

Bareboat Charter

Newport to Martha's Vineyard

By Colleen Perry

The holidays have passed, the once beautifully decorated tree is by the curb and a new year beckons. Now we come to those cold, often cloudy, early evenings of deep winter. It's time to curl up with my books and hot cup of cocoa (laced with a generous shot of Baileys) and think about the season to come - as well as seasons past - on the water. My memories drift back to a lazy Labor Day weekend and bareboat charter from Newport to Martha's Vineyard.

Last summer Brian Blank of Bareboat Sailing Charters commissioned the newest edition to his fleet - *Summer Dreams* - a beautifully appointed Beneteau 42. As we talked about his charter business in Newport and he described the boat, I could hardly wait until *Summer Dreams* was launched at Newport Shipyard and my Labor Day booking date arrived!

During the summer of '06 I completed my Basic Keelboat certification through Sound Sailing Center, in Norwalk, CT, and continued on to get certifications in Cruising and Bareboat through Offshore Sailing School in New York, NY. Even though I had three summers of sailing on a friend's C&C 32 as well as the certifications, I did not feel confident to handle a 42-foot boat without a crew that had much more experience.

The first item on my "to do list" was to put together a crew. This was my first bareboat charter experience, and I was looking forward to all the preparations that would make it a memory to be savored!

Fortunately, Tom Claydon, my Basic Keelboat instructor from Sound Sailing Center, was available for the weekend. Tom had just completed a sail up to Edgartown from Long Island Sound earlier in the summer - so he knew what to expect from the currents as we entered Buzzards Bay. One of my best friends, Kathy Gavin, had been sailing Vineyard Sound down into the Newport area for the last 20 years or so...she was my next crew addition. Lastly, Ken Clarke agreed to come down from New Hampshire and join us for this last holiday weekend of the summer. Ken, like many New Englanders, had spent many summers on Cape Cod, and, though his sailing resume is extensive, he had never spent time sailing this region. Whatever was lacking in my own resume was certainly abundant in the crew that had been assembled!

I completed Brian's required paperwork, faxed over sailing resumes and set about planning for provisions. Fortunately, Brian's website (bareboatsailing.com) has an inventory list of all the equipment onboard in regards to navigation support, the galley, linens, heads and mechanical items. All we had to do was fill in with personal items, food and beverages. We were all looking forward to the weekend and *Summer Dreams*.

Summer Dreams was moored in Brenton Cove just off Alosin Dock at Fort Adams. Tom was the first to arrive and had already met with Brian to check out the boat's systems and



*Above: Entering
Cuttyhunk Pond
Right: Overlooking Oak
Bluffs from the harbor on
Labor Day morning*



equipment before Kathy and I arrived with enough food and beverages to supply a navy. We loaded the *Summer Dreams* dinghy with provisions and headed out.

Tom gave us the grand tour and acquainted us with all the emergency equipment (fire extinguishers, flares, PFDs, etc.). After getting all the provisions stowed away, he familiarized us with the boat's nav equipment. WOW! *Summer Dreams* was equipped with every piece of electronics today's sailors could possibly want! The Raymarine ST60 series was so user-friendly...two-color chart plotters with color radar, GPS, and autopilot...we had it all – including cell phone and computer hook-ups! I could hardly wait for Ken to join us on Saturday morning. Even though I had told him about all the hi-tech equipment, he kept telling me that I must be mistaken...nobody equips a charter boat as I was describing it! He was in for quite a surprise.

Newport is one of the most exciting harbors on the East Coast. There is so much to see and do in this seaside city that you could easily spend a week day sailing out of Newport to discover quaint little villages tucked along the Rhode Island coast...not to mention a side trip to Block Island for a couple of days.

Saturday dawned with a glorious blue sky...with winds at 10-15 knots in the Bay. As we drank our morning coffee we looked over the charts, listened to the weather reports and began planning our first day out. Tom decided this was a great opportunity for me to continue my "learning experience." He presented me with a composition book and proceeded to instruct me on keeping a ship's log. Sitting at the nav station, we plotted our course electronically and marked it on our paper charts as well. I made the appropriate log entries and we began preparing the boat to set sail. At 0849 hours, we dropped the mooring and began to motor out of Newport Harbor into Narragansett Bay. Forty-five minutes later, we were leaving the mouth of Narragansett Bay, sailing downwind with 11 kts of true wind. The day seemed promising for a great sail!

Oak Bluffs is about a seven-hour sail from Newport. However, this being a holiday weekend, we decided to spend Saturday night in Cuttyhunk. The marina at Oak Bluffs does not accept reservations and we did not want to risk a late arrival and the prospect of having to anchor outside protection of the harbor. Cuttyhunk, on the other hand, was a half way point and Brian had given us directions to the Cuttyhunk Fishing Club - a wonderful little restaurant on the island known for its Sunday morning breakfasts.

