

Circumnavigating The DelMarVa Peninsula



By Matthew B. Jenkins

s/v Moondance

June 2002

Chesapeake Bay Lighthouse Project

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The Delmarva Peninsula forms the eastern side of the Chesapeake Bay, separating it from the Atlantic Ocean. As it's name implies, it covers three states – Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia. In June 2002 my wife, Gail, and I started from Deale, MD, about 15 miles south of Annapolis, and circumnavigated the Delmarva in our 28 foot sloop *Moondance*. We took two weeks and covered 515 nautical miles in the process. This is something a fair number of Bay sailors think of doing. While preparing for this trip we encountered a certain amount of difficulty finding information for the C&D Canal, Delaware River, and Atlantic passage segments. We were more apprehensive about some things than we should have been, and ignorant of things it would have been nice to know about. The following article is an attempt to address these issues while also documenting our trip to a lesser extent.

Why do it?

An obvious question is why circumnavigate the Delmarva? We came up with three reasons for our trip.

1. This was the natural progression in our cruising education. We've owned *Moondance* since 1997 and have been fairly hard core in our cruising of the Bay. We've bought into the "cruising dream" to a certain extent and the circumnavigation offered a "next step" opportunity for honing our skills including some small degree of passage making, with shift sailing through a couple days and nights.
2. The Chesapeake Bay is 150+ miles long, has over 65 rivers, and many hundreds of creeks. Our home port is mid-Bay, yet we inevitably get asked "Have you been in the Atlantic?". One feels like responding "It would take me 3 days just to reach the Atlantic – and then what?". However, we did honestly see this as a void. A Delmarva circumnavigation offered the opportunity to experience an Atlantic passage in a well defined and contained manner.
3. There are 34 lighthouses and 1 lightship remaining on the Chesapeake Bay. Fifteen miles out from the entrance of the Bay, in the Atlantic Ocean, there is also a Texas oil tower-like platform, built in 1965, complete with a helicopter pad. The "Chesapeake Light Station" replaced the lightship *Chesapeake* (now in Baltimore Maryland's Inner Harbor). It was later automated and arguably marks the end of lighthouse era. Gail and I have used the Bay lighthouses as a "connect the dots" way of exploring the Chesapeake region both with *Moondance* and our VW Westfalia camper-van, the *Blue Beast*. We've photographed and documented every light on the Bay and setup a website <http://cblights.com>. The Chesapeake Light Station was the one remaining Bay-related light we hadn't seen. A Delmarva circumnavigation seemed to compliment the goal of seeing this tower, while fulfilling our primary cruising and regional exploration objectives.

Part 1 – The C&D, Delaware River and Bay, and Atlantic Passage

Preparation:

Before someone decides to circumnavigate the Delmarva, we would both strongly recommend they cruise the Bay first. The circumnavigation is mostly a passage and as such, it's somewhat tedious. We've spoken to several people who have done it in less than a week. While there is a certain macho quality to having done this, it isn't much of a vacation. If you can take two or more weeks, do so and see some of the sights along the way. Your boat should be in good repair and capable of moderate rough weather sailing (e.g. 35 knot winds and 6 foot seas). You should know how to perform basic maintenance on your engine, including how to bleed the fuel line. All crew should be in OK physical shape and comfortable sailing the boat in a variety of weather conditions. In particular, everyone should be comfortable reefing, and sailing at night. Plan the trip with reasonable stops, including contingencies. Remember to include some time to actually see the places you have stopped at. Decide how much night sailing you want to do. You will probably have to do some in the Atlantic. However, that's about the only time it's required. Listen to the weather forecasts daily.

You need charts of the Chesapeake Bay, DE River, DE Bay, and the Atlantic coast from Cape May, NJ to Cape Henry, VA. The popular laminated ADC Chesapeake Bay chart book does not include charts of either the Delaware River and Bay or the Atlantic coast. So, we bought the Maptech Chartkit for Region 4 – Chesapeake and Delaware Bays. (This is a spiral-bound chart book that also includes the Atlantic coast from Cape May, NJ to Cape Henry, VA going 50+ miles out to sea). Baring electronic charts, all of which recommend you have paper backups anyway, if you don't want to deal with a zillion separate and large NOAH charts, the Maptech chartkit is your main option. It costs about \$100. You must have a set of parallel rulers and a divider on board to use it.

