

A Lobster Summer

Dartmouth, Nova Scotia to Newport, Rhode Island

Linda and John Andrews

We had planned yet another marathon trip this summer, 2016, from Halifax, Nova Scotia, where we wintered *Suilven*, into New York, a long held dream, and then back across the Atlantic via the Azores. In the event these plans had to be abandoned. We would only have a short cruising season available to us and would need to leave Canadian waters in May in order not to over stay our one-year cruising licence. As so often the change opened up new opportunities, in this case an unexpected and delightful cruise along the Nova Scotia and New England coast.

The winter in Halifax had been unusually mild and we found *Suilven* in good order on our return in early May. We had kept the boat ashore at Dartmouth Yacht Club, where we had been made most welcome by the



members and manager Dan Gallina, ex Royal Canadian Navy Captain. We also had a fabulous new addition to the boat, a cockpit enclosure. While up in the Arctic we had had a rudimentary enclosure referred to as the 'tent', or on sunny days, the 'greenhouse'. This zipped to the spray hood and stopped just short of the steering position. It provided essential protection from the elements but fell far short of the wheelhouse arrangements

enjoyed by nearly all of the arctic boats. For years we had ruminated over how we could enclose the cockpit. Wandering around the Dartmouth Marina we noticed that many of the boats had excellent cockpit arrangements. A few enquiries put us in touch with the local canvas man and on our return he arrived with the component parts, zipped them all on and immediately not just the cockpit but the whole boat was a wind free, warm environment despite the outside temperature being in the low teens. Bliss!



The skipper on *Suilven* in new cockpit enclosure

Nova Scotia

We were very early in the season to cruise Nova Scotia and places were either closed or only just opening up. We had to push on though because our Canadian cruising licence was due to expire. Again there were significant plus-sides to this. Normally crowded anchorages such as Rogue's Roost were left to us and the wildlife, people were delighted to see us and generous to a fault with their hospitality. The only downside



Lobsters

was the myriad lobster pots that we had to negotiate. On this part of the coast the pots have to be lifted by the end of May. There were only a few days to go and the pots were being brought in from deeper water and set in their hundreds inshore. Not only that, the fishermen were not bothering to shorten the lines and although you could spot a lobster pot ahead, you definitely could not spot tens of metres of trailing line. By dint of keeping a permanent close watch, we managed to wend our way through without getting caught, but almost every

yachtsman we spoke to had had the ignominy of being towed in by the sea rescue service because of getting a prop wrap on a lobsterpot line.

But yet again the silver lining was that lobsters were plentiful and cheap. Our first pair of lobsters were actually given to us in Sambro, in exchange for coming aboard to look around an Oyster. He'd only seen one

Linda and John Andrews

in magazines and procured two lobsters from the Harbour Master who he'd spotted motoring into the harbour as we were chatting. He'd told us that he was responsible for investigating fatalities on fishing vessels along this part of the coast, so no doubt had clout.

Nova Scotia, jutting out from mainland Canada into the Atlantic, has an air of pioneer or settler country. The most significant towns we visited were Lunenburg and Shelburne, each with a proud history and blessed with



Lunenburg House

brightly painted wooden buildings, many dating from the 18th century. The season was just opening up and in the early summer sunshine householders were out in force, paintbrush in hand, smartening up their homes for the season. Lunenburg is home to the schooner *Bluenose II*, a replica of the iconic *Bluenose* that raced undefeated for 17 years in the 20s and 30s and which

features on the Canadian dime coin. Like the houses, she too was being spruced up for the summer season and unfortunately not yet open for visitors, but we were able to admire her from the dock side.

Many of the people we met also exhibited a glorious pioneering and individual spirit. In Lunenburg we made a point of meeting up with Michele Stevens, a fourth generation sail-maker with an international reputation. We had damaged our sails two years previously and they had been sent down from Newfoundland to her sail-loft for repairs. The banking system had efficiently charged both us and her for the pleasure of transferring money for payment so we had a small bill to settle. She happily came aboard and regaled us with tales of her family history, her dozens of cousins and of the family business, making sails for the old schooners. In the winter they used to make use of the frozen lake on their farm to lay out the canvas to cut the huge sails used by the fishing schooners. We also met up with Douglas Veasey and his son Charlie, introduced to us by Miles Woodhouse (RCC). He and his family had given up the thankless task of dairy farming in Devon and had made their home near Lunenburg. Douglas is Rear Commodore of the Nova Scotia Schooner Association and we were invited to inspect his lovely old schooner which had just been launched, before he treated us to an excellent Nova Scotian breakfast at the Savvy Sailor.

