

“Old Blue” Solo Cruise June 2020

**6 days, 284 miles,
52 hours sailing, 8 hours motoring**

We had a cool May with no great sailing windows and with Corona virus keeping people at home. By June, with the hopes of sailing in the Southern Bay, I was keeping an eye on the forecast for a dry spell starting with a NW cold front.

A nice front with two days of North wind was expected starting Saturday, May 30th so I packed, fueled, watered and washed the day before, then jumped onboard Saturday morning.



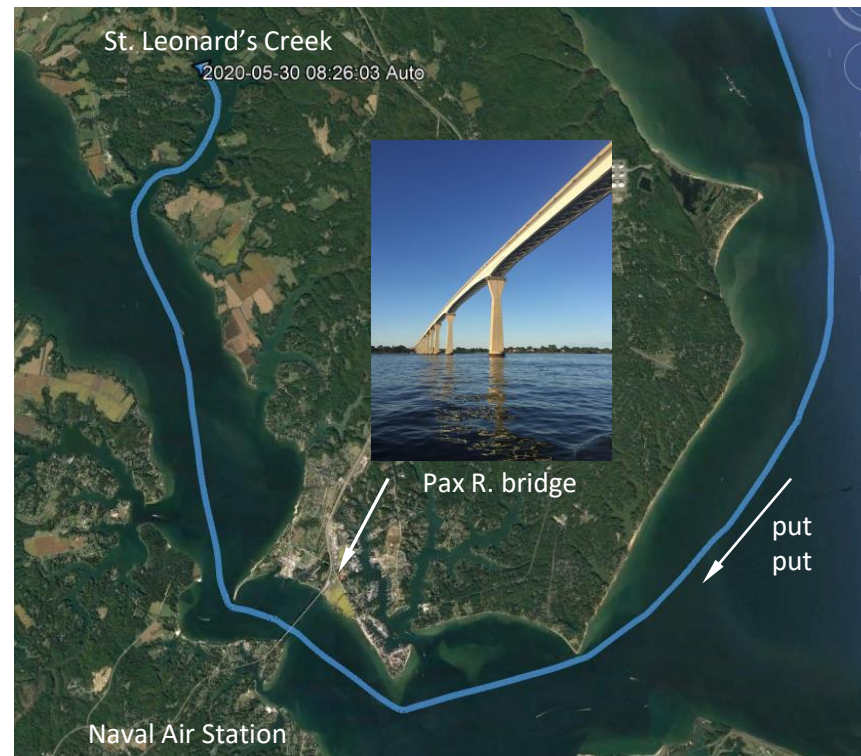
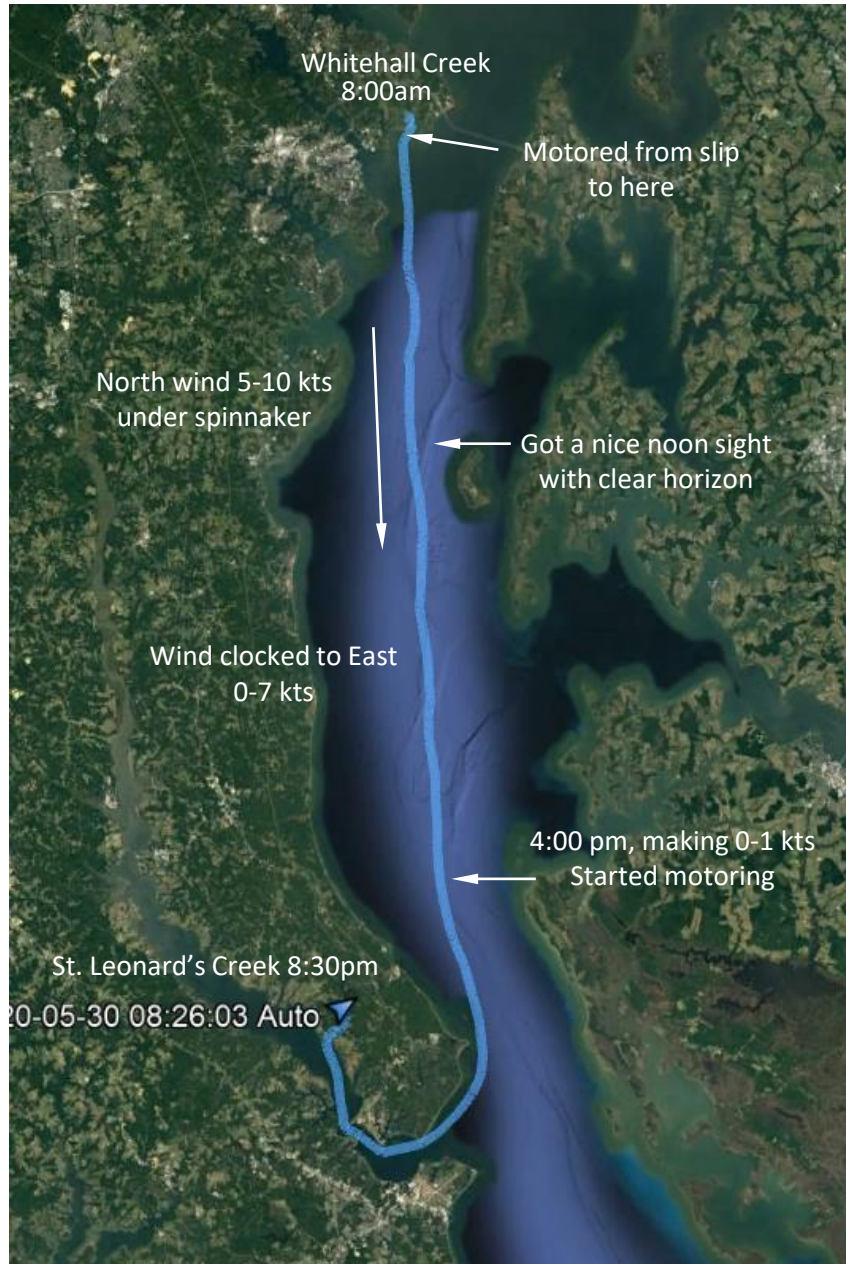
Beautiful morning at the dock, a great way to start