Another chart we would strongly recommend is ADC's laminated roll-up chart of the entire Chesapeake Bay. This does include the DE River, Bay, and Atlantic coast. It is wonderful for big-picture trip / route planning whether you're doing a circumnavigation or just cruising the Bay. We've spent many evenings with it spread out on the kitchen table or in the living room, walking out potential itineraries with the dividers.

If you don't have one, get a copy of Chesapeake Bay Magazine's *Guide to Cruising the Chesapeake Bay*. It gives information on all the navigable rivers, anchorages, and towns in the Bay. It's an invaluable reference.

All major chandleries sell the Maptech and ADC charts and the cruising guide. ADC can be reached directly at 1-800-ADC-MAPS. Maptech can be reached at 1-888-839-5551. Both will ship directly.

You should check your marine insurance policy. Many are issued with restrictions on sailing region (such as Chesapeake Bay only). You should be able to contact your insurance company and add temporary coverage for the coastal Atlantic for a small fee and will need to do so.

We upped our Boat U.S. towing insurance to unlimited for this trip. Someone once told us “There are two types of sailors – those who have run aground and those who lie about it.” (I’ve since added a third type – those who don’t go far enough from their home dock to have the chance.) A tow in the Bay runs about \$10 a foot + time from dock at some un-Godly rate. You can usually kedge yourself off, or wait for high tide. However, if a storm is approaching, a tow may be the prudent option.

We hung a Davis Echomaster passive radar reflector from our lower spreader. I think this mostly just made us feel good, but we figured it couldn’t hurt. Sail as if you are invisible. If you see a big ship approaching act quickly to assess it’s direction and get out of the way immediately. It doesn’t take very long for a ship making between 15 and 20 knots to travel a couple miles.

We borrowed a handheld GPS from a friend to have as a spare.

Having an Autohelm or some sort of self-steering mechanism is a great benefit, particularly if you are short-crewed. However, apart from refrigeration, an Autohelm is about the largest battery draw on a boat. This becomes an issue when you are doing more than day-sailing. We have a two group 27 (deep cycle) battery bank. We reserve one for starting and monitored both several times a day using a multimeter which we ground to the engine, touching the positive contact to the back of the A-B-All battery switch. Even if you are lucky enough to have great wind for prolonged periods, if you don’t have a wind generator or solar panel, it may still be necessary to turn on the engine for a few hours periodically. We switched the batteries to “All” when charging to allow them to equalize and charge to a synchronized level. (Never change the A-B-All switch when the engine is running. It can fry the solenoid.)

At least one burner on your stove should have a potholder. You can’t even boil water under sail without one. (Holding the pan while trying is not a safe solution.)

We carried two 5 gallon Jerry cans strapped to our rails – one for water, one for diesel. We like to anchor in remote places. If you don’t have huge tanks, a dink ride or two to shore with the water can extend your water by days without putting you into heavy rationing mode. We didn’t end up needing the diesel. However, having the reserve offered a lot of peace of mind.

We keep a basic spare parts kit on board that includes oil and fuel filters, a replacement impeller, spare belts, engine oil, various small nuts, bolts, and screws, light bulbs, a tube of clear silicon (you’ll hate life if the velcro for your mosquito netting pulls off in a marshy creek on a hot still night and you can’t stick it back up), and other miscellaneous items.

We keep a reasonably well stocked first aid kit on board when cruising and both of us have taken a basic first aid training course.

We bring a cell phone with us and have found that Verizon has the best reception in strange out of the way places around the Bay region of any of the carriers by far.

Finally, we filed a sail plan with an interested sailing friend and called him regularly with updates, particularly during the Atlantic portion.

Planning the Route:

You have two basic routing options for a circumnavigation: clockwise or counter-clockwise. My hindsight recommendation is that you check the Atlantic coastal weather forecasts for several weeks before your planned departure, write down the prevailing wind directions, and give this considerable weight in making your decision. We didn't do this. In hindsight, there are pros and cons to each route.

