



This River Harbor is about to Dry Out

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

Dave Zeiger © 2010

www.TriloBoats.com

Part 4 of 4

Leg III: Haines to Tenakee – Late September to Early November -- ~100nm¹

“In Lynn Canal, the Wind comes down with his Long Boots on!”

-- JR, late Mayor of Pelican

We're turning south, *with* the southbound flow of fresh water and the dangerous North Wind. It can gust or blow to hurricane force. If it turns cold, it can blow freezing spray that can top-load a vessel till she turns turtle. We're well into the zone of Equinoctal Gales, soon to be followed by Winter Storms. Daylight hours are contracting fast. Tis the season of short, carefully planned hops, with fail-safe options both up and down wind!

But it's also the time to test SLACKTIDE at the upper end of her range of abilities.

Our plan is to make short jaunts along the west shoreline of Lynn and Chatham, tucking in behind river berms (walls of sand and gravel pushed up by storms). We've got lots of time, so we neap ourselves behind each one, staying high and dry for as much as a week at a time before the approaching spring tide floats us.

Each jump, though lasting but a day, can be exhausting, what with effort, adrenaline, wind and cold. A

¹ This distance is tallied 'as the Raven flies over water.'

week to debrief and recoup, explore and plan is just about the right mix! Autumn colors are at their most exquisite; alder, birch, rock maple, crab apple and vacciniums blazing up red and gold against the dark and faithful conifers. First snows dust peaks that crowd the awakened waters.

And at this time of year, we have it mostly to ourselves. Gone are the kayakers (delivered by mothership for a day's gawping), most of the fishing fleet is done or is staying close to home, the cruise ships – vast floating cities lit up like luminescent, sea-going wedding cakes – have turned south to warmer climes. There are still the occasional vessel, plane or jet overhead. Not the splendid isolation of true wilderness, but it'll hafta do. They've nearly finished paving paradise.

In select gales, we beat and reach and run, pleased to find SLACKTIDE reliable on the wind and docile off. We were able to make good, slow but sure, snugged down against 35kts and a long fetch of slop. This is good for any vessel of our size. The low foredeck only occasionally shipped a runnel of white water at the leeward, downside corner, despite a short, steep sea. Still, good gaskets and dogs on the forehold hatch are good insurance.

Jibing down on broad reaches presented no problems to 45kts. SLACKTIDE's free-standing, junk rig jibes all-standing without a ruckus, but we're scuttling for shelter by that time! Running, ditto.

It's both exhilarating and spooky to be storming along like that. Winds that high can and do generate zones of intense wind. NOAA likes to say, "...and higher gusts from interior passes." Boy howdy! Shelter is often located near the mouth of such a pass. Better to run in early than late. In dire case, we may have to run aground on a smoothish beach behind an outcrop. Not an eventuality we court!



It's not all Autumn Gales

North winds are usually less predictable, gusting from any old which way, where a southerly usually settles in for a steady blow. Worst are northerly generated down-drafts, which can explode straight

down, radiating tree-snapping bursts of wind outward from a stadium-sized locus... like *Bambi Meets Godzilla!* These can occur on very cold, very high pressure days in base winds of 20+kts. Needless to say, we hunker down in those conditions!

But hunkering is a favorite part of cruising. Fuel for the woodstove literally grows on trees, warms our small, insulated cabin in minutes, and beats time to a parade of gustatory delights. Walking berms of sand or gravel, their strata as smoothly striated and regular as the rings of Saturn, we watch wild winds decapitate the driving swells, vaporize them into sun-dogged spume. We sat out one 80kt storm with 100+kt gusts. Gratefully! Lots of big trees went down in that one.



Sweet Little River Meadow



Same Place, Different Direction
Lynn Canal, over the Bank

One day, while dried out on a tidal meadow, a doe and two fauns crossed a small but fierce river, about 50yds distant. Mama chose a spot *upstream* of a *sweeper* (any limbed tree fallen at right angles to the stream). Sure enough, the two fauns were swept into its branches and pinned by the current. They struggled briefly before fighting free and turning back. Mama, who had successfully forded, recrossed for another family try from the same spot, and with the same results. This time we thought the fauns were done for. But first one and then the other broke through the snare of branches to the downstream side. We breathed again as they walked within a boat-length on their way across our meadow.

Finally, we eased into Tenakee Springs in time to vote. Waiting for a harbor slip, we beached SLACKTIDE on a steep sand beach behind the harbor. This spot is well protected from the predicted weather, but open to swell from the south. One evening, we got some.

When I designed the trampoline bottom, the galley and aft chest-of-drawers structures limit the free-flexing area. I had assumed that any flex would be upward, as water pressure pushed it, to a maximum of three inches in mid-tramp. Therefore, my structures were made to work in compression. This had held true for a year of living aboard and eight months of cruising.

That night, though, the furniture posts were working loose, as flex was *doubled!* No harm done (after an admittedly nervous inspection), but what was going on?

As the tide rises in this situation, the stern begins to rise long before we come level and the nose lifts clear. This opens, under the barge dead-flat, a wedge of water between hull and beach, open end toward the fetch. That swell stuffed its way in, under the sole. My hypothesis is, that, with the bow held high, it's not only the *rise* of the water that flexes the bottom upward, but also the *fall* of the water pulling it downward; suction pulls at the bottom which can, for once, flex downward by the allowed margin, there by doubling the amplitude of flex (up *plus* down).

Examination showed no trauma. No cracks along the inner chine and bulkhead joins (paint would be the first thing to go). The posts, being only two feet inboard of solidly bonded bulkheads, merely worked a fraction of an inch in their slots... annoying, but not a problem.