Saturday May 30 – Whitehall Creek to St. Leonard's Creek
60 miles, 8 hours sailing, 4 hours motoring

Left the dock around 8 am with 5-10 kt North wind. 17-25 kts NW forecast for tomorrow. Hoping to get to Solomon's by nightfall and Tangier Island the next day. That would allow plenty of time for the return trip.

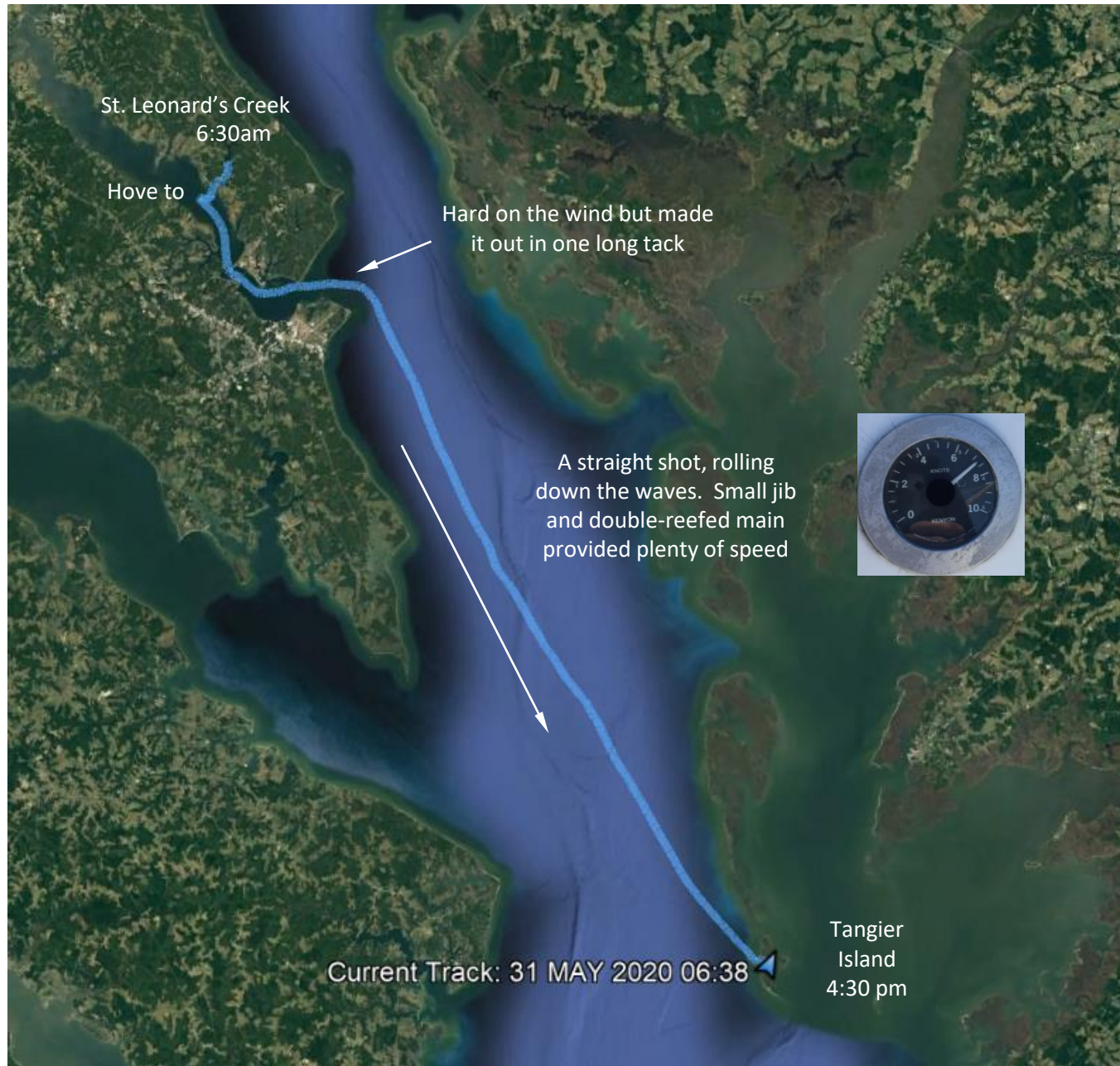
The breeze clocked East and faded toward afternoon. Only saw one ship south of Deale and a few pleasure boats. Got to play cello on deck but it was hot. Took a cockpit shower and finally decided to turn on the motor, knowing it would be dark when we got in (dined on the Chef's famous ravioli en route).