Casual encounters were equally fascinating. We overheard a waitress

in the bar in Shelburne telling her tale of being sold as a baby for \$10 in a Chinese restaurant and then her delight at successfully tracking down her much younger step-brothers years later. A wild-eyed man with an equally wild-eyed dog stopped us on the foreshore and, in the style of the Ancient Mariner, engaged us with a long story of the making of the film *The Scarlet Letter*, filmed in Shelburne some twenty years previously. This had involved rebuilding some of the historic buildings on the waterfront and many of the local inhabitants, including our new friend, had worked as film extras. It was as if nothing of significance had happened in the town since. Then there were the Shelburne Hookers, a mischievously named group of ladies of a certain age who met weekly in the Shelburne Yacht Club to work together on their hooked rugs. These rugs have a long tradition in Nova Scotia, originally a way of recycling old scraps of material, but developed over the years into a sophisticated art. They were delighted that we showed an interest and proudly showed us their wonderful creations.

Although early in the season, we were not the only yacht on the move. The first boats were coming up from Maine where they had wintered. They were on their way north to cruise Newfoundland, Labrador and Greenland and one was even planning to sail to Norway. We exchanged information and tales of our arctic experiences like old pros. It felt good still to be part of the 'adventure sailing' community, even though our journey was taking us south to warmer waters.

New England

Our cruise in New England took us from Maine down to Rhode Island via such familiar place names as Portsmouth, Gloucester and Portland and the less familiar names of Penobscot, Piscataqua and Namisquam.

We had to time our departure from Nova Scotia carefully in order to make the best of the ferocious tides that swirl around Cape Sable. The passage takes you across the entrance to the Bay of Fundy which has the greatest tidal range in the world and needs to be treated with respect. It was our only overnight passage and we had a good following wind so were able to sail most of the way relieving us of the worst of our concerns about lobsterpots. The pot lines remained a constant worry, although the Americans were significantly more disciplined about weighting their pots and leaving no trailing lines.

Our arrival in the USA was not without its difficulties. Our landfall was Rockland, described in the cruising guide as a port of entry. The only way you can contact the border authorities is by mobile phone and although our phones had worked in Canada, they did not work in the USA. Just

Linda and John Andrews

to make sure that our arrival was registered by someone in authority, we contacted the Coastguard on the VHF radio. Their working channel is Channel 22 which does not work on our European VHF, so we had to give all our details over Channel 16, thereby announcing our arrival to the whole boating community.

Maine, and in particular Penobscot Bay is a glorious cruising area,



Schooner in the fog off Portland Maine

with hundreds of little bays, inlets, islands and 'gunk holes'. You could easily spend a whole season, or multiple seasons cruising these waters. Our time was limited unfortunately, shortened even further by an enforced two day stay in Tenants Harbour due to a damaged, cooling water hose. The boatyard there,

founded unbelievably in 1605, had access to an excellent mechanic who managed to source and fit the correct spare part. We focussed our time on smaller harbours and anchorages and loved their slow pace and bucolic atmosphere. The trees were just coming into leaf and looked glorious in their bright spring foliage. We were thrilled to see chipmunks for the first time: tiny, stripy, little things which no doubt are a complete pest, but to us looked like cute cartoon characters. Trips to local eateries introduced us to the delights of the many varieties of clams served here: Little Necks, Steamers, Cherrystones and Quahogs. We had



A plate of steamers

to get instruction on how to eat the steamers, but clam chowder presented no such difficulties, and we ended up buying it by the bucket-load, literally, to freeze and eat on the boat.

After such a tranquil week or two, Portland came as a bit of a shock

to the system. This is fully urban America, with all the bustle and noise associated with a working port. Our arrival was also somewhat alarming. We had to feel our way into this busy commercial harbour in thick fog. The air was full of the sound of fog horns and the sound of waves crashing onto an invisible shoreline. We were motoring in, extremely cautiously, when to our astonishment, out of the mist appeared a schooner in full sail. She slid silently across our bow and disappeared again into the mist. It made us feel distinctly faint-hearted.

