

SAN JUAN ISLANDS CRUISING GUIDE



By: Roger and Marlene Van Dyken

San Juan Sailing & Yachting Cruising Guide

Many of our charter guests and friends have asked us to share our favorite spots with them. We gladly do this, of course, for in doing so we can mentally cruise the islands yet again, each favorite spot flashing like a video before our mind's eye.

Normally, we do this as our charter friends are ready to head out into the islands, crouched around the chart with one of them scribbling notes about how to enter this passage or that cove. I suspect we may still do that - but instead of covering the broad overview, as we do below, we can focus on fine tuning your cruising plans when we visit together.

Voyages of discovery - or re-discovery - are always more enjoyable if studied in advance. So here are some hints for those fireside cruise planning sessions in your family room.

Enjoy!

Roger and Marlene Van Dyken and family

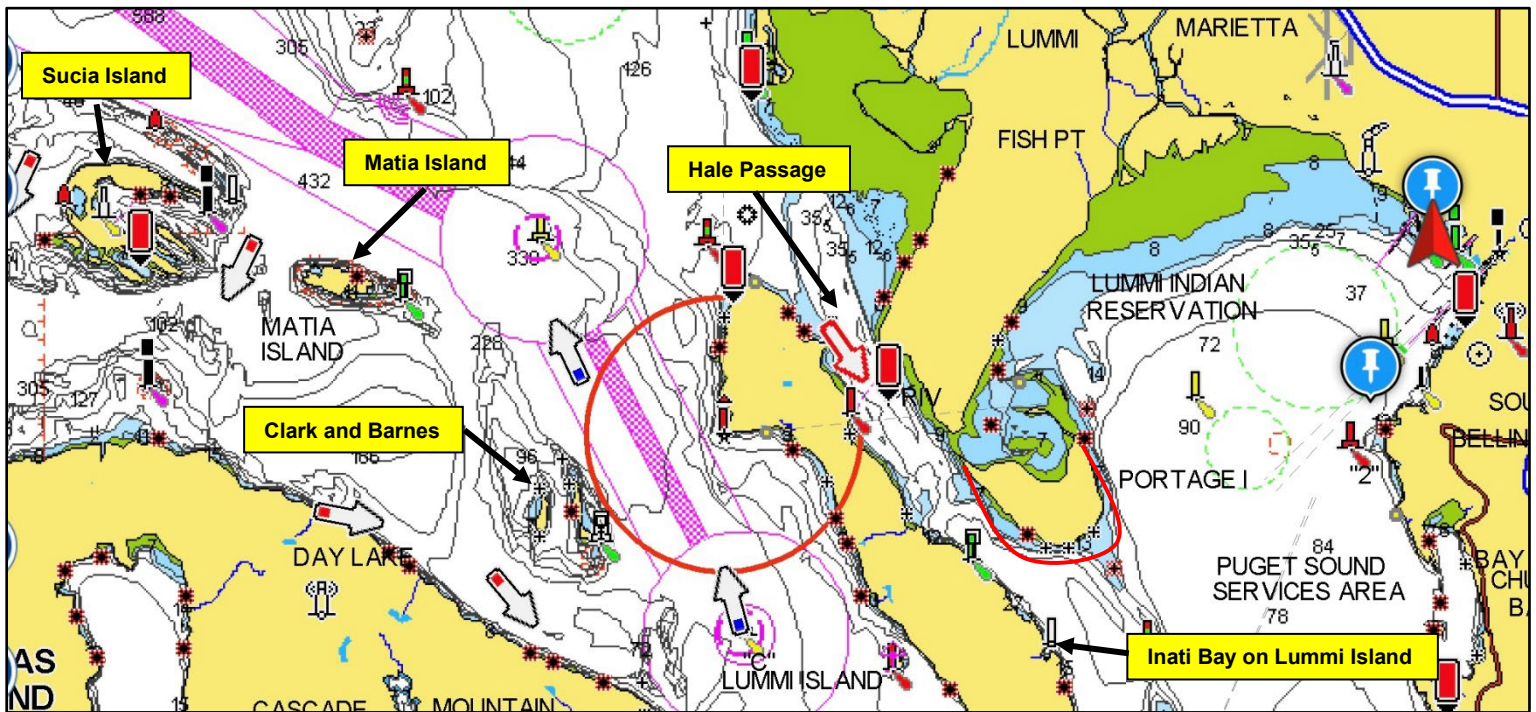


San Juan Islands (no date) Wikipedia. Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/San_Juan_Islands (Accessed: January 10, 2023).

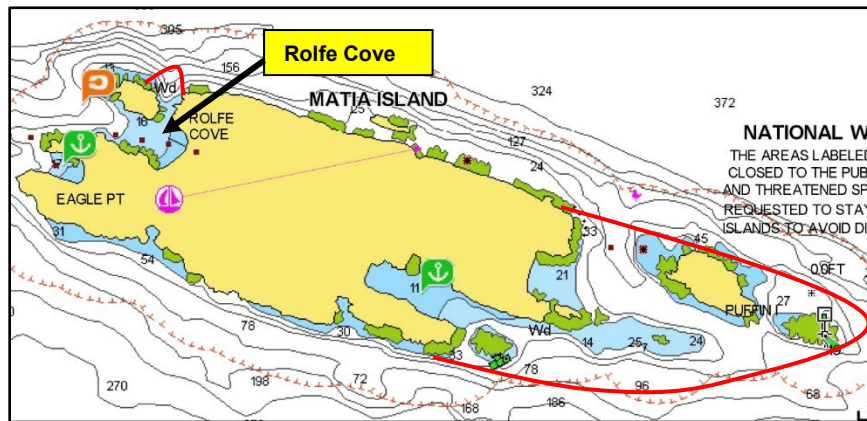
DEPARTURE DAY- MATIA, SUCIA, INATI BAY ON LUMMI ISLAND

Relax! No matter when we leave Bellingham, there are excellent, idyllic spots that await. If we get away before, say 1 or 2 PM on a long summer's day, we head for Sucia, our favorite island in all the San Juans. At 18NM it's anywhere between one to two hours depending on your hurry. If a southwesterly (the prevailing wind here) has built up a chop, start by hanging a left out of the harbor to catch the clockwise river currents and get in the lee of south Bellingham (see the map above), then head for the tallest point on Lummi Island, which will normally allow you to take any waves on your quarter. If a high-pressure area has set in, any breeze will veer to the north and west, in which case we head directly for Lummi's peak. That will bring you clear of Point Francis (southern tip of Portage Island), and the rocks that have rolled down her cliff. Make sure to keep the red buoy to starboard as you head north up Hale Passage. It gets very shallow between the buoy and Portage Island. The views are scenic as you pass summer homes and farmlands of northern Lummi Island. And no, the island is not Indian Reservation - the mainland opposite is. About midway up, the Lummi Island ferry may cross your path. As you head toward the northern tip, the water shallows between the green buoy and Lummi Island, (watch for Indian crab pots here) but depths are good as you round the northern tip, Point Migley, allowing you to pass within about 150 yards. Directly ahead, you'll see Matia with Sucia just behind. Georgia Strait lies north to starboard, and Orcas, Clark, and Barnes are off to port.