The water was very clear with a light-green tint. While motoring, replaced the large jib with the small jib on the furler since it would be blowing hard tomorrow. While on the bow I saw several pairs of small rays swimming together a few feet down; very pretty.



Before the wind fizzled out

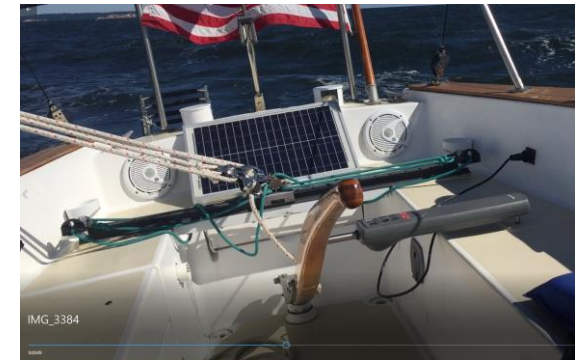
Motored under the bridge and up into St. Leonard's creek. I didn't realize it was 100 feet deep at the point beyond the bridge! Played cello for a while under the almost-full moon. In bed by 9:30.



Sunday May 31 – St. Leonard's Creek to Tangier Island 55 miles, 10 hours sailing

Put a reef in the main before sailing off the anchor at 6:30am. It was quiet in the creek but blowing 15-20 in the river. Hove to for a potty break and then got to work. It was cold and a close port tack out to the Bay so I had a fleece, coat and full foul weather gear on. It warmed up later.

Anxious about entry to Tangier. Wasn't sure if the West entrance was deep enough.



The autopilot did ok with the rolling



Strapped in while boiling down the Bay
(falling overboard would be fatal, strapped in or not)



Passed the creepy
bombing range
across the Potomac

Sunday May 31 continued – Tangier Island

I finally made phone contact with Milton Parks of Parks Marina. We had hilarious conversations over the phone and VHF. I couldn't hear him and he couldn't hear me (I'm nearly deaf and he's 88). Eventually heard "you should be ok" coming in with 5' draft but he wasn't sure he had a slip that deep. I motored into the thoroughfare with at least a foot under my keel the whole way; a big relief after the wild ride down.

The current was running into the inlet fast so I circled and was able to hover in gear at idle with the autopilot keeping the boat stationary. Mr. Parks waved me over to a slip near a 24' sailboat aground and heeled 30 degrees. It didn't look good but he assured me it would be fine. As I inched toward the slip, perpendicular to the current, I hit bottom with the bow still 30' away. Miraculously, the Atomic 4 pulled me off after a few minutes of reverse. I think the hefty current scoured the sand away from the keel.

Mr. Parks eventually got me tied up near the Mail Boat after a few more groundings and rope magic at the docks. We were laughing about it all and he insisted on taking me on his golf cart to show me where the shower and restaurants were. He was definitely the highlight of the trip. Oh, and it turns out that he knew my wife Terri's great grandfather, a Pastor at the church in the 1950's. On top of that, he went out with Terri's mother once when she spent a week there at age 16.

After some gumbo, no-see-um's and entertainment by the local teens swimming from the crab houses, I was asleep by 9:30 but up a few times as the wind built.