We had taken our time cruising down the coast of Nova Scotia and absorbing the rural charms of Maine. We now had to get more of a move on, as we had to get to Boston to meet up with our daughter and her husband who were flying out for a week's cruise to Cape Cod and Martha's Vineyard. Nevertheless, we had time for three stops on the way.

New Hampshire is the State that lies to the south of Maine, and has only



Anchorage in Kittery, New Hampshire

a short coastline. Portsmouth, New Hampshire, is home to the American Naval Shipyard. We picked up a mooring in a quiet backwater in Kittery, which is in fact on the Maine side of the Piscataqua River from where we were able to walk over to the town of Portsmouth. This is a charming place,

reminiscent of a small, English market town. Every place along this coast is enormously proud of its history, each claiming to have a 'first' of some sort or another, first settlement, first suspension bridge, first working fishing port, etc. They are particularly proud of the part they played in the American War of Independence. Portsmouth has the extraordinary Strawberry Banke 'living museum', a whole district of the town containing wooden buildings dating back to the 17th century that was saved from demolition in the nineteen fifties. You can now wander into the houses, shops and workshops and see them furnished as they would have been. They are occupied by extremely well informed actors and craftsmen who remain resolutely 'in character' as they talk about life in their period. John had a fascinating conversation with a cooper who had been to Burton-on-Trent to learn his trade and we learned some interesting 'secrets' about

Linda and John Andrews

rationing in the second world war and ‘leakage’ from the local naval base.

Gloucester, Massachusetts, was our next port of call. This is a nonsense, working fishing port where the book and film, *A Perfect Storm*, was set. Somewhat incongruously it also hosts a large artist colony on the Rocky Neck peninsula and the narrow streets and waterfront buildings house numerous art galleries of varying quality. It also has a delightful small theatre which in the week of Peter Shaeffer’s death, was putting on one of his lesser known plays, *Lettice and Lovage*. We had to go of course and were treated to an excellent performance with a top-rate US TV cast.

We now had only two days before we had to be in Boston and had choices to make. Should we go to Salem, famous for the witches trials in 1692, or would we instead drop in at Marblehead, home to the Boston Yacht Club? For us there was no question, it had to be Marblehead, and not because of the Boston Yacht Club or the beautiful clapboard houses, but because it is the home of the MMYC (Marblehead Model Yacht Club). For the past

two winters, John has been spending any spare Sunday mornings racing model yachts on the Round Pond in Kensington Gardens. He has recently become the proud owner of a vintage ‘Marblehead’ yacht called *Little Haste*, which he is slowly restoring. So a visit to Redds Pond, home of the



Model yacht racing on Redds Pond

MMYC, was absolutely essential, even though the anchorage looked to be a little shallow for our 2m draft. On our way in, we had to take a short detour to take a look at what we thought was a small island marked on the chart as ‘Little Haste’. This proved disappointingly to be just a stick marking an underwater rock. We also later found out, rather dismayingly, that it also marked the end of the old sewage outlet from Salem.

As luck would have it, there was a race meeting the following day, and John was given a very warm welcome by the members. Not totally thrilled by model yacht racing, I took the opportunity to walk around the small town which is a gorgeous collection of beautifully preserved clapboard houses, ranging from small, humble houses, built for fishermen and artisans, to larger Captain’s houses and finally the magnificent three-

story mansion built for the merchant Jeremiah Lee in 1768. The town is a delight.

We could linger no longer as we had to get to Boston to meet our daughter. We like going into major cities on *Suilven*. She has wintered

in St Katherine's in London and in Seville. She has visited Dublin and Cork. Boston was now beckoning, an enticing skyline glittering across the bay. Despite mooring up in a marina costing pretty much the



Boston Skyline

same as a suite in a five-star hotel, we decided that for once we would treat ourselves so that our daughter and her husband could have easy access to the city. As it turned out, a computer glitch meant their flight was delayed by 24 hours and they had to make their way out to the boat in the dinghy through the rather uncomfortably choppy waters of Boston Waterfront. John and I had a day sightseeing in Boston which is a charming city but Tess and Theo decided that their priority was to get out to Cape Cod and Martha's Vineyard and leave Boston for another time.