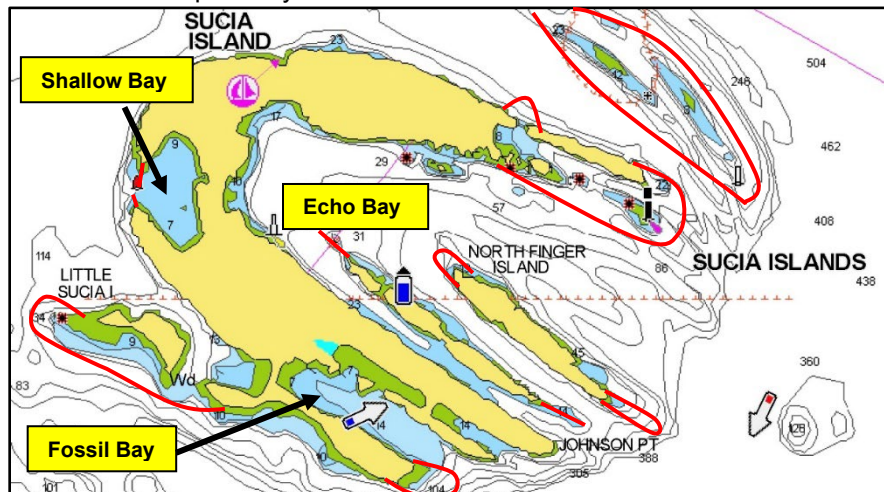
OVERVIEW FOR DAY 1



Matia- As you near Matia (officially pronounced “Mah tee uh”, but the locals all call it “May sha”), you’ll frequently see seals sunning themselves on the rocks by the light just west of Puffin Island. We usually pass north of Matia, going AROUND the little islet at the northern tip of Rolfe Cove to enter the cove from the west. Rolfe is a beautiful cove with a dock and several mooring buoys, but very poor anchoring. Check your tide table --- currents can make for a very bouncy night during heavy tidal shifts. A better spot lies just south of Rolfe Code. We call it Eagle Cove, after Eagle Point which forms its southern arm. Careful anchoring fore and aft (watch for the rocks on either side of this cove) makes for a snug and beautiful overnight spot, with excellent protection in a stormy southerly. In addition to being a state park, Matia is also a federal nature preserve with two ecosystems – the northern half lush and verdant with ferns taller than your head, the southern exposure resembling the arid California Sierras. A delightful half hour or so trail walk will take you through both.



Sucia- Sucia is also a state park accessible only by boat, lies just west of Matia. Our favorite is Fossil Bay, cozy and serene. It also has docks and mooring buoys. Though it is shallow, you should be okay except on the most extreme minus tides. If the mooring buoys are full, we find good anchorage between the western end of the lines of buoys and the westernmost dock. Otherwise, try Echo Bay just to the north, or Shallow Bay on the other side. They are excellent as well. None provides much protection in weather, however, though Shallow is better in a southwester, as is Echo in a high-pressure northerly. Again, there are excellent hiking trails and wonderful beachcombing. A great stroll runs south and the west along the narrow spit of land that forms the beach of Fossil Bay, following the trail southwest to the wooded point. It winds through beaches, a min-forest, and along cliffs. For a nice hour-long hike, take the loop trail on the hill that rings the south side of Fossil Bay, out to Ev Henry Point, named for the legendary yachtsman who raised millions in donations from our state’s boaters to buy Sucia from its private owners and then give it to the state for posterity.

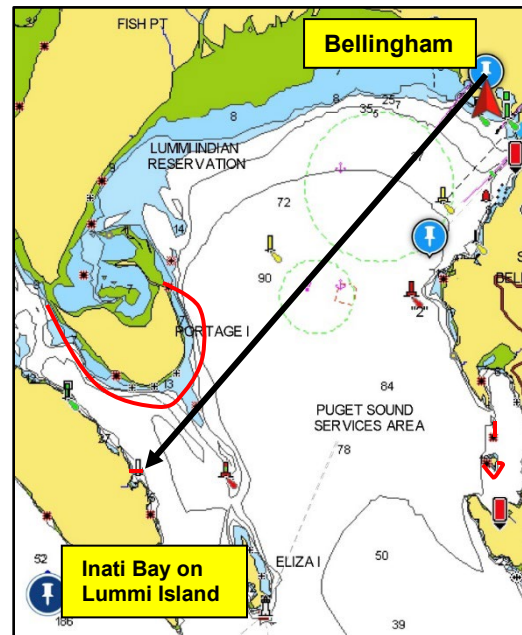


Beware of the rocks north, east, and west of Sucia. In fact, the island was named by Portuguese explorer Juan De Fuca (of Strait fame). In his language, Sucia means "foul" (as in rocks, not birds!).

By the way, state parks charge a fee for overnighting at the docks, and for tying onto a buoy. Your boat's owner has pre-paid that for you with a year-long permit, good at all state marine parks, but you need to register at each one.

IF DEPARTING LATER IN THE DAY

If leaving Bellingham later in the day, we sail into the setting sun across Bellingham Bay - again toward Lummi's tallest point - but a mile or two away, instead of turning north up Hale Passage toward Sucia, we take a quick dip south into Inati Bay. It's only seven miles across the Bay. Watch for the white marker near the entrance. It marks one of the most talented "killer reefs" in the San Juans. The safest path to enter is within two boat lengths of the point at the south entrance. Enter slowly and keep an eye on the depth sounder. Once inside you'll be amply rewarded. If spring has brought recent rains, a mysterious disappearing waterfall will splash onto the beach, but not into the water! The Bellingham Yacht Club (BYC) leases the privately owned land there and maintains it with volunteers, including the toilets, picnic tables and fire pits. It's for the use of yacht club members, and, as a guest of your BYC boat owner, you may too. The tall mountains of Lummi Island surround you with good protection from big blows, but storms will send skittish breezes into Inati, making you swing at anchor. No buoys, but the holding ground is excellent. This is a popular anchorage. We sometimes run a stern line to shore if it's crowded. If you do, compare the depthsounder to the tide tables to assure you won't go aground during the night. It is worth the effort, however. In this remote, wilderness area of Lummi Island, just an hour from Bellingham, you'll look around and you feel you are miles from civilization.

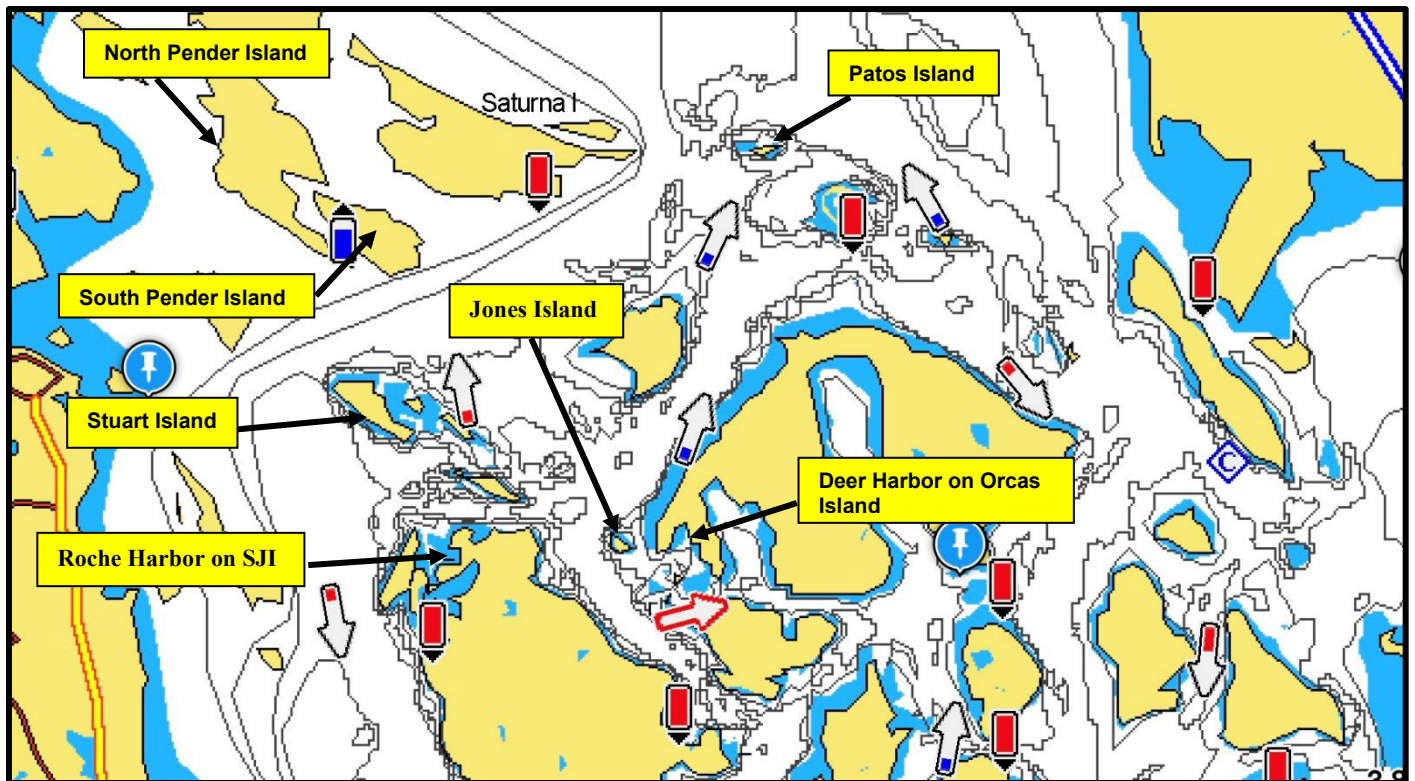


IN BRIEF: On leaving the harbor hang a left if there is a southerly chop, then quarter the waves to Lummi's peak. Choose Inati bay on Lummi Island if starting later in the day. If heading to Sucia, be sure to pass west of the red buoy off Point Francis in Hale Passage.