Mr. Parks in his element



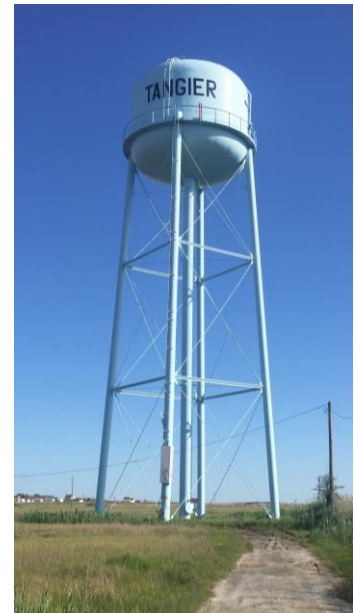
Finally tied up and still afloat



Had a nice walk on the island



Swain Memorial Church where Terri's great grandfather was pastor a few years



Monday June 1 – Tangier Island to St. Mary's
48 miles, 11 hours sailing



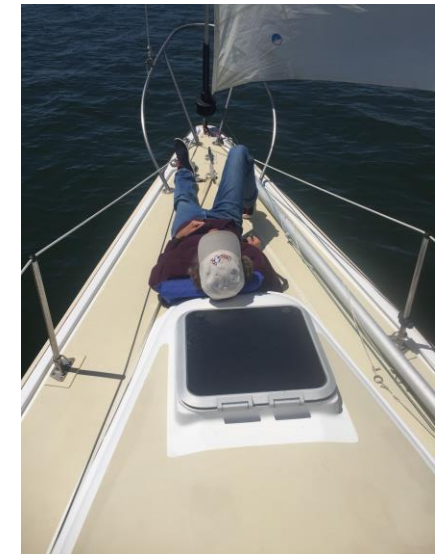
Monday started around midnight when the wind shifted to the East and the boat's rubrail groaned as the wind pushed us into the pilings. I'm not big on overnighting in marinas. An hour later the wind built to near 30 kts blowing straight down the East entrance. Fortunately it wasn't pushing the boat into the dock but the halyards were rapping so hard my bunk shook. Dressed up and secured them in the frigid wind.

It started getting light at 5am but the wind was still howling and it was cold so I rolled over in the sleeping bag. Up at 6:30. After coffee and oatmeal I put a second reef in the main. I was worried about backing into the wind and getting the spider web of docklines undone but it all went fine. The current was running near 2 kts and pushed us out of the cut quickly. Never saw less than 8' of water.

Once out we were in the lee of the island so the waves were small and raising sail was easy. The wind was blowing 15-20 from the North so it was a close reach to Pt. Lookout but we were cracked off a bit and the boat was happy with its small sailplan. I started out with a fleece, full foulies and hat but it warmed up later as the wind dropped. By Point Lookout the reefs were shaken out and the foul weather gear was put away as it warmed up. Eventually the wind was down to a few knots but the sky was clear blue with no humidity. A gorgeous day and a perfect time for a nap on the foredeck after a rough night. There were no boats around so dozing off wasn't all that dangerous.