By 1135, the wind changed and we trimmed to a close reach. Winds had become shifty at 10-15 knots. An hour later, we had a NE wind at 9 knots and variable. Between the current and wind shift we were going nowhere fast. Reluctantly, we succumbed to motoring the rest of the trip into Cuttyhunk. We arrived in Cut-

Cuttyhunk Pond is a forest of masts on Labor Day weekend



tyhunk around 1500 that afternoon – at low tide. We placed a call to the Harbor Master and were told there were no moorings available in the inner harbor. However, outer Cuttyhunk is fairly protected and there were plenty of moorings available at Jenkins Moorings.

Although Jenkins has a nice mooring field, be aware that there are no pennants on the mooring balls. Be prepared with two lines to make a bridle and cleat to both sides of the bow. In our case, Ken took the dinghy and attached each of our two sheathed nylon lines to the mooring – making us quite secure in the event of a windy night. The boat neighboring us used a shortcut and cleated a single, three-strand line, ran it through the mooring ball and brought it around to the opposite cleat. Remember – this was my first charter experience and I had a lot to learn. Tom explained to me, that although the single line might hold, the chafing that takes place heats the core of the line, causing it to chafe through...leaving no safety option in the event the single line doesn't hold. After securing *Summer Dreams*, it was time to take the dinghy and explore this fascinating little island!

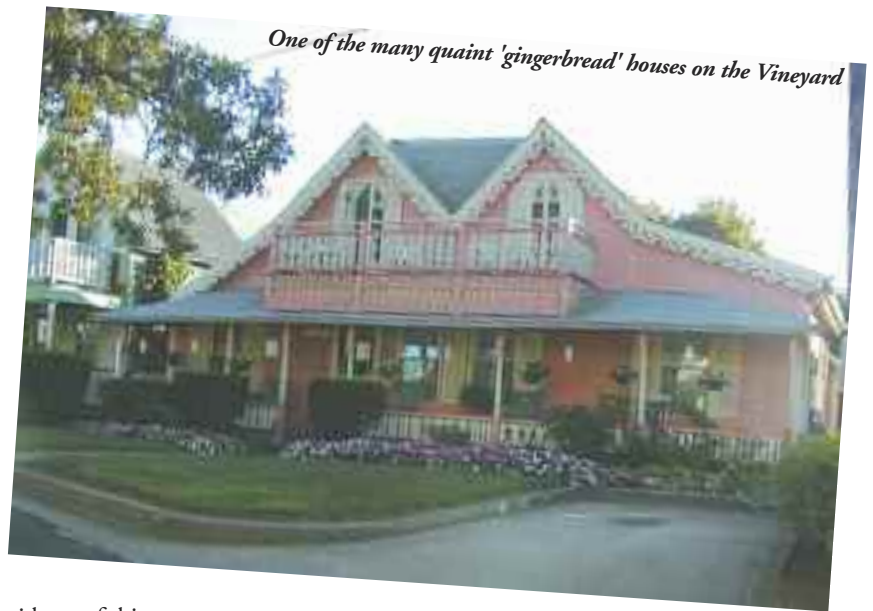
We took the dinghy and made our way through the narrow inlet. Upon reaching the inner cove, we were astounded at all the boats! Every mooring had at least two boats rafted together... some had three. As busy as this little harbor was, we could only imagine what we may have encountered in Oak Bluffs! One of the most pleasant parts of this little discovery jaunt was motoring through the harbor inspecting all the boats. Kathy and I listened in amazement as Tom and Ken identified the various makes and models and told stories about their early days on the water.

Arriving at the dinghy dock was quite an experience. Dinghies were tied four and five deep! It reminded me of those little green turtles I used to see in the pet stores as a child...you know, where they were all piled on top of each other trying to get to "who knows where?" The dinghy scene was a comical sight. The camaraderie of the boaters at the dinghy docks was fun to observe. Everybody was so tolerant and helpful to fellow boaters...tossing a line here, lending a hand there...everybody with a common goal - to get ashore.

Once ashore, we looked around - wondering what makes this little island of Cuttyhunk such a desirable destination. There are no pretty boutiques lining the harbor; not a single restaurant as far as the eye could see; no neon lights beckoning visitors in for a cold beer; come to think of it... not even an ATM in sight! We had one mission...find ice.

Strolling down a planked walkway we came to the only place on the Island to buy ice - sporting a notice, "Closed until 7:00" (pm). We decided to pass the time exploring. By the time we followed the narrow main street about half way up to the top of Lookout Hill, Kathy and Ken decided to stay behind and wait for the iceman to open up. Tom and I continued our journey, which was well worth the trip! From the high point of the island, we could see all around. The residents of this island live very simply. No fancy grocery stores, no big banks - nothing except quaint houses on beautiful hillsides with a small general store, bed and breakfast, post office, ice cream shop, bait shop, one room school house and electric co-op! No entertainment except the spectacular beauty of the sea and surrounding islands. And yet, the harbor was crowded with boats rafted two and three to a mooring.

