

Onboard

CRUISING · SEAMANSHIP · EQUIPMENT

FUN-SIZED SAILING

A Herreshoff 12½ is just a daysailer for short hops, right? Not if your name is Ellen Massey Leonard, who found room for her husband and two friends for a grand tour of the Maine coastline

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHS ELLEN MASSEY LEONARD



The smaller the boat, the bigger the fun. So says the Cruising Club of America Blue Water medallist Annie Hill, in her book *Voyaging on a Small Income*. And what sailor hasn't had fun in little dinghies, trying to get that last bit of speed out of them or pulling them up on a beach for a picnic? Some people have even taken them across oceans, although this does not make the easiest or safest means of conveyance. Annie, of course, knows this and has voyaged over the horizon aboard a reasonably sized yacht; however, if long voyages aren't your passion, what could be better than an open daysailer?

My husband Seton and I enjoy small boat sailing as well as long voyages, and we recently circumnavigated the globe aboard our 1968 38ft (11.6m) copy of the legendary Sparkman & Stephens ocean racer *Finisterre*.

Back in America after this four-year voyage, we were planning a cruise of the Maine coast with two friends, Dan and Melanie, but on the eve of their arrival, we discovered our boat was in need of some urgent repairs. We weren't sure what to do because Dan (whom we had met sailing in Bermuda) and Melanie had driven a long day from Canada only to find our yacht up on shores. Thankfully, my parents stepped in and generously offered to loan us their open daysailer *Pilgrim*, an original Herreshoff 12½, but she could hardly take us so far or in such comfort. This was to be Melanie's first introduction to sailing and we knew how much Dan wanted it to go well, not least because he had told her she could expect a cosy cabin with bunks, electric lights, a real toilet and a propane stove. Although *Pilgrim* is lovely to sail – the Herreshoff 12½ is widely considered one of the finest small boats ever built – she could not sleep four people;



Above, left to right: *Pilgrim's* dinghy ashore on the island; sailing solo in a Herreshoff 12½ is child's play



HERRESHOFF 12½
LOA
15ft 10in (4.8m)
LWL
12ft 6in (3.8m)
BEAM
5ft 10in (1.8m)
DRAUGHT
2ft 6in (0.8m)
DISPLACEMENT
1,250lb (567kg)

her heads was the stern for the boys and a bucket for the girls; and her galley was a bag full of sandwiches. However, my love of sailing the 12½ overcame my reservations, so we all planned a camping trip.

Pilgrim, one of the famous design line named after its waterline length, was built in 1937 in Nathanael Herreshoff's yard in Rhode Island. Constructed of white oak frames and cedar planking, she measures 15ft 10in (4.8m) overall. She was one of the first boats to have mahogany trim instead of oak and she still carries her original bermudan-rigged spruce spars. Paul Cabot, her first owner, ordered her as part of a fleet of 12 for his yacht club on North Haven, Maine, where she raced under sail number 1. Her history was lost from then until the 1990s when she reappeared in Massachusetts and then moved south to New York.

In 2000, my parents found her back in Maine faithfully restored to mint condition with gleaming brightwork and almost all her original bronze hardware, which had been custom cast at the Herreshoff Manufacturing Company. They keep *Pilgrim* in Brooklin, a place alive with wooden boats and in the centre of Maine's beautiful cruising

grounds. Although this wouldn't turn out to be the cruise Seton and I had planned, we were at least now able to show the gems of our coast to Dan and Melanie.

As the days unfolded all of us discovered the truth of Annie's words. *Pilgrim* was simple to ready, simple to sail and simple to put away. Instead of fussing with a diesel engine or grinding winches to make sail, we simply hauled up main and jib, cleated the halyards, and slipped the mooring. Two minutes later *Pilgrim* was gliding alongside the dock to collect tents and provisions. In the dead air behind the small island that forms Brooklin's harbour, no hammering pistons insulted the still scene: we simply unshipped the canoe paddles and propelled *Pilgrim* past Concordia Yawls, an original Herreshoff Fishers Island 31, and Spirit of Tradition racers. In the faint breeze beyond the harbour, she ghosted smoothly along under spinnaker, capable of progress in zephyrs that would not have budged our ocean-going yacht.

