

Best Kept Secrets for Successful Cruising and Anchoring *Easy Breezy Tips for Fun, Comfort and Safety*

By Brian and Marg Credico

Anchoring:

So, you're a new sailor, and anchoring sounds like you just simply drop the anchor, sip a cold drink, and watch the sunset, right? Well, yes... but also, *no*. Let's make sure that your anchoring adventure doesn't turn into more "adventure" than you want.

A depth sounder is critical for good anchoring.

It's best to anchor in a minimum of 10 feet, and up to say 15 feet of water where the anchor is dropped. This is deep enough to avoid weeds and shallow enough for a reasonable length of rode. Say about 70 feet of rode including a few feet of chain. Your boat will swing at anchor so be sure that even with an on shore wind, you'll still end up in reasonably deep water.

If sharing an anchorage only drop ONE anchor, so everyone will swing together in wind shifts.

For a new anchorage, I would motor around a bit to check out the water depths in the area and where to avoid weed patches. Do a GPS way point at the anchor drop location.

Setting your anchor:

Slowly motor into the wind to where you expect to drop your anchor. Note the water depth. Stop the boat and slowly lower the anchor, ideally with the flukes properly orientated.

While letting out the rode, slowly reverse downwind. *There must be NO tension on the rode while reversing.* If the anchor moves even a little bit before there is the shallow angle of pull, the anchor will slide along the bottom, not dig in, and likely get fouled with weeds. If you have a ball of weeds on your anchor your only option is to pull it up, clear the weeds, and reset.

Once all the rode is let out, cleat and increase boat reverse power. By lightly holding the rode you will feel the rode stretch as the anchor successfully digs in. And the boat will stop reversing. Turn off the motor and you're all set for a worry free night on the hook!

From years of good and bad anchoring experiences, here are some secrets:

- Always check wind forecasts before committing to an overnight anchorage. Particularly watch for a significant on-shore wind.
- If a strong, onshore wind pops up during the night, you may decide that it's safer to up anchor and leave in the dark, than risk your anchor dragging and ending up on shore. *Yes, this has happened to us more than once! I usually left!*
- Before leaving, and it will likely be very dark, no moon, rain, etc., check your charts. GET A COMPASS BEARING to where you need to head. Otherwise you may risk sailing into an even more dangerous situation or grounding in shallow water. *Yes, once when leaving an anchorage in the dark I didn't take a compass bearing. And we ended up bouncing along over a shoal! Marg was not pleased! Fortunately we kept going but that's very nerve racking in bad weather!*
- You can make an inexpensive anchor light from an LED solar "garden light". Brighter the better and with access to its rechargeable battery. Just take it apart to its basic case. Add an optional On-OFF switch to the battery. ON for recharging during the day and light at night. OFF when storing below deck or if not being used. Hang from your backstay so it will be visible for 360 degrees.
- At night when trying to sleep even the smallest sounds can be disturbing. Particularly if the wind comes up a little. Clanking halyards and swinging boom are the usual culprits. Tie off every halyard INDIVIDUALLY. If you have in mast halyards good luck and use lots of tension. For in mast wiring, hopefully you added small cable ties along the cables to keep them from touching the inside of the mast. Clip a line from the end of the boom to the toe rail to keep the boom from swinging. *We store this line and clip in a cockpit locker.*

Are You Comfortable at Anchor?

If you don't have canvas covers over the cockpit, on a hot day use a simple boom tent. Use a nylon or polyester sheet, add grommets, drape over the boom and tie to the lifelines. This will also provide some protection in a light rain. *Be sure to remove and store the boom tent before closing up for the night. You do not want to deal with this at 3:00 am if the wind comes up.*

If rain is expected have a small "tent", made from some waterproof material. Add grommets. Drape over the forward hatch cover when it's fully or partially open. Use elastic lines to click to mast, life lines and maybe the forward stay. Allows ventilation

while keeping the rain out. *You could tie it with light rope, but elastic lines, with clips at the end, will keep the tent under tension and are easy to attach to life lines and stays. And can be quickly removed if necessary.*

When swimming around the boat use a pool noodle for support while you brush off any fouling under the boat's water line and rudder. Also check that the knot meter impellor is not jammed with zebra mussels.

A five gallon plastic bucket with a rope is indispensable for bringing lake water on board. We also carry a folding bucket as a spare.

To stave off terminal boredom while at anchor, it's a good opportunity to go over the whole boat looking for any minor repair jobs, e.g. tighten screws and bolts, re-setting porthole gaskets, lubricate winches, replacing silicon around deck fittings, etc. etc. And do some internal cleaning like inside hatch covers. For deck and topsides, it's best to use the hose at your home dock.

I have also brought a travel guitar along. Stores out of the way in the back of a Grampian 26 hanging closet.

Be sure to have a 12 volt "cigarette plug" installed. You'll need this to keep all your social media devices charged up! And if you don't use your boat regularly, you should have a solar powered inexpensive "tickle" charger permanently connected to your battery. This provides enough electricity to prevent a seldom used battery from calcifying, greatly extending its life.