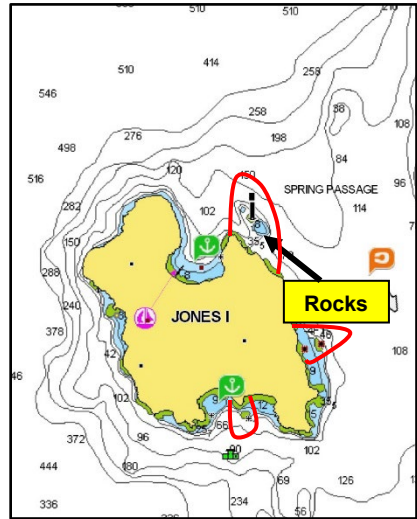
NEXT DAY - GULF ISLANDS (CANADA), JONES, DEER HARBOR, ROCHE, STUART

You've got so many options here: 1) across Boundary Pass to the Canadian port of entry at Bedwell Harbor (closed October through May) on South Pender to spend time in the beautiful Gulf Islands (see our Gulf Islands Guide); 2) a short cruise to the state park's Patos Island or 3) continuing the counterclockwise northwest rotation through the San Juans. We take the last route most often and even this gives abundant choices: Jones, Stuart, Deer Harbor, or Roche Harbor (to name a few.) Regardless of your choice, keep a sharp eye out as you head southwest from Sucia. These waters are the favorite playground of Dahl's porpoises, and occasionally, Orcas (killer whales). Colored black and white and about eight feet long, Dahl's porpoises look like baby Orcas. Watch for their dorsal fins. They often swim in pairs and, if in a playful mood, will cavort in your bow wake.

OVERVIEW FOR THE NEXT DAY

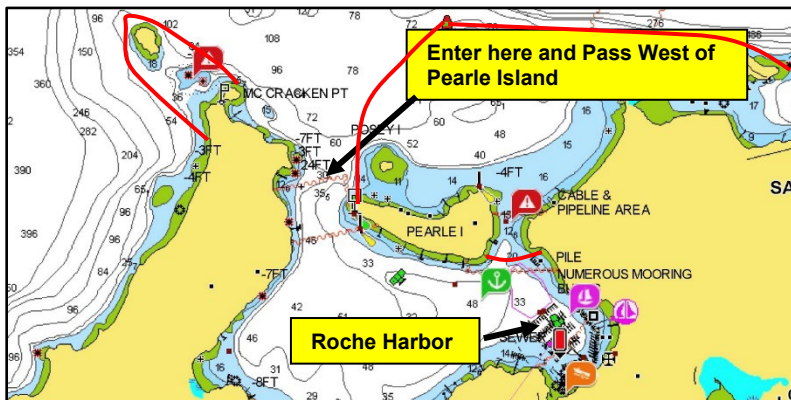


a. **Jones Island** - the excellent protected cove on the north side of this picturesque state park has dock space as well as buoys. If neither is available, holding ground is moderate, but best close in. Make sure you have a solid set on the anchor for overnight, or maybe put out two. Beautiful trails traverse this little island. Take some apples ashore to feed the deer that eat out of your hand. This is a picturesque little island, excellent for a quick leg stretch. The large trees strewn like toothpicks in the island center bear mute testimony to the power of wind. The little beaches, trails and tidepools are marvelous. Beware of the rocks and kelp near the east entrance of the north cove. By the way, anytime you see kelp, steer clear. It means killer rocks hiding nearby. Not that the real prop eaters need kelp, mind you, but kelp is a dead giveaway that danger lurks. Back to the cruise - if the north cove is too full, we avoid Jones' southern cove (exposed to southerlies and rocks are strewn everywhere, even near the easternmost buoys) and veer off to the east to Deer Harbor, or to the west to Stuart Island or Roche Harbor.



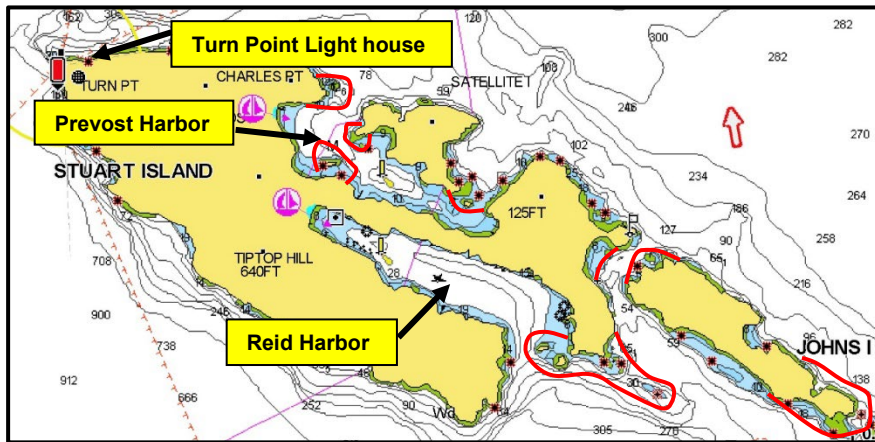
b. **Deer Harbor** - This tiny community tucked under Orcas' westernmost arm is less traveled and sports an aura unlike anywhere else in the islands. The compact bay gives a sense of cozy comfort and sure shelter. Our charter guests report a couple of excellent restaurants there. Plus, you can unwind in the swimming pool and explore the little township with its quaint yet surprisingly modern cottages. You can fuel and buy some provisions in this spot, which ranks as "favorite" among many cruising veterans.

c. **Roche Harbor** – This harbor is the ritziest resort in the islands. We've seen powerboats with helicopters on the afterdeck. John Wayne used to keep his converted minesweeper here. Many jetsetters winter their yachts in Hawaii and summer them at Roche - or so the story goes. You get the idea. Yet, the ambiance is more "old money" charm than "new money" glitz. Steeped in tradition (watch the retiring of the "colors" at sunset), it's a fun place to visit, a good place to shower, wash clothes, replenish stores, enjoy a fine meal, and taste civilization just enough to glory in the fact that you can leave it instantly behind as you head into the pristine beauty of the islands.



