



***SLACKTIDE's* Sea Trials: Breaking in our T26x7**

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Part 1 of 4

Introduction

Anke and I have just completed our first season's cruising SLACKTIDE in SE Alaskan waters. She's a 26' x 7' x 1', engine-free, junk ketch-rigged sailing barge of my design (plans and more pics at our website). She's not one of those curvacious barge-babes, either, but a four-square and unrepentant *box barge*.

Years ago I read that it was once common to convert smallish box barges, originally built to service bridges, into sailing cruisers. My memory paraphrases the passage thus:

These little yachts, generally gaff-rigged and sporting leeboards, were surprisingly beloved by their owners. They could be found tucked away in backwaters one would think only accessible to more able vessels.¹

¹ I *think* I read this in a book on small boat conversions, but have lost the source. If you know it, please drop me a line at triloboats@gmail.com. --Thanks!

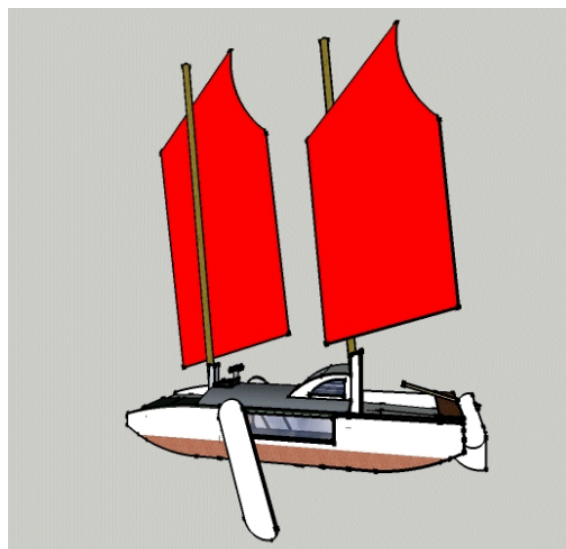
I skimmed that passage in passing, along with its appealing pen and ink sketch of one, anchored in obvious contentment. Interesting, but I'd never seen such a barge – they seem to belong to times past. Yet the memory lay dormant for two decades before pushing through the mud of my id.

Being by nature a penny pinching breed of sloth, I was finally led by circuitous routes back to the box barge. Plywood replaces the planks of yore, but like their inspirators, TriloBoats are, as boats go, extremely cheap and easy to build.

But would they fulfill their promise under sail? Would they be capable and lovable? SLACKTIDE was built to find out (and *psst...* the short answer is *yes*).

SLACKTIDE incorporates several features ranging from unusual to outright experimental. Our sea trials aimed to answer questions about the viability of the following:

- *She is a box barge* – while there are several examples of sailing box barges (ALMA, WEATHERFAX, et al.), I'm aware of none that sail as general cruisers in anywhere near the range of conditions found in SE Alaska. To my knowledge, she is the first of my larger designs completed for sail. In particular, can she make good in moderate gale conditions?
- *Her bottom is a trampoline structure* – by this I mean there are no internal stiffeners over the large, dead flat cabin sole (the inside of the hull). It's designed to flex.
- *The copper bottom plates were glued, not fastened* – this was intended to avoid barnacle-like nail-heads.
- *Her large, side-windows are little more than a foot above the waterline.*
- *Her low foredeck is little more than two feet above the waterline* – this is to maximize the forward windows, allowing good steering visibility from a sitting position, inside the cabin.
- *Her off-centerboards are arranged on cable travellers* – This allows them to stow aft, clear of our views while at anchor.
- *The mizzen mast is off-center* – displaced over one foot to port.
- *The junk topsail cut is unusual* – inspired by Polynesian crab-claw rig.
- *We've added a SeaCycle ® Drive Unit for windless propulsion* – this is like an outboard, but with rotary pedals (like a bicycle's) in place of the motor.





Making Pizza for Five plus the Dog

Living Aboard:

SLACKTIDE is intended for year-round, live-aboard cruising, and we've been living continuously aboard, now, through four seasons.

Her simple, flexi-space interior is reminiscent of a luxurious tent, but with the addition of 270deg of large windows, affording a kayak level view. I can't say enough about these! From curious sea-lions spy-hopping for a peek into our living room, to hump-back whales seen from point blank, to wide vistas of snow dusted peaks o'er-topping autumn inflamed forest. HDTV? Who needs it? They have the effect of opening a small space into the wide world. Claustrophobic friendly!

A kneeling galley, with wood-stove for heat and cooking, spans the forward end. All our day-to-day foodstuffs, spices and cooking gear are ready to hand, backed up by refill stores in 'deeper', hold storage. The port drawer (a glimpse can be seen in above photo) has a sliding 'bread-board' cover. It can be drawn out and used for additional counter-space.

Aft, a chest-of-drawers provides reasonable storage for clothes, books and toys. The drawers are lidded, and can be drawn to serve as seats, tables or shelves.

The mid-cabin is a 10ft x 7ft platform on the inside of the hull, insulated and cushioned by foam and carpet (you might say we live in the bilge). Windows are double-paned and the cabin is fully insulated. A project table folds out from the portside wall.

A double-wide, self-inflating mattress bed folds against the s'brd wall as a sofa, and bedding is stuffed into large, upholstered pillow-cases for daytime lounging.

Raingear hangs outside, under the scuttle overhang, and coats hang p&s of the companionway, well clear of bedding.

Two large holds, separated from the cabin by water-tight bulkheads, provide deep storage for food and gear, and contribute toward extra-positive buoyancy. We try to carry a year's worth of staples at all times, so they have to contain a pile o' stuff. Aft hatches are set level with the deck in case we wish to sleep on deck.

Anchor wells fore and aft let us deploy six anchors in many combinations. Two Manson Supremes (way cool spade anchors) are ready to drop from bow rollers. We pull by hand, and the well enables good posture and purchase for the haul. Line is spilled into the well, leaving the foredeck clear while underway.

I'm writing aboard, quite comfortably warm despite the outside temp of 17degF. Our fire is banked for wood economy, so we're in sweaters, but I'm considering taking mine off. All corners of the interior have remained dry and mildew-free, despite this year's wet autumn. The insulation and double-panes have paid for themselves handsomely.

We once lived aboard a much smaller boat whose interior was laid out in a similar manner, and very much liked it (with the exception of raingear hung insufferably in the bed space). So it has been no surprise that the extra room with better access to gear, not to mention the windows, has proven comfortable.

Like we've always said, "Our home may be small, but the back yard is HUGE!"



Anke and I, with Friend's Luggage and Beer

Sea Trials took place in three legs totalling about 428 nautical miles, as the Raven flies over water.

We sailed in and between Sitka and Salisbury sounds, through Sergious Narrows and Peril Strait, Into and out of Icy Strait, and up and down Chatham Strait and Lynn Canal. These are challenging waters by any measure, and much of it was in autumn, a season rife with gale and storm. Of course light air can also settle in for weeks at a time, presenting its own challenges.

Please join us for the next installments to hear how things went!

This four-part series of articles includes the following:

- Introduction to SLACKTIDE and Living Aboard
- Leg I – Sitka to WarmSprings Bay
- Leg II – WarmSprings Bay to Haines
- Leg III – Haines to Tenakee Springs

Please check back at this site for the rest of the series.

Thanks to John Hirschenrider and Tom Krantz for their photos of SLACKTIDE under sail.

SLACKTIDE and other designs, along with more articles and FAQ pages, can be found at www.TriloBoats.com