

Part 3--High Island, back to Muscongus Bay to Maple Juice

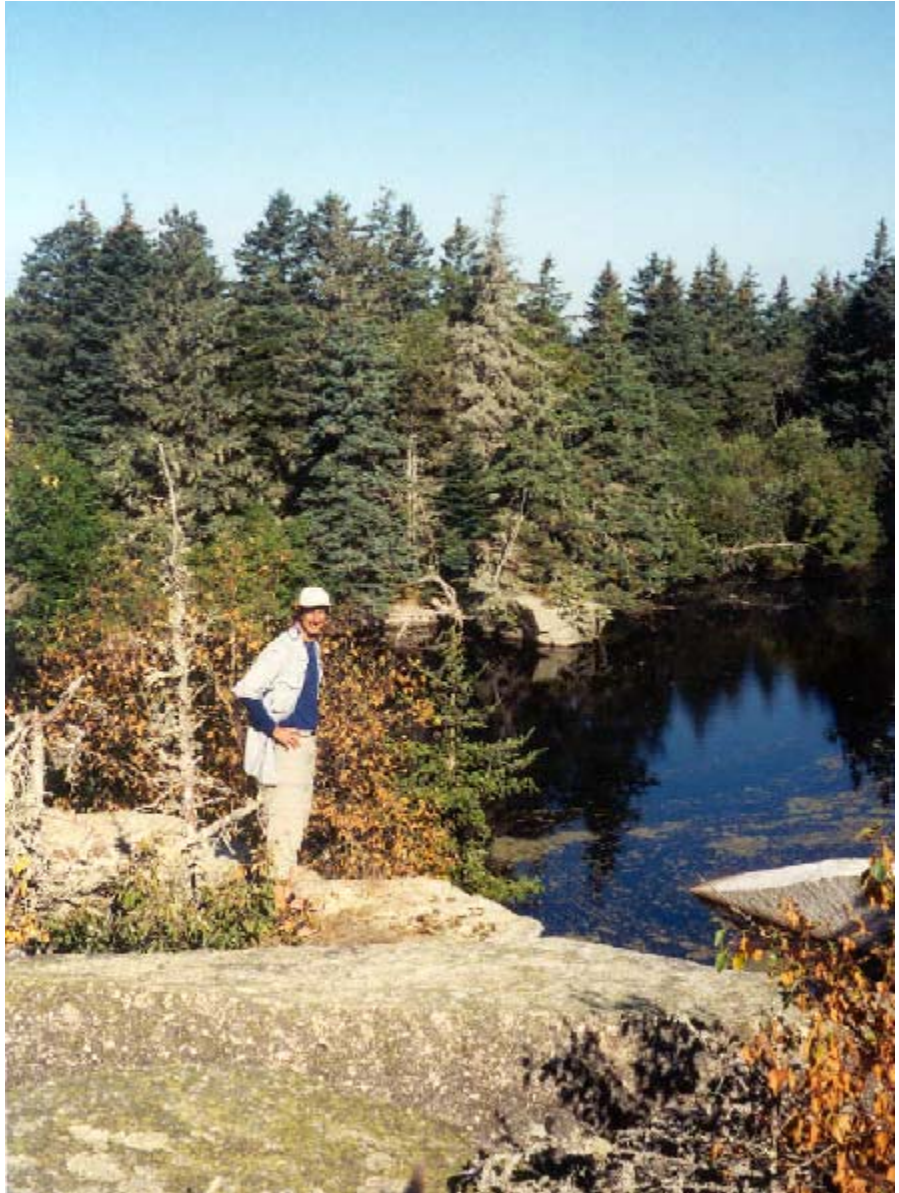
The pleasure of being in a smaller boat was made all the more clear as we sailed into the channel between Dix Island and High Island on the north side of the archipelago. There were three larger keelboats anchored in the recommended spot of deep water between the two islands. We sailed past them and decided to explore other possible coves before anchoring for the night. Andrew Island, nearly a mile long, provides shelter on southwest side of the Dix island Harbor. After poking around the east side of the island we headed to the north side to explore a small niche that looked promising as a possible evening anchor spot. As we approached the cove, first we saw a large heron take off and fly low across the marsh at the end of the cove, and that was followed immediately by the sight of a deer swimming across the channel between Andrews Island and the adjoining island, called the Neck. The deer reached the shore and bounded with long graceful leaps into the woods. A fine pair of sights in the space of a few minutes. We decided the cove was not quite right due to tidal considerations and some exposure from the north, so we headed back to High Island and found a wonderful spot next to the shore just off the steep shore. We had four Osprey as companions, as they selected key perches high in the pine trees above the shore and kept watch, occasionally screeching, though not nearly so loudly and persistently as when we first anchored. It was a perfect evening to sit with our backs on the thwarts, eat dinner and watch the sun go down.