Provincetown was to be our landfall on Cape Cod. All the way down from Nova Scotia people had been asking us whether we would be going to Provincetown, always with a slight smile on their faces. It has a certain



Cape Cod boardwalk

reputation as being a crazy place and the gay capital of New England. It didn't disappoint. The waterfront street was buzzing and definitely 'gay'. It is a small place, however,

and when Tess and I hired bicycles, it took no time to find the quieter side of town and then take the cycle track through the sand dunes to the wild east coast of the peninsula, classic Cape Cod with board walks,

Linda and John Andrews

grass-covered sand dunes and wide, sandy beaches. It does have a darker side, however. The coast is littered with shipwrecks and we were able to visit the Old Harbour US Lifesaving Station Museum, built in 1897. From there numerous hazardous rescues were launched, often involving breeches-buoys, lines fired from the shore to the wreck and then people ferried ashore as if on a zip-wire.

Back in Provincetown, we were delighted to see *Cosmic Dancer*, Clive Woodman and Angela Lilienthal (RCC), making her way into the anchorage. Our paths have crossed several times over the past few seasons, wintering together in Lewisporte, Newfoundland and sharing laying-up and launching suppers. John had introduced Angela to the delights of the lobster supper in Lewisporte. As we were now firmly in the land of



Osprey Nest

the lobster, lobster it was for what was our last meeting on the water. *Cosmic Dancer* was at the start of an epic 3,500 mile voyage to Duluth, at the head of the Great Lakes, where she was to be taken out of the water and trucked over to the Pacific Coast. We in contrast were going to make our way in a leisurely manner a few miles down the coast to Newport, Rhode Island. As usual, *Cosmic*

Dancer was a fund of information, handed over local tide tables, and spoke enthusiastically about the boatyard in Jamestown, Rhode Island where they had wintered.

With Tess and Theo arriving a day late, we decided that we would not try to get out to Nantucket on this cruise, but spend the remaining few days in Martha's Vineyard. You can get there by going round the exposed east coast of Cape Cod, but we opted instead to go through the Cape Cod Canal, which cuts through the base of the Cape Cod peninsula. It is only about 10 miles long, but it's best to get the tides right as there are no locks and it has a 4 knot current. We then had to pass through the narrow channel at Wood's Hole, home of the US Marine Research Centre, another place with dangerously strong cross-currents.

The island of Martha's Vineyard has the reputation of being a playground of the rich and we weren't at all sure what we would find. Edgartown is apparently the 'preppy' place to go, but we opted instead to go into Oak Bluffs, a more down-to-earth destination. The harbour is in fact a lagoon which is accessed through a dredged channel. The way into the channel is marked by tall posts, and we were astonished to see, on the

top of one of these, the messy pile of sticks that is an osprey nest, and sitting on top, two ospreys. Closer inspection of the nest revealed the eclectic mix of stuff the birds use to make their nests, including brightly coloured bits of polypropylene rope and in prominent position, a snorkelling goggle.

Like Provincetown, Oak Bluffs is a vibrant holiday destination, with many waterfront bars and restaurants. The town, however, has long history

as a Methodist summer camp. Originally, this was literally a tented camp, a circle of tents around a large space where meetings and services could take place. Over time the tents were replaced by 'gingerbread'



Gingerbread Houses Oak Bluffs

cottages and a vast tabernacle, capable of seating 1,000 people, was constructed. It is now an quaint collection of tiny gingerbread cottages, each one different from the next, with their intricately carved bargeboards and enclosed verandas.

Sadly, we had to start making our way towards Newport, where Tess and Theo would be leaving us. We had one night left, and decided to stop at Cutty Hunk, the most westerly of Elisabeth Islands. From the south, this involved negotiating the very narrow and tide swept Canapitsit Channel which the pilot book warned should only be tackled with local knowledge. Fortunately the tides were such that we could go through at high water springs, but there were, nevertheless, a few anxious moments closely watching the echo sounder as the depth reduced to almost nothing. Again we found ourselves in an extremely sheltered anchorage, this time in a very small, quiet settlement. The island only has 220 inhabitants, reduced to 70 in the winter. There is no shop, but there is a lobster shack on the pier which provided us with our final, very expensive, lobster supper.