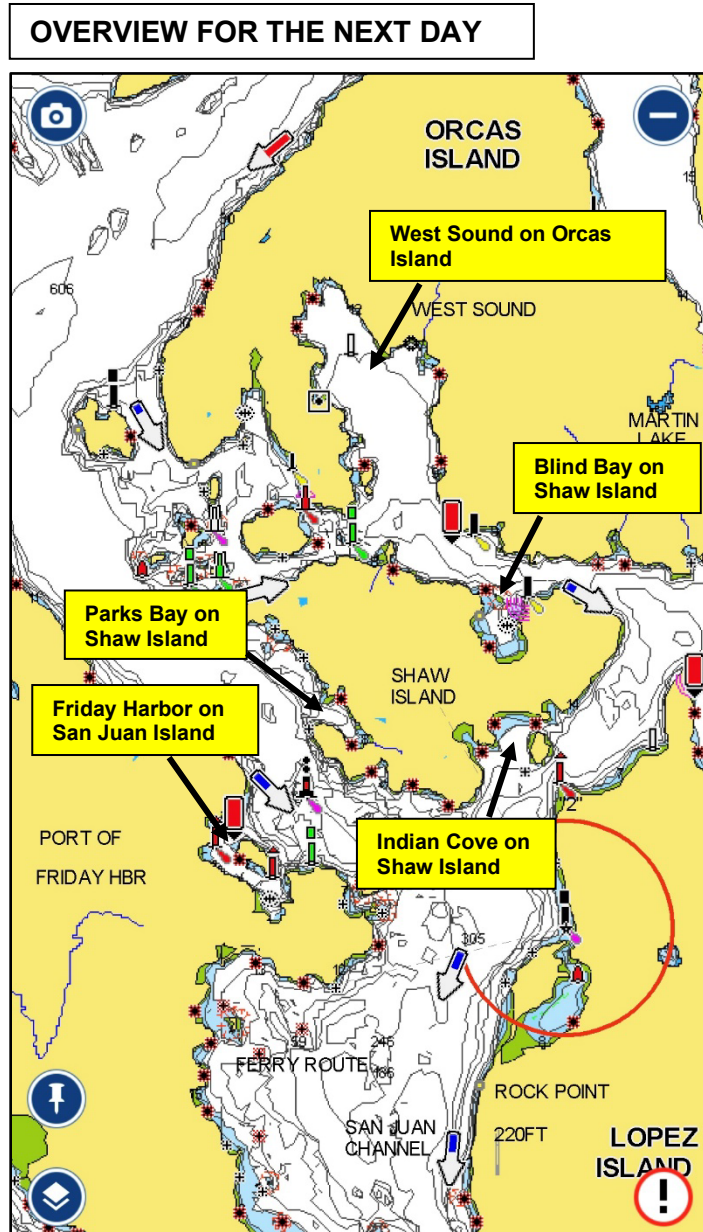
On entering Roche Harbor, be sure to pass **WEST** of Pearle Island. The entrance to the east looks inviting but its shallow bottom holds numerous nicks from passing props. Like other resorts in the islands, dock fees run a bit more. Buoy fees are moderate, and anchoring is free (unless you accept a ride on the water taxi). There are many local byways from here, but that's for another cruise.

d. **Stuart Island** - this island has what are probably the two most protected coves in the San Juans. **Reid** and **Prevost Harbors** are on opposite sides of the island (south and north, respectively), connected by a narrow neck of state park land. The rest of the island is private. Clams and crab abound in these waters. But choose which cove you want early on because your route of approach will vary considerably, as a study of the chart will demonstrate. The pass between Stuart and Johns Islands is perilous, with many rocks. And the eastern ends of Johns and Ripple Islands need to be negotiated carefully. But it's clear sailing - so to speak - around the light house at the western end of Stuart, where the bottom passes 1100 feet below your keel, the deepest in the US islands. To stretch your legs, there are two short loops on state park property between the Harbors, and a delightful longer hike west to the light house.

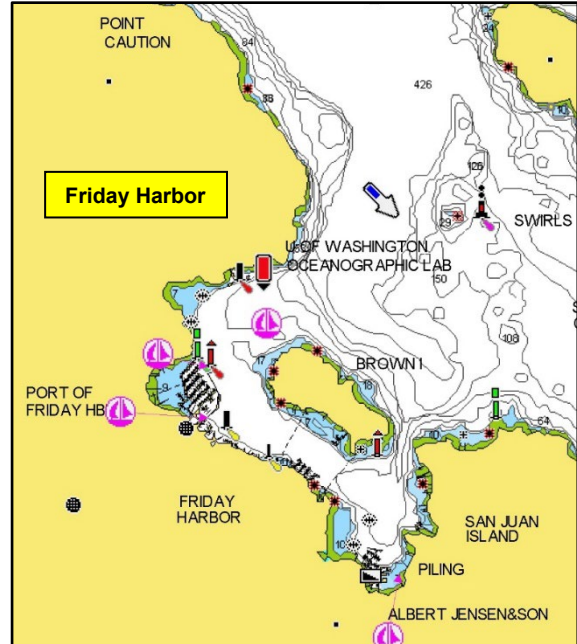


NEXT DAY - FRIDAY HARBOR, SHAW, WEST SOUND

Any fixed itinerary breaks down here. Let's face it - the options make each day a potpourri of multiple choices. You may be on day three or day six by now. Nevertheless, continuing our counterclockwise rotation we now enter the heart of the islands. We're now faced with several choice destinations: Friday Harbor, Shaw Island coves, or West Sound (among a host of others).



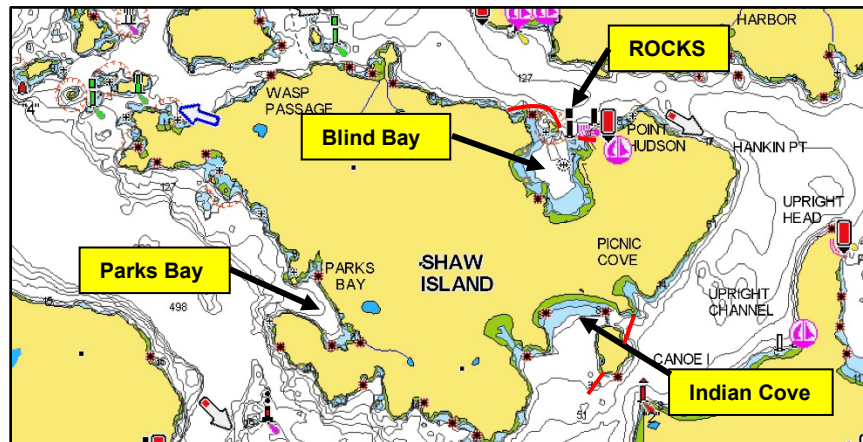
a. **Friday Harbor** combines several cultural flavors. Like Roche, there are showers, laundry, fuel, water, groceries (King's Market, best in the islands) and pump out, and the commercial district satisfies any latent spousal shopping instincts as well as the most discriminating of palates. The University of Washington operates its marine studies here with good reason - you'll find a plethora of sea life. We put down a shrimp pot one evening (inside the marina) and the next morning harvested 16 shrimp, three crab and two cod! Kids with flashlights and insect nets scoop up shrimp along the pilings at night.



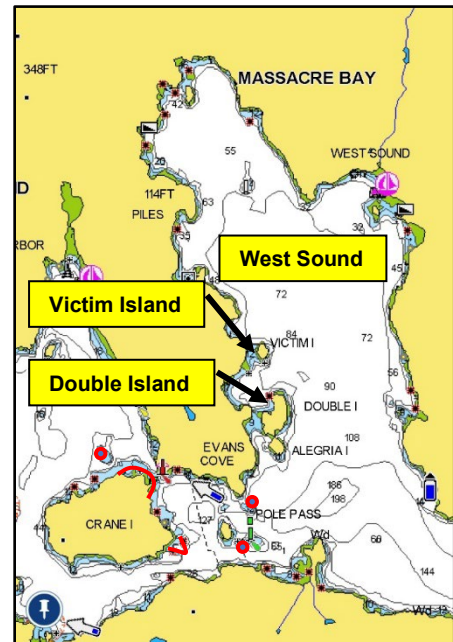
This thriving little community still reflects island life and culture. It's a little funky, down home, with an interesting mix of island isolationism and cruising hospitality. Home to artists, musicians (a delightful popular jazz festival each July), authors, and world-roaming blue water cruisers as well as farmers, ranchers, retired folk and shopkeepers, Friday Harbor has a unique charm if you can overlook the touristy aspects that have become more pronounced in recent years. A remarkably well-equipped chandlery is on Main Street's right-hand side, second floor, a couple blocks up from the marina.