We can avoid exposed dry-out on steep beaches, install leveller legs (so far this is another untried pipe-dream), or install fixed or tensioning structures to back up the compression posts. One could even abandon the trampoline bottom, making it rigid with a composite bottom structure or heavy skegs. Chances are that we'll live with it for the foreseeable future, avoiding exposed, steep beaches.



Tenakee Inlet, Port o' Call

To sum up, SLACKTIDE exceeded our expectations without quite living up to our hopes. She's comfortable as a live-aboard and capable as a cruiser. She's proven safe and easy to handle across a wide range of conditions. She's not as fast on her waterline as I we'd hoped, though I'm confident that longer versions will pick up.

Given her lower speed, we'll want to head for shelter earlier and pick our weather more carefully than in a faster boat.

Still, her margin of safety feels quite high. She made good into the strongest winds we ever brave by *choice*, and handled well in winds well above that point. As the squarest of square boats, she speaks well for the entire family. Handsome is as handsome does!

SLACKTIDE's sea trials certainly prove again the concept of the sailing, box barge. They are quick, cheap and easy to build, commodious and capacious. I can now state that they are capable cruisers well in reach of those with limited funds or skills.

Sea-trials never really end. Conditions we'd never choose may choose us. She may, one desperate day, surprise us further with unforeseen ability.

Which is no more than we hope from ourselves.

An Afterword of Caution:

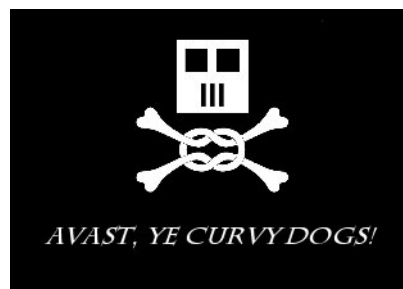
ALL weather is potentially dangerous.

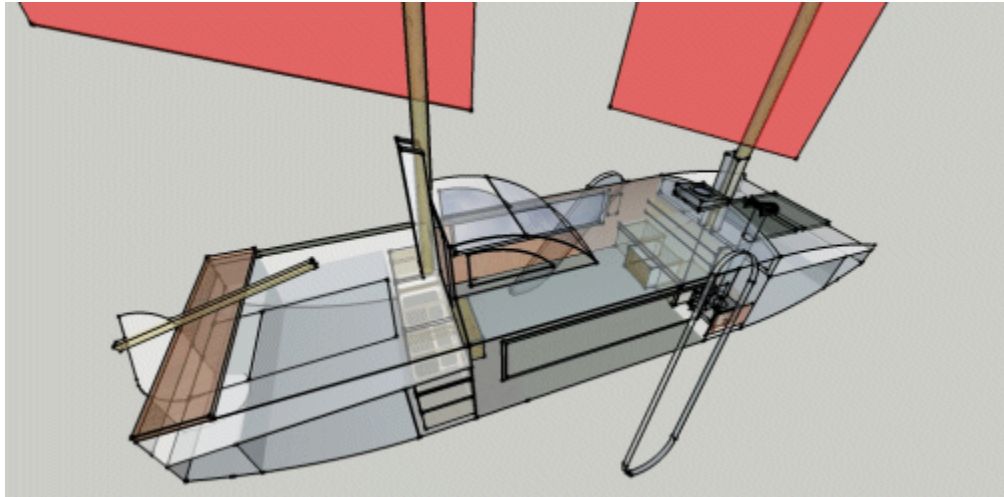
Anke and I, are a couple of clowns in many ways. But across two decades, we have built our skills to the point we can take serious wind in stride. Don't just jump into the Deep End!

NEVER sail in conditions exceeding abilities of yourself, the crew or the vessel.
DO push the envelope in small increments, with a sharp eye to your fail-safes.

Assess, address, de-brief.

And thus prepare yourself for Sphincter Tightening Adventure!





SLACKTIDE T26x7 at www.TriloBoats.com

Technical Summary of Results:

- *She is a box barge* – Quick, cheap, easy to build. Commodious for her size. Stable with good motion and low heel, tracks well. Trouble carrying through stays in higher winds / seas. Hard to drive (our hull) to hull speed. Length should improve this. Able to make good into surprisingly high winds and short, steep headseas, though windward progress impaired. No undue pounding under sail or at anchor.
- *Her bottom is a trampoline structure* – Appears quite adequate. Definitely survived a harsh test on sharp and pointy rock. Appears to flex 2 inches from flat at mid-point, normally upwards, but some conditions generate downward flex, doubling amplitude.
- *The copper bottom plates were glued* – Polyurethanes failed miserably despite excellent bond before immersion. More research required.
- *Her large, side-windows are little more than a foot above the waterline* – this turned out to be no problem and quite a delight. Curtains recommended.
- *Her low foredeck is little more than two feet above the waterline* – Buoyant bow rises well and stays mostly clear of green water. Self-bailing and good gaskets make fail-safe. Still, where feasible, I'd like more height when sailing big water.
- *Her off-centerboards are arranged on cable travellers* – This system worked very well. Lower cable anchors need to be strongly mounted. Light boards are recommended to ease handling... consider surf-board style, foam / glass composite construction?
- *The mizzen mast is off-center* – This makes for a slow tack (that with mast to leeward is slower). Mounting junk or lug sail on inboard side of mast would help reduce offset.
- *The junk topsail cut is unusual* – Works great... reduces weather-helm and shapes panel well. Lots of possibilities for experimentation in this direction.
- *We've added a SeaCycle unit for windless propulsion* – Yeah, Baby! Pushes us at 2kts at an hours-long peddling pace. Trading off, can go all day. With a fair current, can really cover some ground without wind.

This four-part series of articles included 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.

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