

THE MAREP REPORT
Winter Boating
January, 2005

As I write this we are several days into one of those clear and cold periods in January, which can be highly enjoyable for a few hours of boating. A few things should be kept in mind before you head out:

- Make sure you are not iced in! With all the local swiftly-running streams, Port Moody's inlet has a considerable amount of lower density fresh water on top of the salt. Even a very thin skim of ice can play havoc with your gel coat. We often sit in a bowl of still air as well, so there may be little wave action to break up the stuff. Reed Point also sits in the shadow of Burnaby Mountain all day, and receives little warmth.
- Our wind may be virtually calm – but this can deceive you about what is happening elsewhere. Upper Indian Arm can be another story, as can English Bay, and especially can Howe Sound. In these clear winter conditions we are often dominated by a big high pressure ridge in the interior, and a low or trough west of the Washington coast. This leads to strong outflows through the inlets.
- Log onto www.weatheroffice.ec.gc.ca, select "Marine Weather", and check the "Pressure Slope". The chart given will likely show a north or northeasterly slope. Check the "Slope Steepness", which for example could be "3.5mb per 60 nm". The chart will show you the general wind directions – but the slope steepness value shows what the wind speed could be in exposed locations. In this case, multiply 3.5 by 6 to 12, or 21 to 42 knots! Then check Pam Rocks, and you may find that it is in fact reporting over 40 knots. A Northerly slope will also give strong to gale force winds in Georgia Strait, which can make an outer English Bay excursion rather uncomfortable.
- Along the bottom of the pressure slope chart are the actual hourly slope calculations. These allow you to assess developing trends in the wind speed.
- It is not so much the wave action which is the concern here (the local fetches may not be that large) -- it is the chill factor from very cold and dry air. Remember apparent wind, and then consider air at 0 degrees or less, and an apparent wind over the deck of 30 knots. Not fun when you have a task which takes you outside! It is even worse if you encounter a problem.
- A check through Weatheradio for the wind at Jericho can tell you how far it is wise to venture beyond First Narrows, although you will have the swells from the Strait. Point Atkinson is sheltered from the outflow.

In other words, this trip for the day could be most enjoyable as long as you don't head up to the end of Indian Arm (assume half the speed given for Pam Rocks), or venture much beyond First Narrows.

All the best for 2005!

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