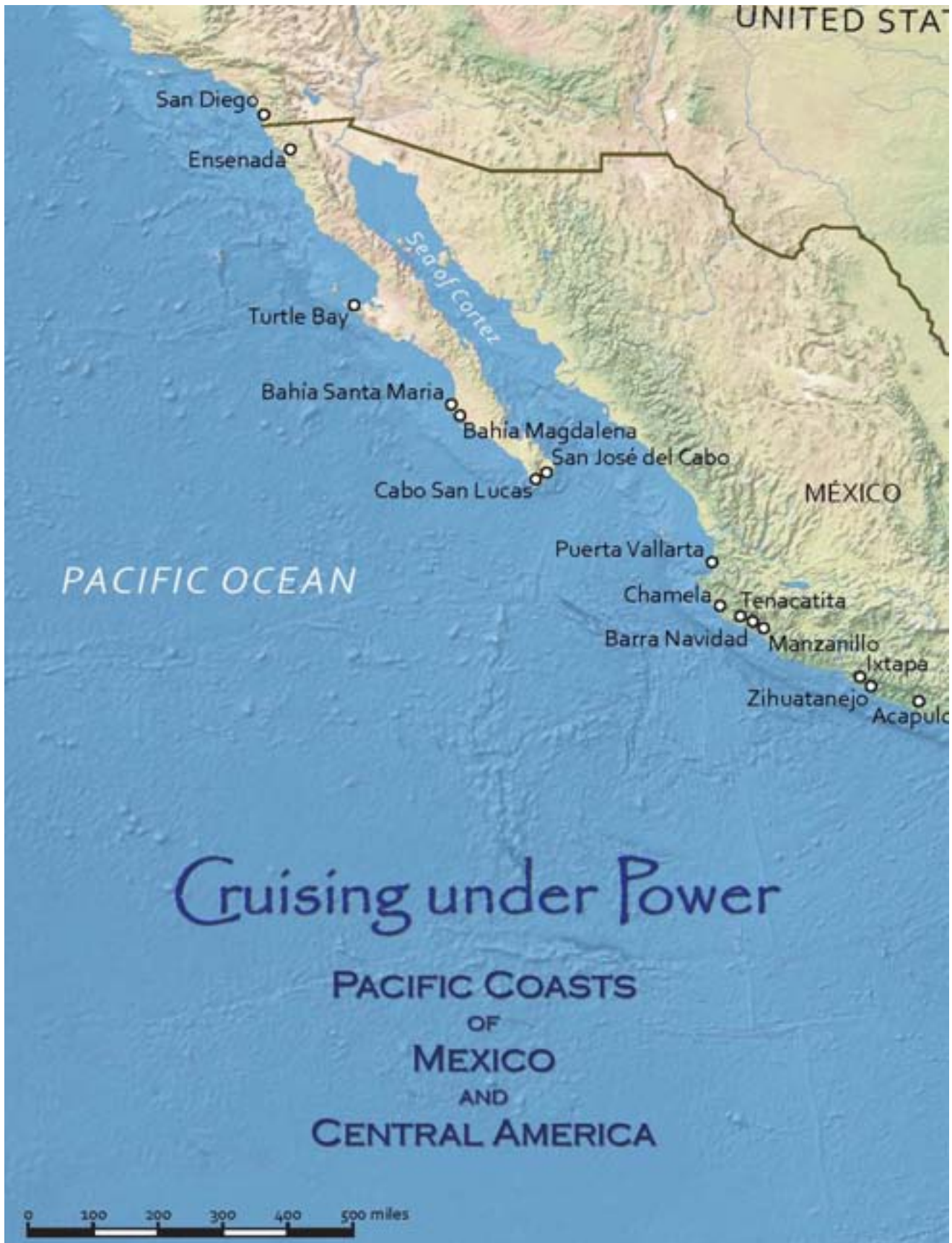
My wife Roberta, without whose "encouragement" I'd probably never do anything quite this wild and crazy.