The Washington State ferry docks at Friday Harbor numerous times daily. Remember these huge craft are swift and silent. And, here in the center of the islands, if you see a sailor doff his cap and smile as you meet, odds are that you've courteously "watched your wake" ... either that, or they're thanking you for the fuel taxes that pay for the state's marine parks!

b. **Shaw Island Coves, Parks Bay, Indian Cove, Blind Bay**- Friday Harbor's marina can be full. A favorite out-of-the-way spot to anchor after "doing the town" (no charge to dock for the day-only at Friday Harbor) lies just to the north. **Parks Bay** on Shaw Island is well-protected from prevailing winds, has good holding ground, and charter guests report good crabbing. It's beautiful - one of the most tranquil and serene spots you will ever enjoy. The shore, though secluded and pristine, belongs to the University and is to be left untrodden. **Indian Cove** is an inviting cove on the south end. Be aware of two disadvantages- the cove is exposed to any stiff breezes from the south and heavy greases can make anchoring difficult. **Blind Bay**, on the north, is delightful, but remember the isle near the entrance is a state park and the chart notes the location of several professional keel crunchers. Enter very slowly, note the marks on the chart located on the image on the right for avoiding rocks. Enter only east of the little isle, leaving the rocks to port.

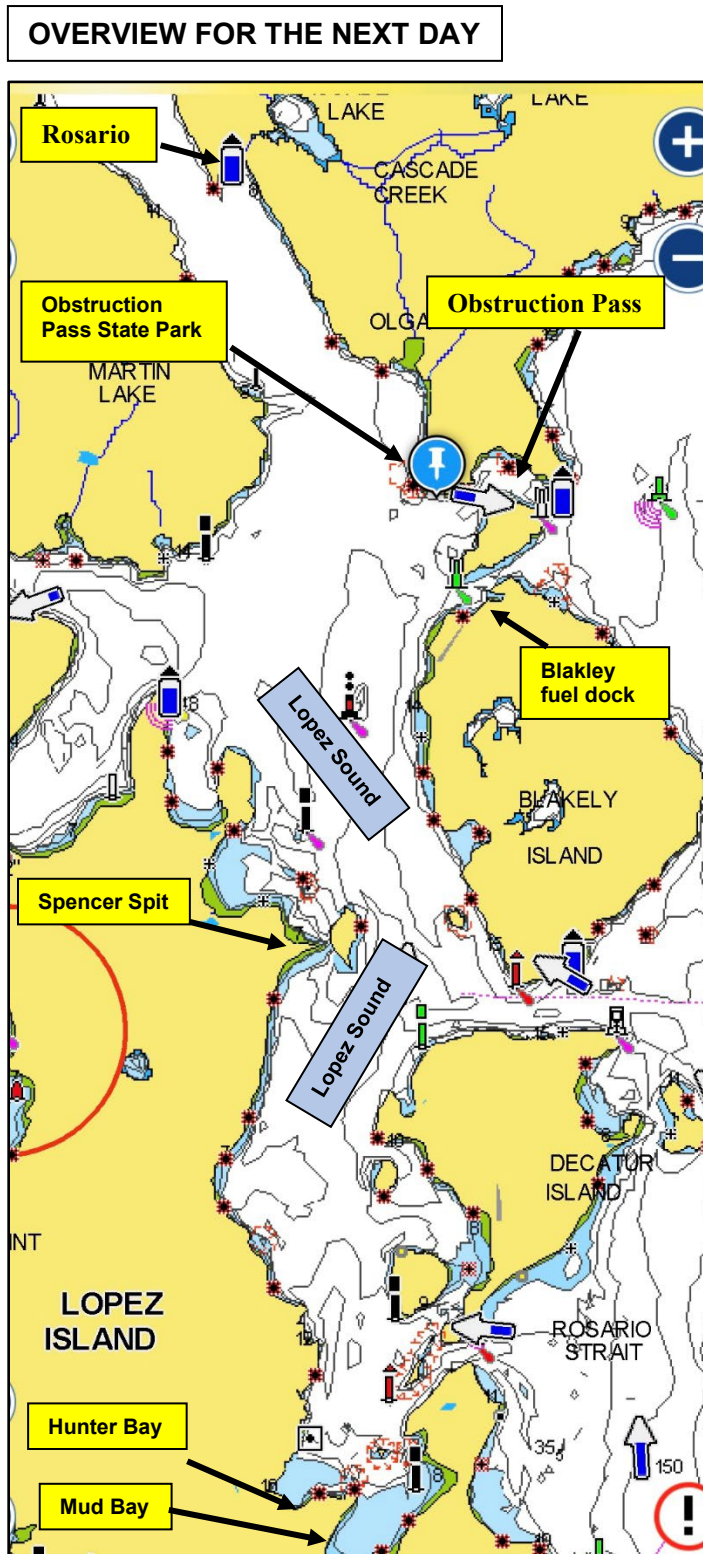


d. **West Sound**- this has a texture all in its own, with a different feel than the rest of the islands. Beautiful cruising but few excellent anchorages. The best is probably behind Double Island, just south of Victim Island. The macabre may enjoy anchoring in Massacre Bay behind Skull Island (names are after a ferocious Indian battle) but we found restless ghosts trying to disanchor us all night there.



NEXT DAY - ROSARIO, SPENCER SPIT, LOPEZ SOUND

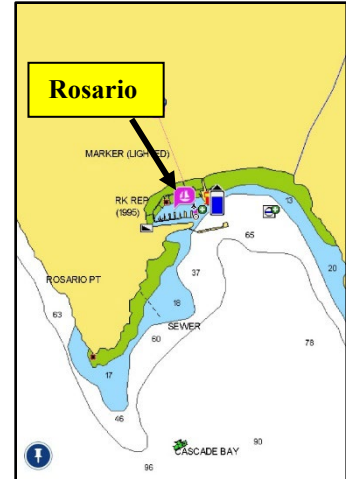
Wherever you are in your multiple-choice cruise, you now have several philosophical decisions to make. Your course will be determined by whether you're ready for a relaxing resort stop, hungry for clams, or in the mood for a new world of cruising scenery.



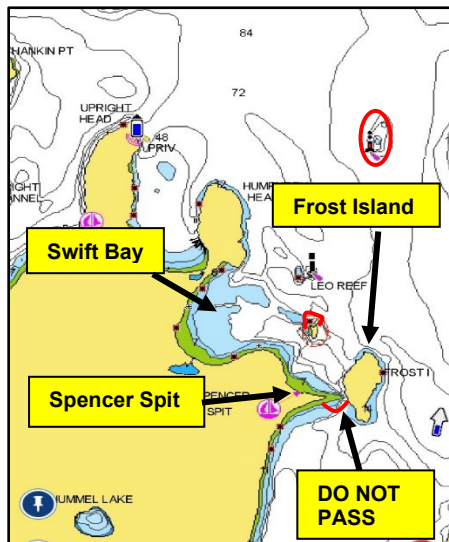
a. **Rosario Resort** - picturesquely positioned beneath towering Mount Constitution on Orcas Island, this unique resort on East Sound has tennis courts, 3 swimming pools, a good (though a bit pricey) restaurant, sauna, and Jacuzzi.

Try to get at the dock or on one of the few moorings. Reservations are highly recommended during peak season. Anchoring on the rock bottom can be difficult. If you must anchor, set your hook straight south of the mansion, about 100 yards offshore.

Take a tour through the old mansion--the pipe organ, library, and old rooms. It's a delightful spot to seep the salt from your wrinkles. On your way up or back, we sometimes stop at Olga, just south of Rosario. A short walk over the hill brings you to a little restaurant with a superb reputation among the locals.



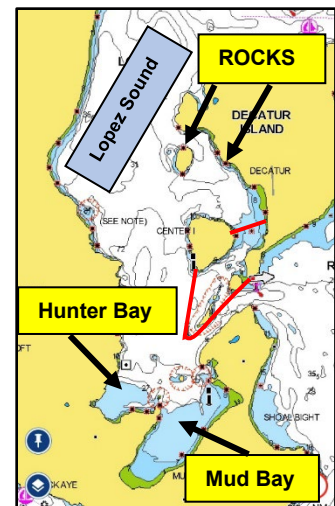
Though, the interior of the islands, especially around Friday Harbor, tends to have little or no wind, East Sound-on which Rosario is located- is typically breezy. The topographical features create a chimney (Venturi) effect, swooshing winds either up or down the Sound. Our experience says the breezes are strongest in the afternoon, mostly southerly. and run about 15 to 20 knots.



b. **Spencer Spit** - this sand spit state park has the best clamming we know about. It's a fun and different spot with good mooring buoys; but you can bounce a bit in a breeze as there's not much protection. Try the north shore first so if the south winds come up, the waves have little fetch. Do not pass between Frost Island and Spencer Spit.