Do you have a "sun shower"? If not, get one! It's basically just a heavy plastic bag with a short hose and spray spout. Fill and let the sun warm the water. *It can even get so hot that the water is scalding!*

If you are out for more than a few days without docking at a marina, you'll appreciate this shower. We tie it to the boom and use the cockpit as a shower stall. *Depending how modest you are (with or without a bathing suit) you may want to shower only in a deserted anchorage! Or at night.*

Mosquitoes!

They can stop you from enjoying even the most perfect anchorage! And they are at every one! Unless there is a hard frost. But why would you be out and about anchoring in the cold? Interestingly, a light onshore breeze, rather than offshore, is preferred by mosquitoes. They don't get blown to your boat, but rather fly upwind towards your CO2 and other scents carried by the onshore breeze

Obviously you need good mosquitoes screens, or Kleenex blockers, on every thing e.g. opening hatches, cabin door, small cabin and hull openings, etc. (*Did you check the anchor rode hole?*) But there is one other thing you must do if you don't want that buzzing in your ear at 2:00 am.

Mosquitoes will sneak into your boat during the daytime!!

No matter how well you have sealed everything well before sunset, they are already in your boat! Little monsters just hiding until dark!

The solution:

Before sunset, and no sign of mosquitoes, go into your sealed boat (hatch covers closed) and use RAID to spray the whole boat inside starting from stem to stern. Back away towards the cabin exit. Hold your breath! Dash out the cabin into the cockpit and quickly drop in the door screen with a covering towel.

Let the sealed boat sit for about 15 minutes. Then open it up with screens all in place and let air for another 15 minutes.

Now you can go into boat, screens on, and enjoy a no mosquitoes buzzing night.

We've been doing this for years and since have never had a mosquito in the boat at night. But it took us ages to realize that the mosquitoes were already in the boat, just waiting!

When the evening cools off, say after about 11:00 pm, the mosquitoes will have gone back to wherever they camp out. You can now leave the boat to enjoy the anchorage at night.

Be sure to do this!

Under a dark sky temporarily turn off your cabin and anchor lights. Take a few minutes for your eyes to completely adjust for darkness. If it is clear, with no smoke haze, city lights or little moon, you will be amazed at the sky! You may even see the Milky Way. And if you are lucky, the odd meteorite. And nowadays lots of artificial satellites passing overhead.

Food, Food, Food, Snacks, Beverages!

Ahoy, future sea chef! To prepare on-board meals, without being chained to a stove or burner, here are a few tricks we've used to prepare healthy and tasty meals with minimal effort.

Before you leave home, pre-cook as much as possible. Include pasta, hamburgers, bacon, hot dogs, whatever. Then it's just heat and serve on the boat. Freeze what you will use a bit later on your cruise.

Pick up take-away, like KFC or Subs, before you set sail. They're great for your first meal while sailing or at anchor.

You will likely have a built in ice box on your boat. The Grampian 26 is great for this! It has a large, insulated, ice box. *For extended cruising we load it with four blocks of ice (NOT ice cubes).* Still lots of room for food and the ice will last about four days even during the hot summer. Longer during cooler weather. Ice box will have a drain hole. Attach a flexible hose to this and place into a conveniently located plastic jug. Better than draining into the bilge. Don't forget to periodically empty this jug.

Re-useable grocery bags organize the food in the ice box. Place similar items together. Then just lift out the bag/bags you want. This avoids having chaos in your ice box after a rough sail! *We have also used sealed milk products. No cooling needed until opened.*

For drinking water use 2 to 4 litre plastic jugs that can be re-filled at marinas. *I also recommend low alcohol beer as one of your drink options. You can legally drink this while underway and wave with the beer can at passing boats.*

Don't forget snacks. To go with the pops or near-beer, or maybe real beer when anchored. Our preferences are Cheezies (a Canadian must have!), peanuts, mixed nuts, Pringles. All more compact than potato chips, easy to store. For the sweet tooth you can't beat the Halloween selection of small chocolate bars.

Have a couple of thermos bottles on board. When boiling water for morning coffee, etc, boil extra and put in the thermos. Then you can easily make instant coffee, tea or soup cups for those cool days when you are under sail. *At the start of a cruise, we also fill a couple of thermoses with boiling water from home for the first day on the water.*

Water Tank:

These usually hold about 20 gallons. *We don't use this water for drinking. But useful for dishes and other washing up. And for small flushes of the head. See next section.* At the start of the season we add a couple tablespoons of bleach to the water tank.

Be sure to totally drain the tank before lift out. Drain into the bilge and/or use the sink pump. Avoids damage due to freezing.

You can also leave a basin full of water in the cockpit in the sun to warm up. Use for a pleasant hand and face wash. Or for a small laundry job.

The Unmentionable. Using the Head:

Legally you must have a head on board where the waste can NOT be dumped overboard. i.e. must have some form of holding tank. Also note that you can not legally drink alcohol on a boat, even at anchor, unless you have a working head. As well as someplace to sleep. Pontoon boaters in Sandy Cove take note!

But I've never seen the OPP actually check this on an anchored boat. Anyone?