The crew of Sans Souci (Jeff Sanson, Kirt Ahlquist, Karl Buchmeier, Tyson Buchmeier, Jeremy Henderson, Chris Williams, Dean and Ingrid Heathcote, John and Gloria Buchan and John and Nova Heuer)

Those whose questions and comments are printed herein.

And, lastly, I want to thank those who made this book possible: Greg Riker who put together the maps in this book and helped edit, and to my son Chris who formatted the book and also helped with editing.

*This book is dedicated to David Williams, my father and friend,
who started the journey but never saw the end.*



Pacific Coasts of Mexico and Central America



Pacific Coasts of Mexico and Central America

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An important disclaimer....

This book is filled with comments, opinions, strategies, techniques, tips and more, some by the author, and some by others who wrote to the author. You are responsible for independently verifying anything you read here. No two boating situations are identical, and techniques that worked for one person may or may not work for another. The author makes no claim as to the accuracy of anything in this book, and has made no effort to verify any of the information in the emails and letters from others that are printed herein. And, whatever you do, keep safe!

Sept 15 – Preparing to Fubar



Sans Souci, our Nordhavn 68, will soon be an escort vessel for the Fubar rally, from San Diego to La Paz Mexico. A sail boat rally, the Baja HaHa¹, has been running south to Cabo San Lucas each year for 13 years, with 184 boats making the run last year, including a couple of power boats. The Fubar will be the first ever powerboat rally down Baja. The level of interest in a power boat rally to Mexico caught me by surprise. We will be traveling with over 60 boats!²

The Fubar was organized by Bruce Kessler, who was amongst the first to circumnavigate a trawler, and produced the documentary on our Atlantic Crossing in 2004.³ Although I agreed to participate as an escort vessel, and in assisting with communications, I have consciously avoided getting involved in rally logistics. I have lived very happily in Mexico for 10 years, and would recommend cruising in Mexico to anyone. That said, there are aspects to this rally that will make planning “difficult”. The foremost problem will be fuel. The west coast of Baja is light, by any definition, on infrastructure. Many of the boats on the rally have limited range. The official rally rules say that all participants must be capable of 450 nautical miles at 8 knots. Looking at the list of boats, I suspect this will be an aggressive goal for some. I’m also trying to imagine fueling 60 boats, and know that this will be a challenge. I’m sure the rally committee has all the logistics under control, and I’m happy it isn’t me trying to sort it out.

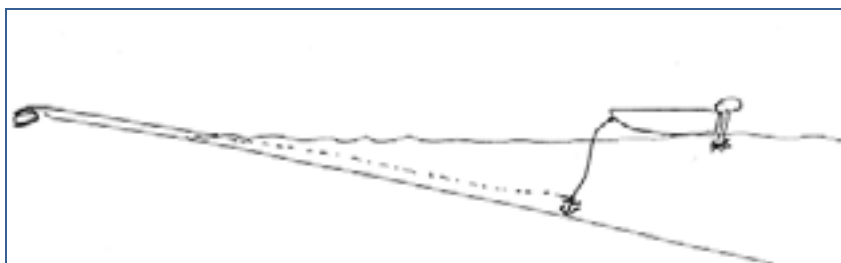
After the boat arrives in Cabo, Roberta and I will relax at our home there for a few weeks before starting our run further south to Costa Rica. I’m approaching this assuming that we’ll need to be self-sufficient once we cross the border. I used SeaKits⁴ to help me work through every piece of equipment on the boat and identify all maintenance and spare parts needed. We’re now preparing lists of everything on the boat, and where it is hidden away, and working to identify anything that may have been forgotten.

These next few weeks are not about fun. The current focus is on trip planning, taking on spares, organizing things on the boat, doing maintenance, cleaning the boat and trip preparation. Don’t worry though, once we get moving, in just a few short weeks, we have 5,000 miles to run, and things will get a bit more interesting (although hopefully not too interesting!)