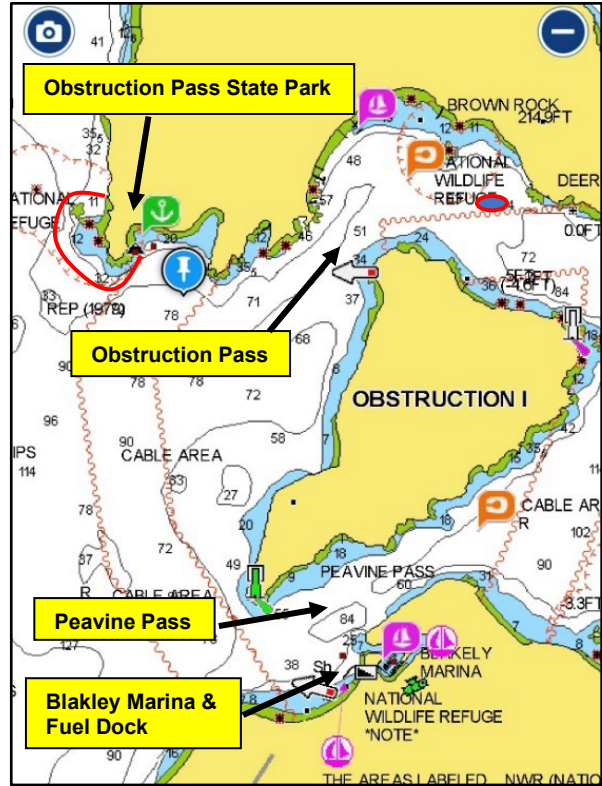
c. **Lopez Sound** - this is a world of its own. You could spend the entire week here.

Beautiful, protected coves, good clamming, shrimping, delightful little islands - it's a nature cruiser's paradise. Just two words of caution: (1) beware of the rocks along the west side of Decatur Island; and (2) every Garden of Eden seems to be spoiled by some devil or another. In the case of Lopez Sound, it's the occasional property owner bordering Hunter and Mud Bays. Even look like you may approach the beach (okay, it *is* private property) in your dinghy, and you'd think the Pig War was about to break out again! But if you don't make moves like a Marine amphibious force, you'll remain at peace in this idyllic and protected spot.

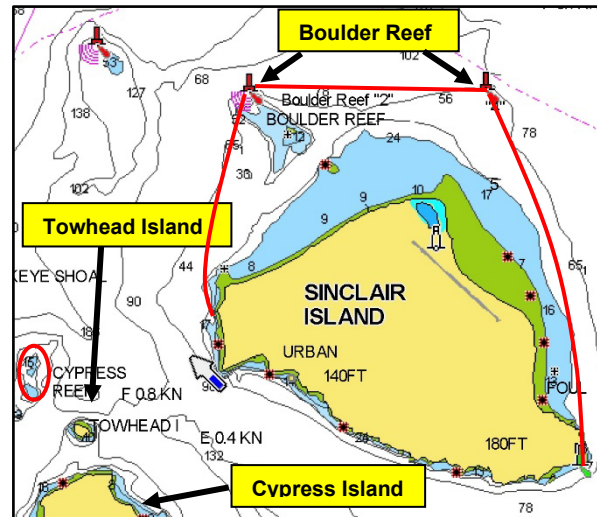


d. **Obstruction Pass state park**- at the northwest entrance to Obstruction Pass. Watch the rocks near the entrance (and just around the SW corner toward Rosario)! You may tie up to one of the few buoys, or anchor. If it's crowded, try a bow anchor with a stern line to shore. The beach and trails ashore are intriguing. Looking at the chart, one would think this would be exposed to stormy southerlies. Surprisingly, however, many of our owners and guests have reported this to be an excellent storm hole. The southerlies lift toward Mt. Constitution, leaving the park protected.

Blakely Island Marina- directly south of Obstruction Pass state park, provides new, secure, dockage, plus fuel and shopping for essentials. Note: to avoid Bellingham "return day" congestion at the fuel dock, we permit sailboats to fuel here before they return "home." The fuel dock extends into the broader east entrance to Peavine Pass. Make two passes: the first to check current direction on the fuel dock pilings so you can moor bow into current, then determine if you will need to port or starboard fenders. After fueling, walk up to the office/gift shop on the hill and tell them how much fuel you took on. (Check before fueling that the pump is zeroed, and courtesy says, zero before you get underway).

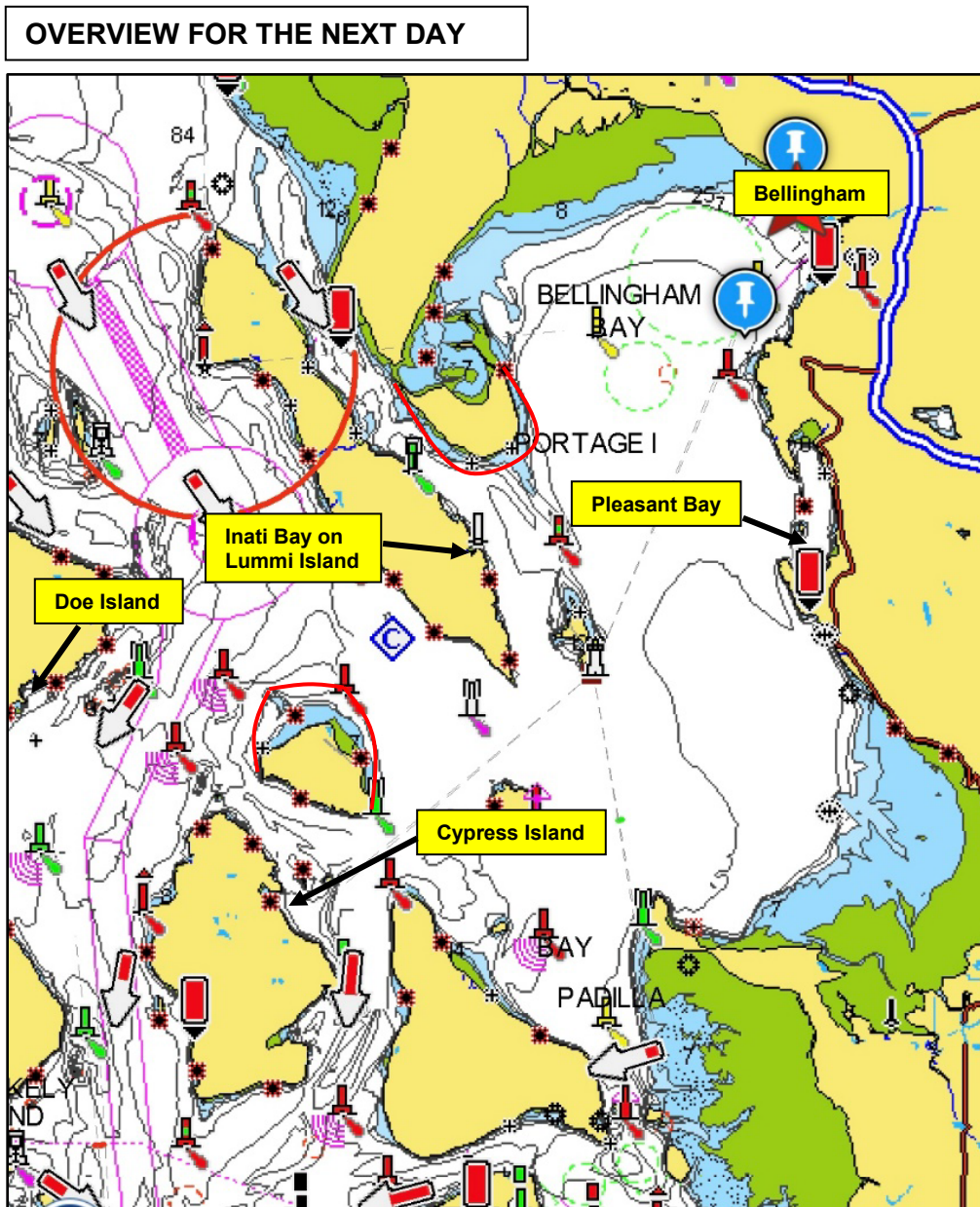


Note: Sinclair Island- When you cross from Obstruction Pass across Rosario Strait, do **not** head north of Sinclair Island. Note on the chart how far the rocky reefs extend northward of Sinclair. It's a veritable submersible graveyard. The best passage is "south of Sinclair" (SOS), passing between Cypress and Towhead Islands. This route is the shortest, safest, and most scenic.