Seven o'clock finally arrived and we were able to collect our ice and head back to *Summer Dreams* for dinner. Brian warned us



One of the many quaint 'gingerbread' houses on the Vineyard

that Cuttyhunk has limited resources for food shopping, so we were prepared to eat onboard. Tom prepared the grill for cooking up some juicy hamburgers while Kathy and I put out a variety of cheeses, fruits and crackers. Ken found a nice selection of wine and we enjoyed a lovely evening on deck with the moon and stars for light and the soft sounds of Walter Beasley's cool jazz in the background. Life is good in America...especially if you are lucky enough to be on a boat in a quiet New England harbor.

Sunday morning we awoke early to another beautiful sunny



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day. The restaurant didn't open until 8 am, and we had plenty of time to take the dinghy in and enjoy a little walk to our dining destination. We followed the winding street along the outer perimeter of the island. True to Brian's prediction, breakfast was delicious! Afterwards, we strolled down towards the water and enjoyed our view across the Sound. We could easily identify the lower tip of Martha's Vineyard...Aquinnah (Gay Head) and Menemsha. Cuttyhunk must be one of the few places left in this country that is so unspoiled by "progress."

Arriving back at the boat, we checked weather and plotted our course to Oak Bluffs. We cast off our mooring at 1038 in route to Oak Bluffs via Quicks Hole. Although the day was bright and sunny, our barometric pressure had risen since our departure from Newport and the winds had become lighter. By the time we passed through Quicks Hole, we were once again motor-sailing. We arrived in Oak Bluffs around 1400 hours. Calling the Harbor Master for a mooring we were told moorings were available... however, they didn't tell us that we would be rafting up.

Boats were rafted three to a mooring. We were lucky...the *Maribella* had nobody rafted up to her, so we chose her mooring to raft to. It was Sunday afternoon and the harbor was thick with boats. No sooner had we settled the boat down than a young boy about 10 or 11 came along in a skiff and offered to take our trash...for \$2 a bag. We gladly handed our single bag of trash over and applauded the young man for his entrepreneurial spirit! Shortly thereafter, we took the dinghy and went ashore to explore the town.

Oak Bluffs has an interesting and unusual history. In its early days, it was a tent village where visitors would come to hold revivals. Eventually, families began making these "tents" more permanent...laying a foundation, putting up walls and finally, by decorating the outside of the structures with exquisite scrollwork. There was an unspoken contest as to which neighbor could be the most elaborate with the woodwork. And, this was not a village of white houses, but of pastel pinks, blues, violets and yellows – along with many variations of those hues. All these little "ginger bread" houses are built along a center green that is home to a lovely open tabernacle. Sitting on a park bench in the green, one is far removed from the hustle of the harbor just a couple of blocks away.

Bareboat Sailing Charters had taken good care of us on this cruise. Brian had even arranged with his friends at Sun "n" Fun Car Rentals (508-693-5457) for us to have a vehicle to explore all the nooks and crannies of Martha's Vineyard. We had chosen Oak Bluffs as a destination because of the ambiance and novelty. From here, we could take the car to Vineyard Haven, Edgartown, Gay Head or Menemsha. The Vineyard is a mecca of shops, restaurants, and beautiful beaches. Visitors can do as much – or as little – as they choose.

On Monday morning, we all walked Kathy over to the ferry landing and said our good-byes. Back on board, we got out the charts and planned our return to Newport. We charted a course from Oak Bluffs back through Quicks Hole where we would sail down Buzzards Bay towards Padanaram. The weather report



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sounded great for sailing: Buzzards Bay was reporting winds at 17 kts and the skies were clear and sunny. It was a perfect September day to sail!

By 1000 hours we were on a long tack from Oak Bluffs towards the R26' off of Woods Hole with 2 ½' to 3' seas and 20 knots of true wind. The wind was shifting and it soon became apparent that we were in for a long hard day of beating across the Sound to keep up with the frequent wind shifts. The head sea and increased wind strength had considerably widened our tacking angle by the time we were just west of Middle Ground. We turned on the engine to reduce the tacking angle and help us get through the heavy current at Quicks Hole. Sailors who had left Oak Bluffs around the same time as our departure were already seeking safe haven in the coves off Naushon Island. With seas rising to 3 ½' and winds at 20 kts gusting to 25, we decided to change course and head back to lovely Cuttyhunk.