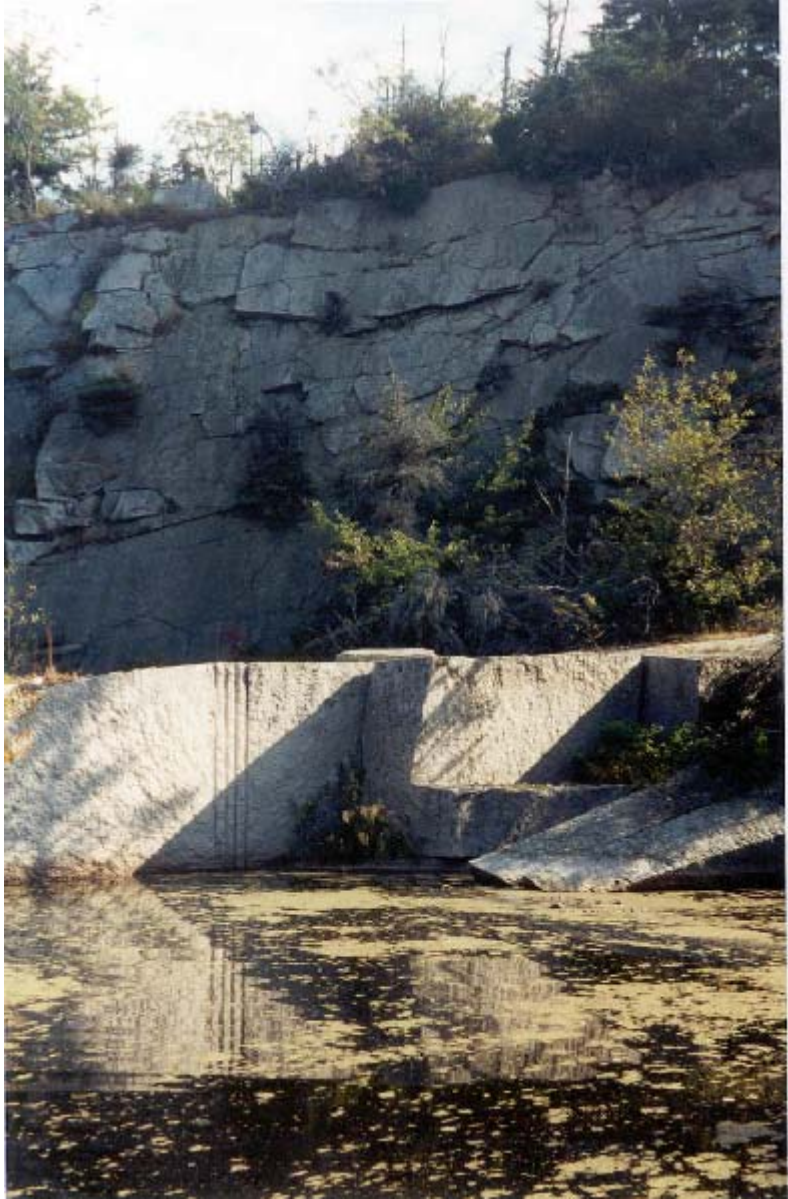
High Island and Dix Island were both quarried starting in the late 19 century. High Island supported quarrying until World War 1, and at one point Taft's reports there were over 2000 quarrymen living in boarding houses on Dix. Today you can walk on both islands, though Dix is owned by the Dix Island Association. In the morning we took advantage of the chance to stretch our legs and rowed Blue Mist to a very nice sand and gravel beach just to the east of the large stone pier on the west end of the island.



We came upon the quarry on the west end of the island (it is mentioned in Taft's but we had forgotten about it), and the promise of a fresh water swim was sufficient enticement that we searched until we found a way down the sides of the quarry to the pool below. The sun was warm in the clear sky. And with only a light breeze, it was a perfect morning for a swim.









Quarries are not always warm places to swim, being deep and often quite shaded. In this case, though the water was crisp and refreshing, it was a pleasant change from the character-building chill of the 57 degree temperature of the ocean beyond. Harbor Island and the quarry set another wonderful scene, so characteristic of the cruise. Given the beauty, Dick and I reflected more than once on how few people there are sailing these waters. We saw very few pleasure boats, what seemed like a small handful for the quality of the waters we were in.