We had spoken to several people who had circumnavigated and most had gone clockwise. In our minds the major passage hurdles were the C&D Canal, the Delaware River and Bay, and the Atlantic Ocean. While a major component of the trip, we thought of these mostly as areas to be traversed, not leisurely visited. We, therefore, decided we wanted to get them out of the way first. We had cruised the northern Bay extensively the prior fall, so had been in each creek on the NE shore and explored the Sassafra River fairly recently. With this in mind, we decided to make a straight run from our home port of Deale, MD to Chesapeake City on the C&D Canal. We divided our trip mentally into two segments. The first was the C&D, Delaware River, and Atlantic passage. The second was cruising the southern Bay. We reasoned that leaving Friday night, as soon as we finished readying the boat, would give us some extra night sailing in home waters, a ten hour head start, and a mini-passage to test out our systems and procedures before hitting the Atlantic. We also figured this gave us great flexibility if we had to wait several days for a good Atlantic weather window. (Good to us meant a forecast of at least 3 consecutive days of winds of 15 knots or less and waves of 5 feet or less.)

With our choice made, we laid our big ADC poster chart of the Chesapeake Bay out in the living room and spent several nights on and off over the course of a few weeks with a pad of paper marked off with two weeks worth of days, walking off various stop options with a divider. We assumed an average speed of 4 knots, but tried to accommodate a 3 to 5 ½ range, leaving appropriate time to explore spots that look interesting. The cruising guide comes in useful here. Be sure to also leave room for a couple "rain" days – places that you can skip if need be and still get home on time if you end up having to be holed up at anchor somewhere along route.

The (first phase) plan we came up with was:

- Friday: Provision and wash the boat, fill the water tank, setup the dink, etc. Leave dock around 10 pm, destination Chesapeake City in the C&D Canal.
- Saturday: Arrive at Chesapeake City in the afternoon and anchor in the basin.
- Sunday: Pull anchor early am, destination Cape May, New Jersey. Traverse the C&D Canal, DE River and Bay, and arrive at Cape May in the afternoon. Get a transient slip, top up fuel, water, and ice.
- Monday: Leave Cape May in the afternoon (weather window permitting), destination Norfolk, Virginia.
- Tuesday: Sail the Atlantic.
- Wednesday: Arrive at Chesapeake Light Station at dawn. Sail into Norfolk, VA, destination

Little Creek.

The Chesapeake and Delaware Canal:

The C&D Canal is run by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. It is a 12 mile open waterway cut (no locks) that connects the Elk River of the northern Chesapeake Bay to the Delaware River. Information on the Canal is available at <http://www.nap.usace.army.mil/sb/c&d.htm>. The northern portion of the Bay has a very well marked shipping channel leading to the C&D. The turnoff to the Elk is at Turkey Point. There is an old white tower lighthouse that sits atop a 100 foot bluff at the point. This is one of the most scenic lighthouse views of the Bay. The channel buoys are so frequent that it's almost like following a road. It's best to stay within the actual channel as you go up the Elk. If you see a ship coming, just pull outside. The Bohemia River on the south side of the Elk offers the last marinas and comfortable anchorage before hitting the C&D. The canal itself is lit by sodium vapor lamps on posts along it's entire route. It's basically a lighted highway. You must motor through the C&D. Sailing is prohibited.

Current is a major consideration on the C&D. It reaches 2 ½ knots or higher on a twice daily basis with the tides. If your boat averages 5 ½ knots under power as ours does, it pays to check the current and traverse the canal on the proper tide. Current and tide tables for any day of the year are available at <http://www.stripersurf.com/currents.html>. Look for "Chesapeake & Delaware Canal Maryland/Delaware current". Enter a "starting time" (date) and click the "Make predictions using options" button. We used this website to generate C&D tables for every day we could possibly be in it. I cut and pasted the resulting daily tables into a single Word document, then printed this out and carried it with us. This was great to have on board. Another option is to buy *Reed's Nautical Almanac* for the East Coast. If you use Reed's, make sure you have the current year. Flood (+ X.x knots) = from the Chesapeake Bay towards the Delaware River. Ebb (- X.x knots) = from the DE River towards the Chesapeake Bay. The tide in the C&D flows towards the Chesapeake Bay. The tide in the Delaware River flows towards the Atlantic.