Once we were through Quicks Hole, we turned off the motor and continued our sail into Cuttyhunk. We passed Pasque Island on a port tack with winds at 27 kts. By 1430 hours, we were safely moored in Cuttyhunk Pond. We had been fortunate to arrive during high tide and had plenty of depth to sail up the narrow inlet into the pond. Entering the pond, we were surprised that the harbor was virtually empty. Picking up the wanded mooring was a real challenge as we were working against 27 kt winds blowing across this pro-

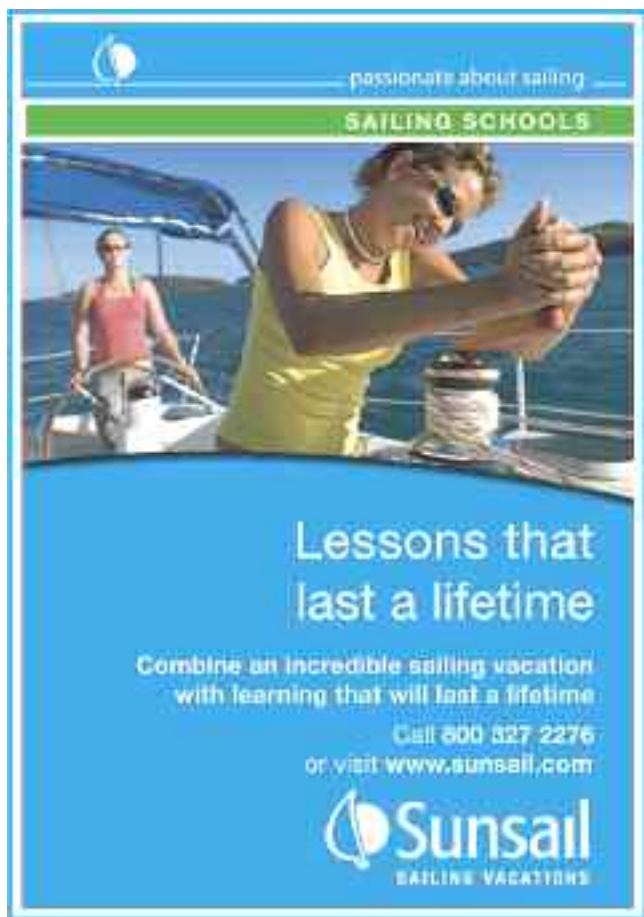
tected harbor. As we approached our mooring, Tom spied *Matinicus*, a Pearson 37' he recognized. Once *Summer Dreams* was safely secured, he was off in the dinghy to satisfy his curiosity.

One of the most pleasant experiences of cruising is the people you meet along the way. After several minutes, Tom returned to tell us that indeed, the Pearson he recognized was captained by his friends Lynn and Howard Musk. Furthermore, they had extended an invitation for us to join them for dinner. We were more than happy to spruce ourselves up a bit and join them aboard *Matinicus*. Lynn prepared a delicious dinner with a basil pesto made with ingredients from her summer garden...a perfect topping for our pasta! After dinner, they returned with us to *Summer Dreams* where we had champagne and chocolates for dessert. While Tom returned the Musks to their boat, Ken and I tidied up the galley and checked all the mooring lines. It had been a long day and we were all ready for a good night's sleep.

Ken had time restraints and needed to be back in New Hampshire by Tuesday evening. This made it necessary for us to return to Newport and forego our cruise up Buzzards Bay. Rising early, we were underway by 0700 hours with winds at 10 – 15 kts. Again, we were blessed with clear blue skies. Within a couple of hours, we were passing Schuyler Ledge at the entrance to the Sakonnet River. By the time we reached Brenton Cove, we had ESE winds at 12-15 kts. We had been able to sail at a consistent 6-7 kts all morning. In just a little over four hours, we had arrived back at the *Summer Dreams* mooring.

After securing the boat, we loaded Ken's gear and took him ashore. As we waved goodbye, Tom and I began to plan the rest of the day. We returned to *Summer Dreams*, cast off the mooring and took her over to Newport Yachting Center where we topped off the fuel and washed down her decks. Back at the mooring, we loaded our personal gear into the dinghy and set about with the "house cleaning." As we cleaned, we talked about the boat and how well she had performed in the weather conditions and how well equipped she was. And, because Brian had been so gracious to give us charts with helpful notations, we had been able to enjoy each day knowing where the "trouble" spots could be along the way.

Looking back, I am quite pleased with how much I have grown as a sailor in the two-and-a-half years I have worked with *WindCheck*. If you love sailing but don't own a boat or get enough time on a friend's boat, book a charter! Put together a crew of your choice, chart your own course, and enjoy the beauty of our coast. If you own a boat but are not exploring beyond your home port due to lack of time, or because you would prefer cruising in a larger boat - maybe this season is a good time to book a charter. New England has numerous bareboat charter opportunities. If you lack confidence in your own ability as a captain, invite somebody to join your crew who has the experience you lack. You'll be glad you did! ♦



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