We sailed the northern part of the trip down the Muscle Ridge Channel within the islands of the archipelago, leaving them just about at the point where you can exit the channel at Whitehead Island. Thought the tide was not with us at this point, we had a 5-7 knot breeze at our backs to carry us down towards Mosquito Island. It was a very leisurely sail, so calm that Dick put together his spinning rod and we took turns trolling for mackerel. As I had learned the first day of the cruise, you quickly adjust to sailing amongst the multitude of lobster pots--the micro adjustment to the tiller, a tweak here and there, to avoid entanglements of keel and rudder, or just to keep from banging the hull. We refined this maneuvering when we had 75 feet of line behind the boat and had to remember that every tweak had the potential consequence of drawing the lure into the mooring line of the lobster pots thus avoided by the boat. One or two snags and it became clear that the process of getting the line free was completely reminiscent of the many times I went through it as a kid, when snagged on the rocks at the bottom of Lake Ontario during a day of drifting and bottom fishing or trolling; the flash of momentary annoyance the interruption of the activity and chance to fish, followed by the scurrying about to motor, or in this case sail, around the snag, followed by relief at not losing the lure, and finally settling back down to the calm rhythmic activity of fishing.

We had good luck with our fishing. At first the mackerel seemed too small, but all of the sudden we started hitting them one after the other, so that after tossing several back, we concluded that three or four would make a fine appetizer for the evening. The fish went into a mesh net bag and then hung over the side. We proceeded on our way, trading places fishing and helming, as we made our way between Mosquito Head and Mosquito Island. We packed up the rod as we rounded Hupper Island next to Port Clyde and headed up the St. Georges River. We were looking for Pleasant Gut, but somehow managed to miss it and sailed onto Maple Juice before stopping. No harm done, as we were going beyond Pleasant Gut anyway.

The wind picked up nicely as we sailed up the river, and we zipped in to the lobster pound at Maple Juice, came up to the dock and hailed the two fellows there asking if we could buy a couple of lobsters. They were a somewhat typical cross-generational pair. There was young fellow, medium height and build, dark hair dressed in blue jeans and t shirt, and an older stocky heavy set fellow with white hair and a full white beard. They were friendly enough as we interrupted their work, and asked us what we were interested in, so we said 'can we get a couple of lobsters for 10 bucks,' to which they said 'how about a couple of pound and a halfers,' and we said 'great.' They were very nice lobsters for that size, and were quickly placed into a bucket of water, stowed forward, as we sailed away from the dock and on to Otis Cove, around the corner on the opposite side of the river about a mile and a half further upstream.

We were really roughing it now. We anchored, set up the boom tent, and finished our anchor dram. Then Dick cleaned the fish so we could have our fresh fish and lobster dinner. We were in a small quiet cove, with several very old unused camps on a point on one side about 100 yards away, a couple of newer camps 200 or so yards away on another side, but not much else. We got the stove going, and started our one-burner multi-stage cooking routine: boiled water for some pasta, and got the water for the lobsters hot. Dredged the mackerel fillets in flour and pan fried them for starter, which we ate while cooking the pasta. Took the pasta off, drained it and dropped the lobsters into the big pot. We savored the mackerel to the last bite, and then moved on to the fresh lobster, finishing the last few bites while battling away a few mosquitoes as dusk descended and the cool evening settled around us.



After five days of great weather the low pressure system in the south finally made it north. The drumming on the boom tent started in the middle of the night, and came on in squalls through most of the morning, when it changed to a drizzle. Since we did not have a schedule to keep, the day started in slow motion. This is where I adopt a state of temporary hibernation, and give way only grudgingly to wakefulness. It starts in the middle of the night when I hear the rain on the tent. I wake up enough to take note and then roll over with a sigh and pull the sleeping bag around me and readjust my expectations to take full advantage of the opportunity for inaction. Eventually I realize I will have to get up, because unlike a bear in winter, my body has not completely shut down, and there is only so long I can lie in the bag. Finally, I get up and linger over coffee and breakfast. We were lucky and the squalls turned to a drizzle, at which point so we suited up in foul weather gear, stowed everything as usual and really started the day. This we did by returning to the Maple Juice lobster pound. The river was hazy and the lobster pound drenched and somewhat sorry looking. There was little action so we were no hindrance as we tucked Blue Mist at the end of one of the floats.



Only in Maine would the response to 'Where did the sun go' on a rainy day be met with a response of 'Probably the same place as the moon'. But the port-a-potty was very convenient.

This became the gray day of little wind. We cast off from the lobster pound float, sailed about 200 yards, where upon the wind completely died. As it was lunch time we made the best of it, rowed to a float in Maple Juice Cove, tied up and unpacked sandwich food from the rear compartment.



The float was covered seagull, and while not attractive, it was convenient. As we neared the end of lunch a light breeze came up, and as we were on the leeward side of the float I became aware of a distinctly acrid aroma. If taking advantage of the wind were not enough incentive to leave, the stench of the droppings was.