A day of contrasts

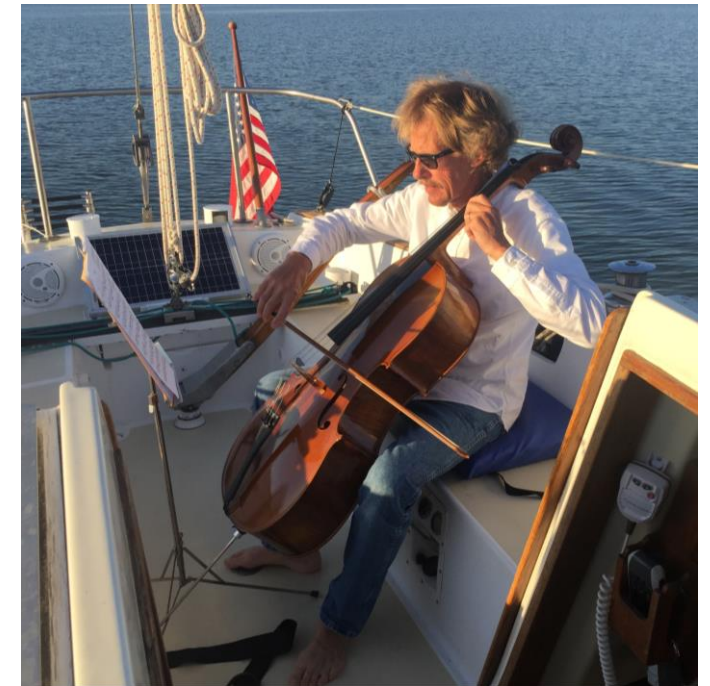
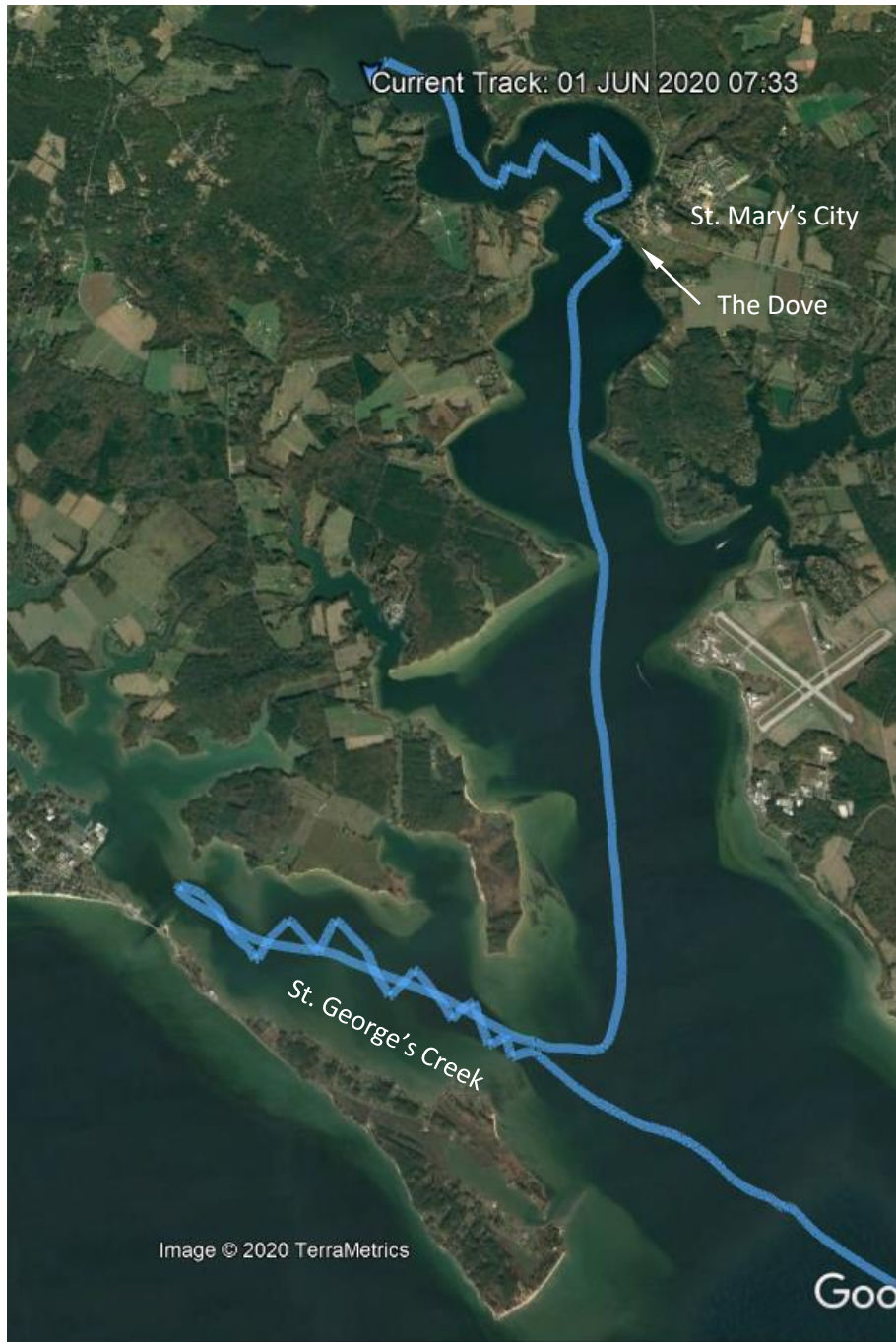