The next day we sailed the 26 miles across Rhode Island Sound to Newport, home of the New York Yacht Club, described to us as 'Cowes on steroids' and certainly living up to its reputation. Although the harbour was crowded, the Harbour-master found us a mooring for a couple of nights just off Goat Island where we had a fine view of the many racing fleets that were on the water at all times, ranging from a flotilla of little Optimists to the fleet of magnificent American 12 metre yachts. We

Linda and John Andrews

could also admire the schooners that took regular trips out into the bay, effortlessly winding their way through the mass of moorings under full sail - a magnificent sight.

Our daughter and husband left us in Newport and it was now sadly time for us to go back home too, so made our way the mile or so to the Jamestown Boatyard, which had been recommended to us by Clive and Angela. This is a well-run and efficient boatyard situated on the south end of Conanicut Island. It is a tranquil haven offering some respite from the buzz of Newport. The yard launch regularly runs through the moorings checking that all is well and we could rely on it for runs ashore, so thankfully didn't have to launch the dinghy. As we approached the yard pontoon we were charmed to see that the Union Flag was fluttering above the Stars and Stripes on the yard flagpole: a lovely touch in our honour. Although the yard is a bit out of town, they were happy to lend us the yard



Gay Head Lighthouse

van so that we could run into town to the shops and to the laundromat. Our plan was for *Suilven* to be lifted out of the water for a couple of months while we kept open the possibility of returning for a two-week cruise at the end of the summer. Emails to Oyster produced the exact dimensions of *Suilven's* underwater shape to ensure she could be safely lifted by the cradle and track system that they have, and we were relieved to receive a photograph a few days after our return to the UK of *Suilven* safely chocked up ashore.

In the event we were able to return for two weeks at the end of August and achieve our aim of getting out to Nantucket and revisiting Martha's Vineyard. Nantucket and Edgartown lived up to expectations. They were as pretty as a picture with their clapboard captains' houses and white picket fences. More interesting perhaps was Menemsha which lies on the west coast of Martha's Vineyard. It is still a working fishing harbour and was chosen by Stephen Spielberg as the setting for the film *Jaws*. The small harbour is approached via a narrow channel which sees 5 or 6 knots of current at full tide, so timing of arrival is all important. There are only two moorings in the harbour to which three yachts can moor up at a time. We spent two very sociable nights here as yachts came and went. Menemsha itself is a very small, laid-back place with a few seafood shacks and a lovely, safe beach. We took the small cycle ferry over the narrow channel to the inner lagoon and walked the six miles to the the Gay Head Lighthouse. We were surprised to find that this part of the island

is reserved for members of the Wampanoag tribe. Notices along the road warned people not to trespass on this tribal land. On our journey down the coast of New England, although there were constant reminders of the indigenous tribes in the names of the rivers, we had seen little evidence of the tribes themselves. On Martha's Vineyard, of all places, we came face to face with an actual indigenous tribe. The lighthouse stands on dramatic, red-stained cliffs that have spiritual significance for the tribe. Tribal members run the site and all the cafes and souvenir shops that serve the lighthouse.

By the first week in September, Labour Day was past and America was going back to school and work; the summer was over. So too was the benign weather that had blessed our summer cruise. Our final port of call before returning to Jamestown was Edgartown on Martha's Vineyard. The Harbour Master was insistent that we could only stay one night as we were on a fair weather mooring and there was a big storm named 'Hermine' coming in. Our own weather information didn't look too alarming, and as we swept past Oak Bluffs and Vineyard Haven, both bristling with masts, we felt a little let down that we were having to cut our cruise short. Then again the water around here is very shallow with numerous sandbanks. Perhaps the locals knew something that we didn't. Certainly the sea did pick up a bit of a chop, but nothing really alarming. Significantly perhaps, we were virtually the only vessel on the water on one of the busiest weekends of the year. Nevertheless, we had a great sailing passage of nearly 60 miles, with the wind on our beam or behind us. With no room in Newport Harbour and Jamestown untenable in a Nor'easter, we anchored north of Goat Island. The wind picked up to 40 knots, but our trusty Rocna anchor held firm. We later heard that Edgartown had seen winds of over 60 knots and that Menemsha had been almost buried by sand, so it turned out to be very good advice to go inshore.

Suilven is now safely ashore in Jamestown and will be launched next year when hopefully we will be able to complete our transatlantic passage. New York calls, though. Despite going in slightly the wrong direction, *Suilven* definitely needs to visit the 'Big Apple' and add it to her list of major cities visited and enjoyed by her crew.