SURPRISE AND DELIGHT

Dan, who had only sailed large cruising boats, was surprised to find how *Pilgrim's* tiller responded

LOCAL INFORMATION: CRUISING THE MAINE COASTLINE

Maptech Chart Kit Region 2:

Block Island to the Canadian Border combines general and detailed charts of the Maine area in readable and economical form. A digital version also exists. *A Cruising Guide to the Maine Coast* by Hank and Jan Taft and Curtis Rindlaub covers even the smallest anchorages from Maine's southern border, north to New Brunswick and the St John River.

Weather forecasts

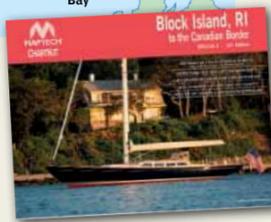
Prevailing winds are SW. Foul weather, when the wind blows from the NE, is almost always followed by a strong northwesterly. Fog can be expected over the islands farthest out to sea, especially in the morning, but is relatively infrequent close to shore. Fog lessens later in the summer:



August and September are the ideal months. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) broadcasts forecasts continuously over VHF radio.

Tides and other hazards

Tides are about 10ft (3m) in the Penobscot Bay/Eggemoggin Reach area,



so be aware that a beautiful cove at High Water may be a mud flat at Low. Currents are not dangerous but can be frustrating. Watch out for boulders, which sometimes lie treacherously near the surface when you think you're sailing in 40ft (12.2m) of water. They are well charted, but not all have navigation markers. Although lighthouses abound on the offshore islands, most nav buoys are unlit so night sailing is inadvisable.

Moorings, boatyards, anchorages

Full service Brooklin Boat Yard specialises in wooden, cold-moulded and classic yachts, as does Rockport Marine. There are more yards and several fuel docks. Most YCs and boatyards rent moorings. Use chain.



Above, left to right: Melanie, Seton and Dan start the campfire; the clearing among the spruce trees made an ideal campsite

immediately to any nudge and, after a few swerves in our wake, he discovered the joy of encouraging a small, well-designed boat to do her best in light airs. Her subtle underwater curves and perfectly balanced helm make her a treat to sail, one of the reasons that the 364 boats Herreshoff built rarely change hands.

Pilgrim's simple and intuitive rig made Melanie's first sail much more straightforward than she had expected. She quickly learned to handle the mainsheet and self-tacking jib, and in the roomy cockpit the four of us were comfortable despite our gear. We were also lower to the water than aboard a larger boat, so we could observe all the wildlife up close: seals sunned themselves on the rocks; porpoises swam in our wake; and guillemots fluttered their wings to take flight.

When we reached the island where we planned to camp, it was a simple matter to make *Pilgrim* shipshape. I had no need of a bow roller to let down our Danforth anchor: I could just drop it by hand. One person alone could furl her sails and another could shift the provisions to the dinghy, both of which were done in less time than it took Seton and I on our circumnavigation.

To our relief, Dan and Melanie were genuinely excited by the idea of camping on one of Maine's many deserted islands, so we rowed ashore in the dinghy that we had

towed along, set up our tents in a clearing among the spruce trees, and searched the strand for wood. Before long, a fire was blazing away, its flames eclipsed by the deeper hues of a glorious sunset, and over the embers we cooked sausages and watched the stars peek through the growing darkness. Aboard a bigger boat we would have missed all this, merely watching the sunset from the cockpit and then retreating to a lighted cabin.

Morning dawned without a breath of wind. Had we been aboard our 38-footer the engine would have roared, the anchor chain would have rattled up, and we would have been under way to a new place.

In this instance, though, we had to wait for the wind, so we ate a leisurely breakfast by the campsite and listened to the seals bark. We took our time rowing back out to *Pilgrim* and stowing our things aboard, savouring the quiet beauty, watching cormorants open their scrappy black wings to the sun, before we hoisted the limp sails and weighed anchor.

Dan and Melanie are seasoned canoeists so they pulled out the paddles and we gained slow headway. But when a few catspaws grew into a breeze, *Pilgrim* glided faster than they could push her and at that precise moment I was reminded once again of Annie's choice words: the smaller the boat, the bigger the fun.