Chesapeake City is the management point for the canal. It's about 1/3 of the way up from the Bay side. There is a boat basin off the southern shore just after you pass under the first bridge. It has marina docks if you want a transient slip. You can also anchor for the day or evening. There is a fair amount of sea grass on the bottom of the basin and getting the anchor to set was a bit of a chore. We have a 13 pound Danforth. However, a 42' Island Packet with a big CQR and all chain rode also had trouble. We didn't have any problem holding after we set. Chesapeake City itself is a pretty town and worth visiting if you have the time. The entrance to the basin is about 5 feet at low tide. Note that this is a changing point for the ATONs. You are returning from the sea from both sides of Chesapeake City. Red on right coming up the Bay to Chesapeake City. Red on left going out towards the Delaware.

There are six bridges on the C&D Canal. Five are fixed bridges. They all have high (130+ feet) clearance with one caveat identified below. As you move west to east, Chesapeake Bay towards the DE River, the first bridge is at Chesapeake City. It is fixed and has 140 feet of vertical clearance. As noted, the Chesapeake City basin is on the starboard side, just after this bridge. The second bridge is the Summit Fixed bridge. It has 130 feet of clearance. The third bridge is

the Conrail (railroad) lift bridge (the caveat). This is an interesting type of drawbridge. The central span operates like an elevator. When the bridge is down the clearance is only 45 feet. When it is up the clearance is 130 feet. The bridge remains up when not being used by a train (most of the time). The bridge tender monitors channel 13 and you can hail him/her ahead of time for its status. This bridge is a strange site to see when you approach it from around the bend. You are greeted by an orphaned bridge span standing high over the water with no road or rails leading up to it on either side. This was a bit unsettling. The fourth and fifth bridges are next to each other. The fourth is the new Rt. 1 bridge and it's clearance wasn't marked on our [latest edition] chart. It appears to be about the same as that of the fifth bridge (St. Georges), which is 130 feet. The sixth and final bridge is at Reedy Point. It's clearance is 135 feet. After you pass it you're in the Delaware River.

We saw some commercial shipping in the northern Bay and C&D. However, we had no trouble keeping out of their way. It is something to be concerned about and aware of, but not something to fear.

The Delaware River and Bay:

The Delaware River and Bay are pretty straight forward and not particularly scenic. There are no pull-offs, so it is something to be traversed, not cruised. As you enter the River you are greeted by the huge Salem Nuclear Power Plant six miles down. The cooling towers are visible for many miles and dominate the northeastern shore for much of the first leg of the river. There are some significant shoals. However, they shouldn't be a problem if you pay attention to your charts. Be careful not to confuse buoys marking shoals with mid-river channel buoys that you can pass on the wrong side. If you can catch the height of the flood tide going through the C&D, then ride the changing DE River tide down, you should be able to make extremely good time. Even if the tides don't let you time this beautifully, it should be possible to make it all the way down the Delaware and either into Cape May, NJ or the Atlantic within daylight. Depending on the direction and amount of wind, you may need to motor some. There are a number of interesting caisson lighthouses mid-channel as you go down.

Traversing the Delaware at night is somewhat challenging. There is a lot of commercial shipping and you should keep just outside the channel. Know your lights. Tugs are easy to spot because they're lit up like Christmas trees. However, the big ships only show two small white lights and the one red or green navigation light. These lights look quite small and often do not look like they're moving. You have to trust the lights, not your sense of depth or movement. Also check your charts for un-lit caissons / caisson ruins.

Cape May, New Jersey:

Cape May offers the last protected port and opportunity for topping up fuel, water, and ice before entering the Atlantic. Stopping there also gives you the opportunity of saying you sailed the Atlantic from New Jersey to Virginia. Cape May surrounds a half natural, half dredged basin in New Jersey's southern shore and is very well protected. There is a four mile long canal connecting it to the Delaware Bay on one side and a short, larger, channel that opens to the ocean

on the other. The canal enters the Delaware Bay at the Cape May – Lewes DE Ferry terminal. So, if you watch the ferry boats, they will guide you to it.

Cape May has 5 foot tides. While depth is pretty good both approaching and in the canal, one should be aware of the tide phases and the effect on current. Not all of the Cape May basin is deep and the state of the tide may impact your approach to some of the marinas.