----- Reader Email, Questions and Comments -----

In my last “Update” I mentioned that I wasn’t sure how to handle tendering ashore in an area with large tide fluctuation. The problem is that if you take the tender to shore and spend any amount of time, your tender may find itself on dry land. I received a couple of emails with good ideas:

Ken/Roberta, As usual your latest blog is a fun update of your latest trials & tribulations. It seems mostly tribulations. Good show! We use a device called “Anchor Buddy”.⁵ Basically a long bungee cord attached to the skiff anchor. Drop anchor about 25 to 30 feet from the beach (over the stern) and motor on in. Get off and pay out a long bowline. Skiff will back off and anchor itself in most all conditions. After the beachcombing, pull in skiff, retrieve anchor and off you go. We use this a lot in BC and Alaska and it saves worrying about getting hung up with a falling tide. --Chuck & Antje, N35



¹ The Baja HaHa can be found at <http://www.baja-haha.com/>

² Go to <http://fubarodyssey.talkspot.com/aspx/templates/blank.aspx/msgid/349627> to see all of the boats which participated.

³ See <http://www.nordhavn.com/rally/voyage/documentary.htm> and <http://www.nordhavn.com/rally/voyage/welcome.htm> for more information about the rally and the documentary

⁴ SeaKits can be found at <http://www.seakits.com/>

⁵ Anchor Buddy is sold at <http://tuggyproducts.com/>

How to use Anchor Buddy

Ken: About your having limited time ashore, due to tide going out and potentially beaching the tender; this should seldom if ever be a problem on most beaches. We carry on our tender a small (maybe 15-lb) folding anchor and a typical 75-ft (or longer) X 1/4" poly water-ski-type floating line.

[1] Connect the tender's painter (should be about 10ft) and the poly line (both) to the anchor.

[2] Set the anchor on the very-edge of the bow of the boat and carefully coil the painter near the anchor.

[3] Lay out the water-ski line up the beach.

[4] Gently push tender away from shore in a way not to drop the anchor until ready, and let it coast slowly into deeper water.

[5] Once in deeper water, gently snap the anchor off the bow by tugging the end of the water-ski line.

[6] Tender is now anchored and may be retrieved by pulling anchor, boat, and all, (the whole thing) back to shore with the long water-ski line.

I have attached a crude drawing illustrate. We have been doing this successfully for many years. Oh one last thing, be sure to tie the long poly line to something on the beach, so it doesn't float away or overtaken by an incoming tide. I have had to swim for the tender more than once. Hope it helps. Good luck.... --Dean H, N55

Lastly, I received this email with questions about AIS, the system that shows information on my chart plotter and radar about surrounding boats. I spoke about it in my Update #8. AIS is fairly new, so I thought there would be enough interest to respond to this as part of my blog.

Ken: Read with interest how everyone extols the virtue of their AIS system and it is very worthwhile system.

***However**, ships are not required to enter into their AIS systems all the data you currently see on your display. The minimum that must be transmitted by a ships' AIS is the ship ID#, and one then has to look that up in a reference text to determine what kind of ship you are 'seeing'.*

*I have this on the authority of a senior master for a major oil shipping company (20+ super tankers) - the company's instructions for AIS are **ship ID # only, absolutely no other data**. In the same vein the super tankers must run at least 300 NM off shore of Africa and they are to stop for no one for whatever reason! This is to foil piracy and the like. (With the current price of oil a super tanker is worth ??? millions of \$)*

I asked you about monitoring exhaust/cooling water temperatures about a year ago - how is the Simon system performing in that regards

As with many others wish I could cruise with you!! --Best regards, Rod S

All boats over 65 feet are required to have an AIS (Automatic Identification System). As Rod mentioned, it is possible to enter information into the AIS such as your vessel name, length, width, weight, what you are currently doing (moored, anchored, running) and where you are going. Most of the vessels I've seen on radar comply with this, but not all.