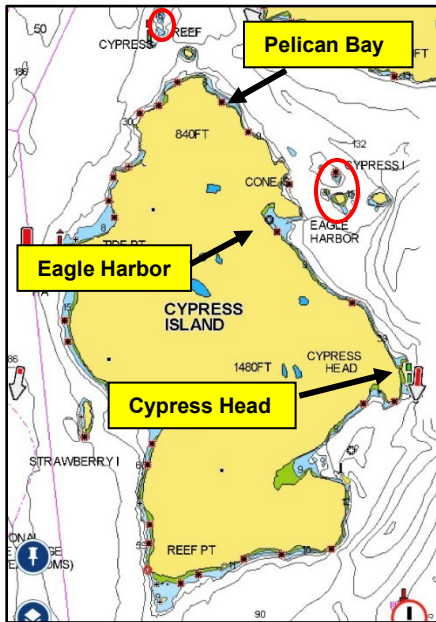
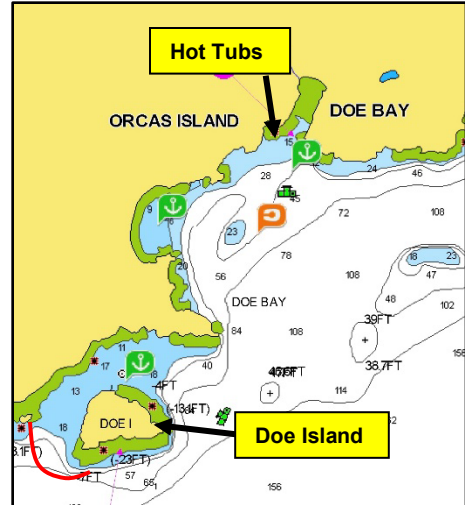


RETURN DAY - FINAL JEWELS, DOE BAY, CYPRESS, INATI BAY, PLEASANT BAY

Depending upon when we need to be back in Bellingham, we choose one of these four special “last night” options, Cypress, Inati Bay, Pleasant Bay, and Doe Bay.



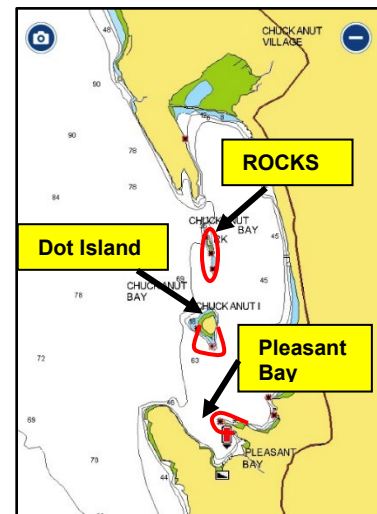
a. **Doe Bay-** If you have time, Doe Bay, near Doe Island, northeast of Obstruction Pass in Rosario Strait, is a delightful day stop. Tiny Doe Island (approach slowly, with your best rock scout at the bow) is a state park with a small dock. A 15-minute walk circumstrolls this wondrous little gem. On the Orcas shore, the small community of Doe Bay has the reputation of being a well-preserved commune from the 60s, complete with communal (and clothes less) hot tub. Anchoring and protection here, however, is poor.



b. **Cypress Island, Pelican Bay, Eagle Harbor, & Cypress Head-** though not superbly protected, provides several fun beaches, endless hiking, a precipitous mountain backdrop, and unforgettable views of snowcapped Mt. Baker, with an alpine glow with the setting sun. Cypress head has several buoys, it lies just east of the norther tip of Cypress Island. It's five minutes to your right after passing Towhead Island. Caution: it is shallow in minus tides. If the buoys are full, don't try to anchor... bad holding ground and swift currents. Eagle Harbor has several buoys, however, closer to shore they are in shallow water at minus tides. This is an area where those long-keeled sailboats need to be extra cautious. We recommend staying on the east of south end of the harbor. Cypress head lies on the southeast end of the island offering three buoys. This anchorage is exposed to Bellingham Channel, which can result in the occasional swell from passing boats.

c. **Pleasant Bay-** This is on the mainland, the southernmost inlet of Chuckanut Bay, just south of Bellingham. Like Inati Bay, this is close to Bellingham Harbor. Beautiful homes line the shore of this cozy, protected cove that gives us a charming re-instruction to civilization. Enter only south of Chuckanut (Dot) island and, upon departure, be wary of tide covered rocks north of Dot Island. If you need to rise early here, the train whistle will sound the alarm for you.

d. **Inati Bay-** described earlier.



But the premium day stop is on the southeast shore of Lummi Island, about directly west of Eliza Island's northern tip. It has no name on the chart, and a sign on the shore says, "Department of Natural Resources." As a budget cutting measure, they may quit its maintenance and the sign. We call it "Secret Cove" and by your reading of this you are hereby sworn to secrecy on its location. If the single buoy is gone, anchor fore and aft in the miniature cove. Grab your camera and dinghy into the beach. Picnic on the rocks overlooking your boat, Bellingham Bay, and Mt. Baker. Then, about 100 yards north, you will find a tiny spit and another spectacular promontory to climb with a couple of tiny smuggler's coves that you suddenly stumble upon.

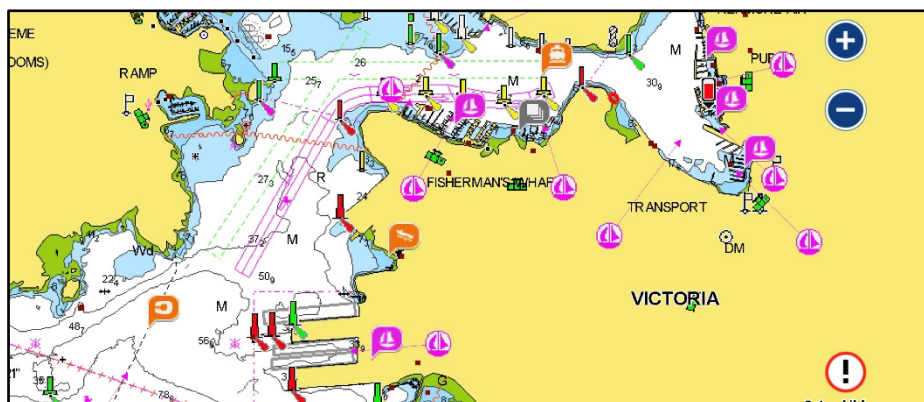
ADDENDA

For those of you who want to taste a bit of Europe, go back to day three and plan an excursion from Roche, Stuart, or Jones to the capital of British Columbia, Victoria. Or, if you prefer, you may go there straight from Bellingham. Be brave, you can make the 48 nautical miles from Bellingham in one day - or stop at Fisherman Bay and make it in two. The latter route goes through the islands - pass between Eliza and Lummi, south of Sinclair, between Towhead and Cypress, through Obstruction or Peavine Passes, north of Lopez through Upright Channel, down San Juan Channel to Cattle Point and westward into the Strait of Juan De Fuca toward the capital of British Columbia. You'll note that your compass heading is nearly 180 degrees as you head from Bellingham to the BC (Canada) capital! Or, if the tide will be ebbing on the last half of your cruise, take the northern route around Orcas.