The Cape May Canal has two fixed 55 foot bridges. If your mast is higher than 50 feet, or you think it's somewhere around there and really aren't sure how high it is, you should continue past the canal and come into Cape May via the Atlantic entrance (which has no bridges). Our mast is 47 feet. We figure the wind vane and antennae make it about 50. We found going under a 55 foot bridge quite nerve-racking. There are height markers on the main pilings at the water. We assume these were accurate and they offered some comfort. In between the two fixed bridges there is also a small, old, railroad swing bridge that crosses the canal. This remains open when not in use. Judging from the rust on the track wheels, it's open most of the time. This bridge pinches the canal in half and the somewhat narrow passage by it had a noticeably stronger current than the rest of the canal. Once you pass the second (final) fixed bridge you are through the canal. Hail your target marina for guidance and stay in channel since much of the basin is shallow.

There are a number of marina options in Cape May. Three of the larger ones are:

Canyon Club Marina, 608-884-0188, www.canyonclubmarina.com

South Jersey Marina, 609-884-2400, www.sjmarina.com

Utsch's Marina, 609-884-2051, www.capemayharbor.com

Many of the marinas rent bicycles, so given time, you have the opportunity of seeing the town.

We had been apprehensive about the C&D Canal, but hadn't given the Cape May Canal much thought. In hind sight the C&D is wide, well lit, has tall, wide, bridges, and is fairly easy to navigate. The Cape May Canal on the other hand is smaller, has equally strong currents, narrow, short bridges, and larger tides. Cape May itself is much busier than the C&D. If we had to make the choice we would be more concerned about entering Cape May during daylight hours than we would about traversing the C&D in daylight.

The Atlantic Ocean:

It should be possible to sail the Atlantic coast from Cape May, NJ to Cape Charles, VA in two full days and one night. Having said that, speed is not very predictable in a sail boat. The further you travel the greater the range of time it might take you as wind, current, waves, and your propensity to turn on the engine are all factors. Before starting the Atlantic portion we monitored the weather and wrote down the 5 day forecast (a daytime and evening forecast is given for each day). As noted above, our criteria was less than 15 knots of wind and waves less than 5 feet for the following 3 days. Adjust as you feel fit. However, I wouldn't recommend the casual cruiser go much higher than this.

There are only a couple pull-off options during the Atlantic segment of the trip. Indian River Inlet has a low, fixed bridge with 30 feet of vertical clearance, so is not an option for a sailboat.

Ocean City, MD is the main option. We didn't stop there. However the Maptech Chartkit has a large, clear inset for Ocean City. We used to take charter boats out of O.C. in our earlier Atlantic wreck diving days and I remember it having a clean, jetty lined entrance and decent marina facilities. Chincoteague, VA is the second option. However, it is notorious for shifting shoals and a tricky entrance. The one person we spoke to who stopped there had a shallow draft boat and a Coast Guard escort in. They thought it was a neat place to visit from the water. Finally, the charts do show a number of other possible pull-offs between Chincoteague and Cape Charles. I have never heard of anyone attempting these and assume the phrase "local knowledge required" strongly applies.

We decided to do the Atlantic passage in one straight shot. There are numerous lighted buoys lining the way down and it is not necessary to stray more than 10 or 15 miles offshore unless you choose to (or the weather kicks up and makes it the prudent choice). Note that your insurance policy probably has a distance from shore coverage limitation that you need to know.

We were very good about keeping our ships log during this trip. One is less concerned about hourly positions when in the Bay. While in the Atlantic we were diligent about recording our position in the logbook every two hours. In addition to this I also recommend that you actually mark the positions, date, and time in pencil on the chart and connect them by line. While this is the commonly recommended practice, multiple day and weekend cruises over the same area don't lend themselves to this, so it's rarely done in the Bay. However, the Atlantic portion is a passage. The weather forecast increased in severity after our departure and we encountered 20 – 25 knot winds and waves of 4 – 6 feet on our nose portions of the second day and evening. At that point visualizing where we were and how far we were traveling took on an enhanced importance. You can always erase everything once you're safely at your destination.

Regarding conditions – The waves in the Atlantic are longer and more melodic than those in the Bay. Sailing on a proper tack through 3 – 4 footers was truly fun, whereas on the Bay similar waves seem shorter, more choppy, and aren't very comfortable. We encountered a large pod of dolphins on the way out and found the freedom of the open ocean a wonderful experience. The week we left had moderately strong conditions. The week after our return the temperatures rose 10 degrees, the winds died, and the seas were fairly calm. It's somewhat luck of the draw within the established patterns. Listen to the forecasts and use common sense.