I've never been certain whether or not it is a requirement to keep all of this information current in my AIS unit (it only takes a minute). Here's what it says on the USCG website:⁶

"...The Coast Guard has noticed that many Automatic Identification System (AIS) users are not updating their unit to accurately reflect voyage related information—navigation status, static draft, destination, ETA, etc. Further, the Coast Guard has encountered AIS units that either do not transmit at all or improperly transmit the vessel's dynamic data—position, course, speed, heading, etc. The former problem requires due diligence on behalf of the user, the latter is most likely due to the improper installation or operation of external sensors—gyro or heading device and vessel GPS system—inputted into the AIS. AIS users are compelled to properly operate their AIS at all times (33 CFR § 164.46). They should pay close attention to these matters, and are encouraged to make each other aware of AIS discrepancies they come upon. Improper operation of AIS could subject the user to civil penalties not to exceed \$25,000...."

I found it interesting that the Coast Guard not only says that keeping the information up to date is a requirement, but talks about fines, and encourages mariners to alert other mariners to any non-compliance.

As to Rod's question about the Simon monitoring system: Sans Souci is my first boat with a monitoring system. For those not familiar, it is essentially nothing more than a computer that surveys all of the equipment on the boat continuously. Whereas I might glance at something like an exhaust temperature gauge once every 15-30 minutes, the computer can do this every few

⁶ http://www.navcen.uscg.gov/enav/ais/AIS_Advisory.htm

seconds. The monitoring system, on Sans Souci, is monitoring over 200 different sensors around the boat. The sensors include water temperatures, engine room temperature, shaft temperatures, port holes, hatches, doors, fluid levels and more. The monitoring system knows for all of these things what a “correct” value is, and alerts me immediately if something is wrong.

Both AIS and the monitoring system are important tools, but technology such as this has a dangerous aspect if not used correctly. For instance, boats with AIS represent only a small fraction of all the targets one sees on a radar. In other words, it is important to keep reminding yourself that AIS information is good to have, but it doesn’t tell the whole story. Similarly, the monitoring system is likely to alert me to a problem much faster than I might spot it myself, but I don’t believe it takes the place of human engine room checks. A monitoring system cannot hear if the engine sounds funny, or if there is a burning smell in the air. It doesn’t know if there is a strange vibration. In fact, I don’t even think it can be relied on for the things that it does monitor. If a porthole sensor fails, with a porthole open, and you rely on the monitoring system before going to sea, a potentially dangerous situation would exist. These things have to be thought of as supplemental to what was already required, not a replacement.

Sept 23 – Life Rafts?

We’re still stuck on land, getting ready for the Fubar (San Diego to Cabo rally).



One interesting thing this week: We “hailed out” the boat to do some maintenance. While we were in southern California there was a failed attempt to lift the boat. They had to give up when the boat was too heavy. I wasn’t there, but spoke with the lift operator. He said that the lift was shaking, and the tires looked like they’d go flat, so he put the boat back in the water. This time, we went to the Delta shipyard, in Seattle, and their 200 ton lift. It was worth the visit just to see the place – we were the tiniest boat there!

As long as the boat was out of the water, we decided to paint the bottom. The original plan was for the bottom to be navy blue or black, but we wound up with a “teal” color, that has been making us crazy. We’re just back from driving to Delta, which was closed. The guard allowed us to peek across the fence and see the boat – the bottom is now painted black, and looks much better. As you can see in the photo below, the teal showed the crud....

There are some pictures that have been floating around the web of a ship being dropped during lifting, which I always thought were faked. Amazingly, they are real! If you haven’t seen the photos, it’s worth a peek (<http://www.snopes.com/photos/boats/badlaunch.asp>)

While the boat was out of the water, I looked at the bow thruster, which you can see in the photo that follows. It doesn’t show up well in this picture, but there is a lot more crud growing on the thruster than one would expect for a boat so new. For those not familiar with bow thrusters, the propeller you see above is sitting sideways to the ship, at the bow. There is a similar sideways prop at the back of the boat (the stern thruster). I can side-step the boat into tight parking places, or assist the rudders for tighter turns. That said, I can only do this if there isn’t too much gunk clogging the thruster. My assumption is that this stuff grows faster in warmer water, and I suspect we’ll find plenty of that between San Diego and Costa Rica this winter. I’ve asked the technicians about painting the thruster (and, the props) with some sort of coating that will make it tougher for this stuff to grow.