HEADING TO VICTORIA

Listen up on the VHF weather channels for winds on the Straits before making the passage. It can get breezy out there. Also check out the tides in the current atlas aboard your boat so you can ride the currents. All the tidal water for 300 miles of inland waters enters and exits the Strait twice each day. So if you've got a 10-foot tidal difference, ask your math-major genius child to calculate the cubic feet moving in and out and you'll know why you get a current. Note Middle Reef between San Juan and Discovery Islands on the chart - this little patch will generate really confused seas if the tide runs counter to the breeze. Watch the chart carefully as you traverse the south coast of Victoria City. Depths are fine if you don't get too close. Don't try to cut between Discovery Island and Vancouver Island - too many rocks. The same is true of Trial Island.

When you make a right into Victoria's harbor channel, stay just to starboard of the yellow buoys to avoid the ferry/air traffic. As you emerge from the winding channel to downtown Victoria with the Empress Hotel and the Parliament building spread before you, well, what can I say? Steam straight ahead to the Canadian customs dock and report in by the telephone there. If you arrive early in the day, try to tie up at the city docks in front of the Empress. It's an experience without parallel. Otherwise, note the Coast Hotel on your right as the Empress comes into view; it has fine docks, showers, hot tub, and is a pleasant shoreside walk to downtown. The docks to the left of the customs dock are fine, too. If full, ask if you can raft alongside another vessel. There is no anchoring here so one cannot really refuse to raft. But it's polite to ask first.



The city is charming, with a decidedly European flavor. Flowers, lovers, and streetside music groups abound. Tour the Empress, the Parliament building (catch a session if you can, to get an appreciation of the origins of the American system), and the wonderful Provincial Museum. You can take a double decker bus tour of the town, a horse and buggy trip around the waterfront, or a tour to spectacular Butchart Gardens. All tours depart right in front of the Empress. Take a walk through the city core to the left of the Empress. For you jazz and pasta lovers, take a few years off by squeezing in to Pagliacci's about two and a half blocks from the Empress (left about two blocks, right about one).

For the return trip, time the tides to ride the flooding currents east and then north, along San Juan Island. Aim for Lime Kiln Point initially as you round Discovery Island. The flood tide takes a broad round sweep as it heads north, running like a river along the San Juan Island coast. Believe me, the ride is much smoother when tide and breeze are with you. Keep a lookout for the Orca as this is their favorite playground. Several past charter guests have returned walking two feet off the dock with semi-glazed looks in their eyes after drifting with a pod of Orca as the whales broached, leapt and played in their special majestic way. And, of course, be respectful and stay at least 100 yards away (they'll come closer if they wish! We head above of their direction of travel, then await them with no motor...sounds travel under water).

ANCHORING TIPS

The normal seamanly 7 to 1 scope is impractical here, due to good holding ground, protected anchorages, narrow coves and the presence of other boats. 3 or 4 to 1 is more common. For peace of mind, all our boats carry two anchors. If high winds are forecast, I sleep better with two anchors leading in a V from the bow (noting if other proximate boats are on two anchors or not). If anchoring in a tiny cove, a fore and aft anchor is appropriate (or in the rare instance that other boats have anchored that way in a larger cove). When you have sufficient scope and are ready to set, give a few gentle at idle tugs...just enough to get the anchor rode straight and set the anchor...any more will bend the flukes. The next morning, please be extra careful of the flukes, Gelcoat dings in the bow have a way of chipping away at damage deposits. (Personally, I prefer to hang on a buoy if it is available.)

WILDLIFE

It is not uncommon to see bald and golden eagles, seals, and the play of the Orca-mini-Dahl's porpoise. Then there's salmon, Dungeness and red crabs, clams, and many varieties of cod, to sample but a bit of the abundant sea life that thrives in the nutritionally rich seafood chain of the Northwest's inland waters.

The key to appreciating wildlife is to keep a keen eye from the flybridge. We have seen friends cruise right through a pod of Orca and not notice! Scan the skies and examine the dead trees for bald eagles. Watch the water horizon and occasionally look behind you to catch Orca and Dahl's porpoises. A walk on the beach at low tide is a real-life biology text.

All our boats are equipped with crab rings. Best bait (shy of fresh fish) is uncooked chicken bones with a bit of meat left on to attract these smell feeders. Tie the bone(s) securely to the bottom of the ring and let it down over the side of your boat. Put it up briskly every 15 minutes or so to check for crabs. Dungeness (which look a little greenish before cooking) are renowned for their flavor. Females (they have bigger breasts...really!) go back in the water to propagate. Males more than 6-1/4 inches from breast point to point may be eaten (if a dollar bill fits, he's a keeper). You may clean them either before or after cooking. If you are unfamiliar, clean afterward. Grasp the legs and twist. Remove the back and entrails (anything not having white meat). To cook them, place sufficient salt water in the crab cooking pot to cover the crab. Bring to a boil. Plop in the crab (they are killed instantly). Cook about 20 minutes. Melt a little butter and enter gastronomic paradise.

You may keep male red crabs of any size. Compared to the Dungeness, they are both smaller and bright red. These too are tasty, just not quite as succulent. Cook them the same way as Dungeness.

Crabbing now requires a state permit. It is relatively inexpensive and can be purchased locally from Redden Marine or LFS.

Salmon fishing is quite a specialty here. For you fishing aficionados, rods, reels, bait, licenses and free advice are available at LFS Marine & Outdoor (360-734-3336, in the marina). For the occasional fisherman, casting plastic worms into kelp (keep that keel away from kelp/rocks!) can often yield a culinary delight. Fishing has seasons that vary from year to year, so please check LFS before you cut back on your groceries.

ROCKS

Rocks are the single greatest hazard in the islands. The island group is essentially a flooded mountain range. Some peaks never quite made it above the water, and they are not happy about it. Get within striking distance and they reach for your propeller.

The most active "killer rocks" we mark on the chart in red. Stay away from them - they have a lot of prop dings. Of course, all asterisks (*) and addition signs (+) on the chart mark rocks to stay far away from. In fact, any time you cruise into blue areas on the chart (10 fathoms or less) in this deep-water region, be especially careful. Alertness is the key - sometimes boaters from shallow water areas get a false sense of security from the prevalent deep waters. They fail to realize it is literally possible to go from 300 feet to on the rocks in less than 10 seconds under power! Occasionally we hear of a rock vs fiberglass encounter...and the rock always wins. Be careful out there!

Of course, all rocks are clearly marked on the chart. Rocks are few, but they must be noted. If you follow the simple maxim of keeping one eye on the chart and the other on the water, you'll stay out of trouble and have an enjoyable, trouble-free cruise.

One other hint: most people who hit rocks are "corner cutters". For guaranteed safety: Be thorough, plan with your finger on the chart, keep the chartbook at the helm, and make big wide turns as you round islands.

STYLE OF CRUISING

Generally, if you're like most cruisers you'll find yourself underway a bit less than half a day, while exploring the other half on foot or by dinghy. If you rise early and get under way to arrive about noon at your next anchorage, you'll stand a good chance of having the choice mooring while others are just getting underway. If you do your land exploring in the morning, cast off about noon, and arrive toward evening, you can expect slim pickings and lots of anchoring practice.

BUT...

If you are one of our many repeat charter guests, you're bound to say "Yes, but Roger and Marlene, you left out this neat little cove over on the..." And you'll be right. So, you be the editor. Take a sheet with you and write comments on, or a tome, of your personal highlights.

And I know I left out James Island, the bizarre stories about Barnes Island, Turn Island and Mackaye Harbor to say nothing of the fantastic Gulf Islands, Saanich Inlet, Desolation Sound and Princess Louise Inlet. Then there's the Sunshine Coast, the islands, and fjords north of Desolation, and then let's not forget Barkley Sound. . .

ENJOY!

Roger and Marlene Van Dyken