

THE MAREP REPORT

Summer Crossings

04 06 24

Summer is upon us, and it looks like a repeat of 2003. Although the prospect of a long string of hot and clear days sounds like a wonderful opportunity for boating in our Gulf Islands, there are situations for which you need to pay attention, while you are contemplating the timing of your run across the Strait.

After several days of a stable and wind-free pressure pattern and hot weather in the interior of the Province, the Marine Synopsis may state that: “a weak trough of low pressure over the interior and weak ridge of high pressure offshore will persist. Winds will be moderate locally strong....” You may find that such winds are NW north of Nanaimo and are SE south of Nanaimo. There may be a warning for an afternoon 20-25 knot inflow for Howe Sound.

This pattern may not be obvious from the weather maps, but the “thermal low” in the interior routinely leads to 40-45 knot southerly winds in the Fraser Canyon. The replacement air must come from somewhere, and it surges in from the Pacific around both ends of Vancouver Island (often bringing fog to the southern part of Haro Strait) and leads to winds from both directions in Georgia Strait.

It is the “locally strong” part of the synopsis which can give you unexpected pain, as there may not be a general small craft warning out for Georgia Strait. However, late in the day local unreported winds can hit upwards of 25 knots. They may have been blowing at such speed for only three or four hours, but with the respective fetches available, 1.5+ metre seas can be generated within that time. Add in an opposing Spring tide and you have a most unhappy beginning to a holiday. An early morning or a late evening crossing would have avoided the problem. You also need to very carefully check all the reporting stations, from East Point, through Sandheads to Entrance Island. Halibut Bank may not pick up the worst of the winds.

Check the “Georgia Basin Pressure Slope” in the Environment Canada Web Site for a couple of days before you leave. It may show a “Southerly Pressure Slope” (depending on the overall relationship of the Low and High), but the wind arrows will be helpful. Note the actual record of hourly “Intensity”, and multiply that number by 6 and 12 to obtain the likely range of wind speed. For example, on June 23rd the values from 1600 to 2000 PDT ranged from 3.6 to 4.1 – or potentially 22-49 knots – on an otherwise gorgeous day! At 1000 hours the value was 1.5, for a wind speed range of 9 -18 knots.

Be forewarned, and therefore forearmed. Green water over the bow is no fun.

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