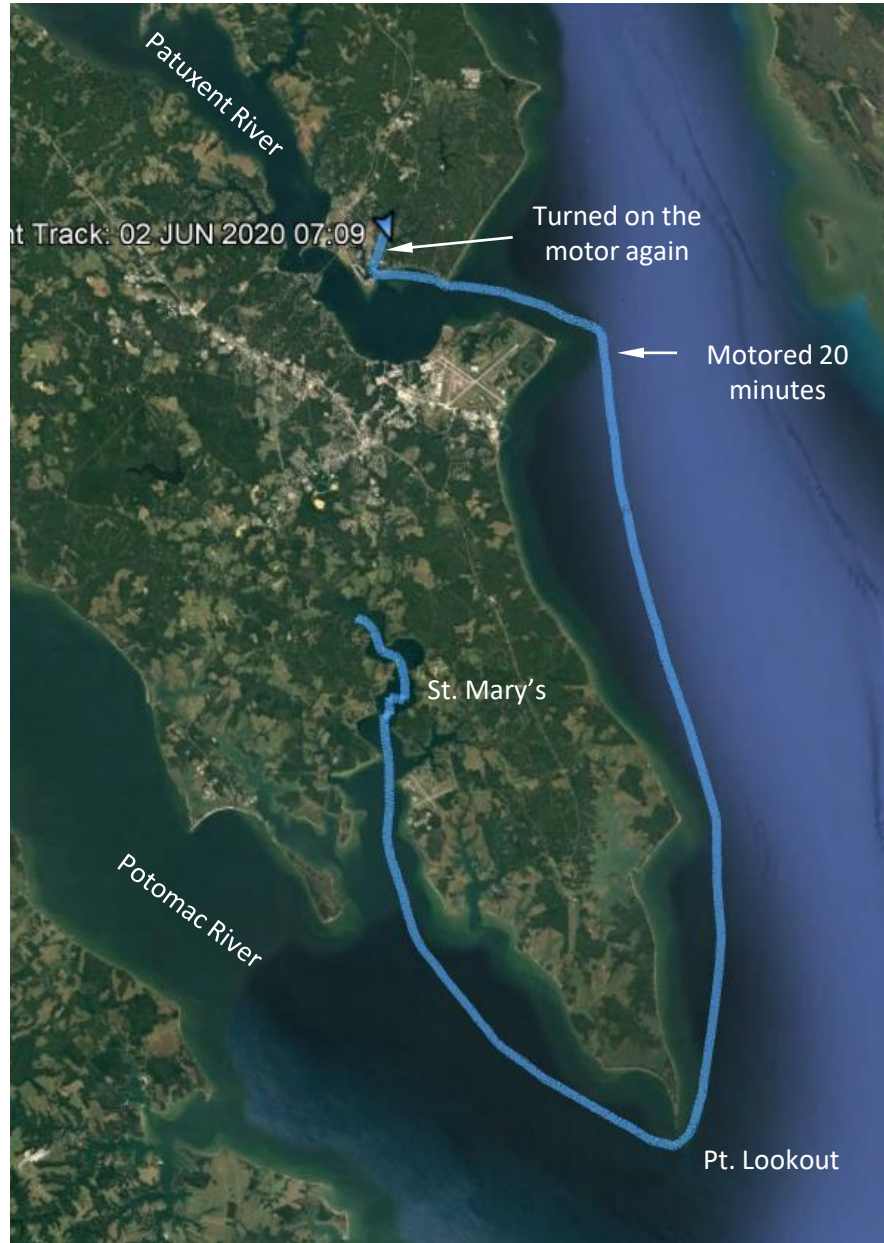
Monday June 1 continued – St. Mary's River

By 2pm the wind was still dead but I wasn't in a hurry to get anywhere so kept ghosting along. St. George's Creek looked inviting, with the bright sandy beach that wraps around the end of the island. As we entered the narrow creek the wind shifted West with some spritely puffs. It was fun short-tacking through the narrows. Eventually, thoughts of dinner came to mind so we spun around and headed up to St. Mary's City.

The wind freshened with strong puffs around the headlands. It was a fun ride up the river. We swooped in for a closer look at the Dove and then did a lap around the big horseshoe anchorage in front of the college. It seemed too open and windy there so we worked our way farther up the river and dropped anchor under sail.

The headwaters made a beautiful setting for some evening cello music with no other boats to disturb. Dinner shortly after and a welcome quiet night.





Tuesday June 2 – St. Mary's to Solomon's 43 miles, 9 hours sailing, 1 hour motoring

Up at 5:45, had some coffee and sailed off the anchor. Forecast was for 10-15 kts SW; some dark clouds south and a few raindrops. All dressed up again. Got to crack off in the Potomac and had an easy ride around Pt. Lookout.

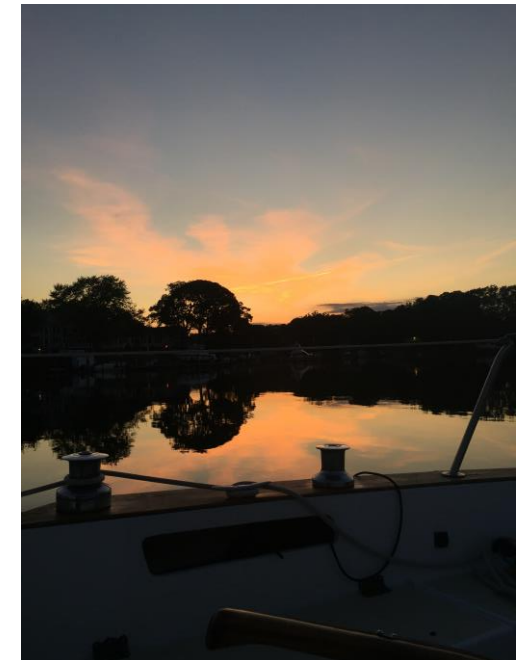
The wind died out near Pax River and we were rolling around so I started the motor. Half an hour later the wind came in from the East so I poled out the jib and we had a leisurely sail right up into Solomon's harbor.

Thought about anchoring near town but was too lazy to blow up the inflatable. Found an opening in St. John Creek to anchor. It was nice there but a little like a fishbowl with all of the house views aimed right where I was anchored. A beautiful sunset.