We have the standard head toilet. A bowl and a pump for adding lake water to flush and pumping waste to the holding tank. Most tanks are about 20 gallons and it is amazing how quickly that tank will fill up during a cruise!

Hoping not to disturb your sensibilities, but here is what we do to most efficiently use the holding tank capacity:

- *We never use the head pump to add water to the toilet bowl.* It is a very inefficient use of your tank capacity. In fact the only time we open the through hull is after lift out to drain any water in the valve!
- For flushing #1 we have a plastic cup on the head shelf. Fill it from the sink, rinse the bowl and pump dry.
- For flushing #2 (etch!!) put some lake water into a bucket and bring into the head with you. Add water to the bowl. Then place a layer of toilet paper just above the edge of the water. Do your thing. Pump dry. Add more water from the bucket until all is clear and clean.

These hacks will use the absolute minimum of holding tank capacity. For a normal couple, you should be good for about five days before needed a pump out.

Our head and tank is absolutely smell free. But I did need to replace the holding tank about 20 years ago. The top was cracked by a high pressure pump-out at a Gananoque marina.

The tank's air vent wasn't enough to handle this overly aggressive pumping. I think the pump was designed for the large tour boats! So be aware!

Stranger Danger Docks

When cruising you will have the challenges of safely pulling into strange docks. Here are some tips to minimize damage and maximize safety:

Note the height of the dock and place your fenders appropriately (*Un-nautical to call those things "bumpers"*). Have nylon bow and stern lines ready. (*Never use old halyards for dock lines. Dock lines, like your anchor line, must be stretchy.*)

Use at least three fenders. Two amidships along the widest part of the boat and one near the bow. This forward fender will protect hull if the boat is slowed by the bow line rather than, properly, by the stern line.

Slowly approach the dock (*Docking speed should be no greater than the speed you'd be comfortable hitting the dock!*) If there is help on the dock, pass over your lines. If not, your crew should be standing on the deck with dock lines in hand, outside the life lines and holding a shroud. Step, do not jump, from the boat to the dock. Stop the boat using the stern line.

Docking sans-crew is a bit more challenging but manageable. As the boat approaches the dock, and on the proper path, leave the cockpit and proceed as a crew would. Very important to keep hold of the two dock lines, both to stop the boat and prevent it from drifting away from the dock.

If staying at this dock, tie up using the usual bow, stern and two spring lines. *If you have a choice for the overnight dock in a marina, I prefer one where the wind direction lightly blows you off the dock.* Keeps your fenders clear and they won't be squeaking at night!

Nautical Knots

After decades of cruising the following are the only knots we actually use. And where they are used. Check YouTube for tying instructions and join Social Sailing for hands on experience

Bowline ("The King of Knots"):

Many boating applications require a loop in a rope. The loop must be secure and yet easy to untie. e.g. attaching sheets to sails, rigging lines, halyards, etc. etc.

Highly recommend that you get comfortable tying this knot.

Double Clove Hitch: Quick way to attach a line to essentially anything. e.g. fender to life lines, securing halyards. The initial double loop increases security. For fast disconnect leave the tail long enough to tie as a slip knot.

Figure Eight ("Stopper Knot"): Mandatory at the end of any line you do not want slipping through a block. And ending up with "Three sheets to the wind".

Double Sheet Bend: You may need to tie two lines together to make one long one. E.g for a dock or tag line. Be careful, as this knot could slip loose under vibration. You could add a couple of half hitches for extra security.

And although I don't really count it; Another knot is basically what you use to tie your shoes. Called a Reef Knot. Not very useful as it will easily come loose. The only place we use it is to tie the cords at the end of the sail cover to the topping lift. There is a much better way to tie off a reefed sail than using this knot. See below.

Do this: Cut several various lengths of 3/16" polyester line, 2 to 4 feet long. Seal the ends. Tie a small bowline at one end. Store by looping over the cabin handholds.

These are extremely useful to have easily available for many jobs.

You can loop the line around anything, pass the tail end through the bowline, pull tight, and secure using the "trucker's hitch" slipknot.

We use these to manage the bottom bag of a reefed sail (feed the tail through the reef point hole), secure a dropped sail to the toe rail or lifeline, silencing banging halyards (loop around the halyard, pull tail tight with two turns around a shroud and tie with a slip knot), etc. etc.

Tying to a Cleat: Yep, it's easy to just keep twisting the dock line rope around a cleat any which way. And it will probably hold. But looks very messy and non-nautical. On the visitors' docks do you want to be the boat where sailors glance at your cleat hitch and just shake their heads? Check YouTube, (or come to Social Sailing!) for the proper way to do a cleat hitch. The final results will be neat and secure, with the rope's tail being one under and two over.

So there are the pages and pages of a Skipper's and his First Mate's Best Kept Secrets for Successful Cruising and Anchoring.

But you ask: *"What about the actual sailing? You don't say hardly anything about actually getting from A to B, using charts, plotting, GPS, best anchorages, boat handling and trim, unexpected storms, fog, running aground, etc. etc.!!"*

For those questions you're best to ask an experienced skipper to go out on your boat with you. To share, hands on, his experience and expertise.

And Yes, Social Sailing also offers this!