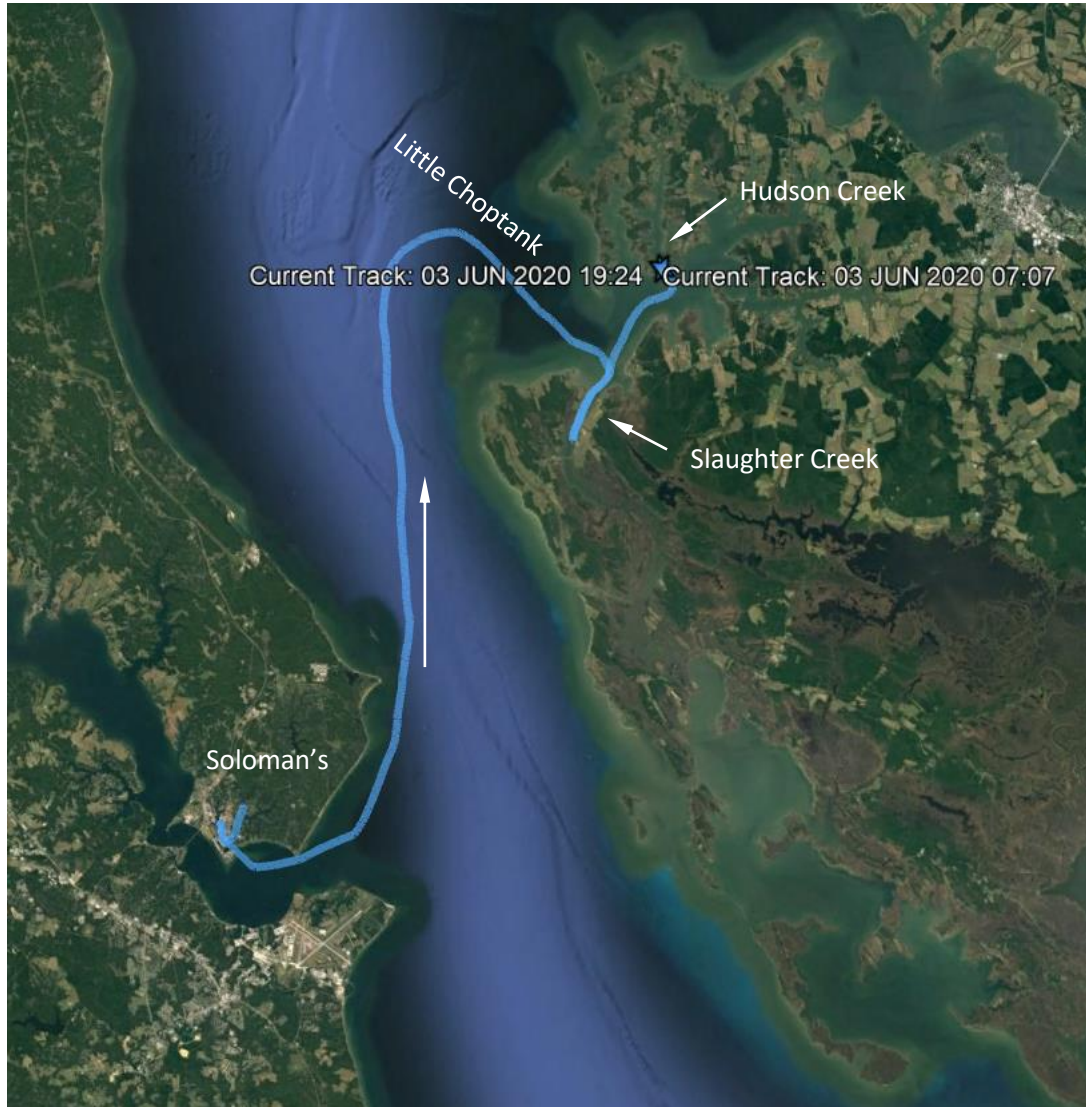


There was loud and constant jet and helicopter noise in the area

The best sunset of the trip



Wednesday June 3 –Solomon's to Harris Creek
37 miles, 6 hours sailing, 2 hours motoring



Up at 6 after a beautiful near-full-moon night. Motored over by the museum and big boatyards, thinking about getting more drinking water and ice but no one was awake.

Rode a beautiful 10 kt SW breeze out the river and up to the Choptank. Had a Pearson 10M within 200 yards from Solomon's up to the Little Choptank and couldn't shake him. I think we both enjoyed the company.

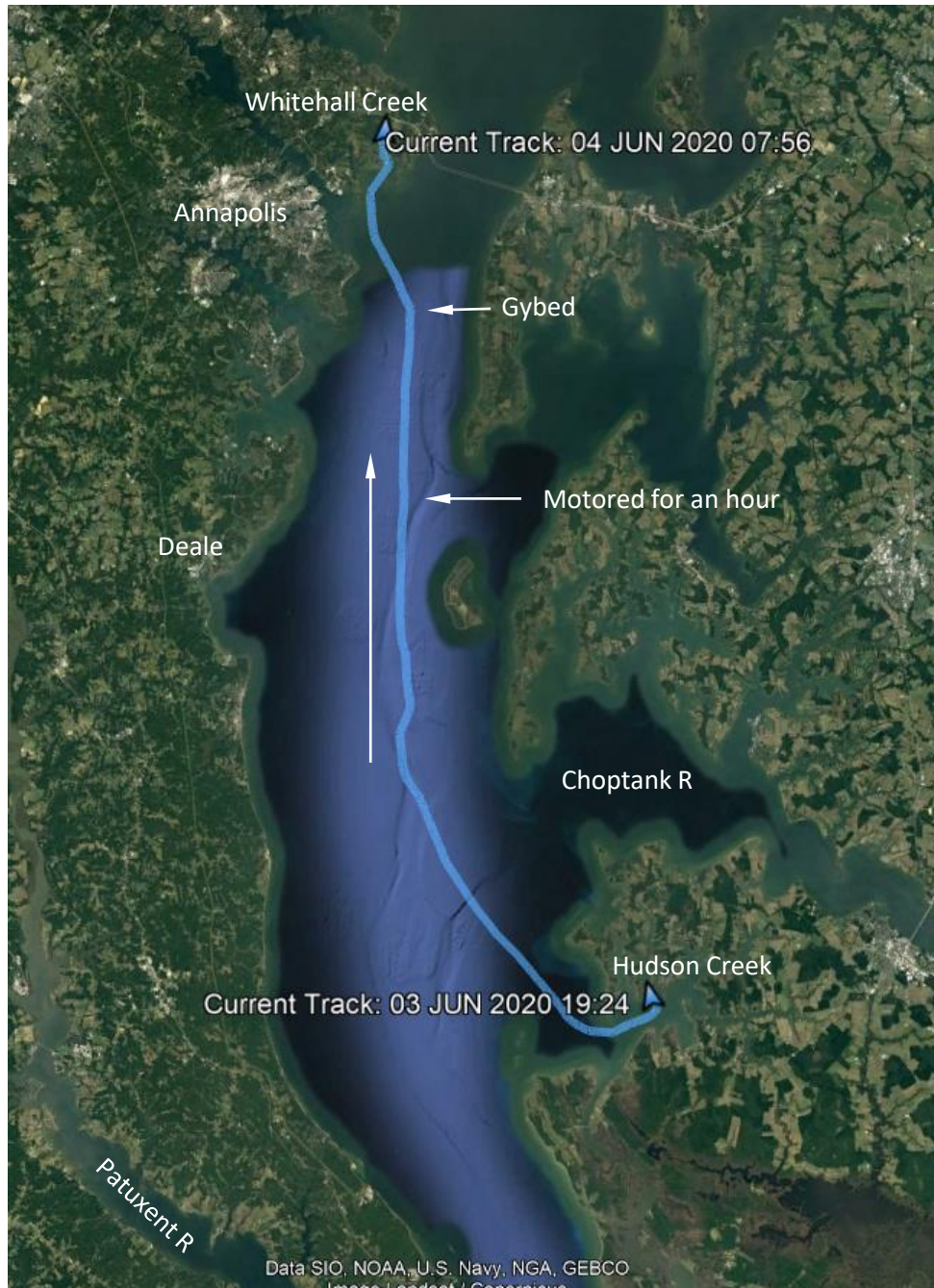
Decided to motor into Slaughter Creek to visit what I thought was a General Store but turned out to be a marina store with mostly boat parts. The channel entrance was really dicey with depths of 6 feet throughout. Got some ice but no water or lunch, had to settle for a cold 12 pack of cheap beer. Water would have been nicer.

Sailed across to Hudson Creek and anchored in the cove behind Casson Point. The bare-trunk pines make it look like you're in the islands. It was hot so took a swim that was super-invigorating.

Hunkered down with my new book "The Splendid and the Vile", played some cello and enjoyed a beautiful moonrise with a balmy breeze and no bugs. Asleep by 9 with occasional peeks at the bright moon overnight.

"Chesapeake Palm Trees" on Casson Point





Thursday June 4 – Hudson Creek to Whitehall Creek 41 miles, 8 hours sailing, 1 hour motoring

A beautiful sunrise, red but no bad weather in the forecast. Sailed off the anchor with a 5 kt NW wind that eventually dropped to zero and filled in from the SW. First the spinnaker went up and then the bimini top; it was hot downwind. Managed to hold 3.5 kts or better the whole morning.

I had a commitment in Annapolis on Saturday morning so could have stayed out another day but I was strangely satisfied. I missed my wife, dog and the company of friends at home. Thunderstorms were in the forecast anyway so Old Blue and I kept the bow pointed due North. The wind fizzled out around Bloody Point so we motored for an hour until it filled in again from the SE. From there the spinnaker pulled us along at 4-5 kts right to the entrance of Whitehall Bay.

Another wonderful June solo cruise with the added bonus of being happy to be home again. Can't wait until the next one!

Sunrise



An easy ride north