Back Into The Bay:

The entrance to the Chesapeake Bay is marked by Cape Charles Light on the northern shore and Cape Henry Light on the southern shore. These are big Atlantic lighthouses with strong beams. We saw Cape Charles over 20 miles out during our night / early morning approach. We could not make out either Cape Henry or the Chesapeake Light Station lights. However, we were a good ways off Cape Henry. Two major shipping channels converge at the entrance to the Bay. Norfolk, VA is also one of the largest naval bases in the world. It's a busy place. Mainly because of our concerns about ships we decided we would enter the Bay in daylight, even if it meant circling off shore until dawn, and we planned our passage accordingly. Having said that, the channels are fairly central to the Bays entrance and a normal cruising route around Cape Charles would not hit them until you got close to the bridge tunnel.

The Chesapeake Bay Bridge – Tunnel is a 14 mile link between the southern tip of the Delmarva Peninsula to the mainland / opposite shore. It is quite an engineering marvel. The bridges themselves are broken into three spans, all of which are too low to go under. The spans are linked in two places by tunnels to allow shipping to pass. The southwestern passage is the Thimble Shoals Channel. The northeastern passage is the Chesapeake Channel. Your destination upon returning to the Bay will determine the channel you take. Be alert for commercial shipping and stay outside the side of the channel until you must pass the bridge tunnel. Whether or not it's actually true, we considered passing the bridge tunnel to be our entrance back into the Bay.

Both Maryland and Virginia require commercial vessels to use pilots when traversing their respective parts of the Bay. So, as you approach Cape Charles and enter the Bay you will hear the Virginia pilots contacting pretty much every commercial vessel approaching. We saw a number of Navy vessels including frigates, a couple submarines, and a small aircraft carrier. You will hear quite a lot of Navy traffic on channel 16 at the southern end of the Bay.

Some Final Passage Comments:

VHF:

It's been said that a VHF isn't of much use if you don't turn it on. When sailing at night, in the Atlantic, near commercial shipping channels, or any of the numerous Navy target or restricted areas always monitor VHF channel 16. Having said that, while commercial vessels are supposed to monitor 16, channel 13 (the same one drawbridges use) is their main [coastal] working channel. If you see a ship coming and are uncertain about their direction vs. yours, don't hesitate to hail them on 13 to clarify the situation. (You will need to know where you are, what course you are on, and roughly where they are and what course they are on to do this. It helps if you have some clue as to what type of ship they are. Your main options will be: tug, tanker, car carrier, Navy warship, and freighter.) While you may feel awkward doing this, the ship will often be happy you hailed, especially at night. Apart from anything, this ensures they know you are there. Furthermore, their electronics are likely to give a much better view of whether you are fine on your current course or need to change direction. Be professional and remember, it's your responsibility to alter course if need be, not theirs. We've found tug boat captains to be some of the most professional and helpful people on the water.

PFDs And The Like:

Our rule is that PFDs (life jackets) must be worn in bad weather, at night, and in the Atlantic. This seems a bare minimum. If a PFD is uncomfortable, it is less likely to be worn. We each have Mustang inflatable PFDs with built-in harnesses. These are quite comfortable for long usage. Before going off shore or sailing in strong winds, you should rig a jack line along each side and clip off to them when conditions warrant. Webbing jack lines are the most common choice because they lie flat under foot when stepped on. We also run a third, short jack line

along the floor of the cockpit. We use a two-strap tether. The 6-foot strap is comfortable in the cockpit. The 3-foot strap provides a lot more security and peace of mind when going up on deck.

Since *Moondance* is a 28 foot coastal / Bay cruiser, we didn't have a life raft (we did have an inflatable dink in tow). Nor did we have an EPIRB (though I believe Boat U.S. rents them). One has to make choices. Obviously, these are good things to have.

Night Sailing:

Falling overboard is never good (we hope never to find out). Falling overboard at night can be a death sentence. In the Atlantic we had 4 – 5 foot waves much of our trip. It would have been difficult to spot a person bobbing in the water mid-day. At night it would have been virtually impossible. Not long ago *Practical Sailor* magazine had an article about the importance of strobe lights on a PFD at night. I now believe that having a strobe in the water would be the only decent chance a boat would have of finding an overboard person at night. A man overboard pole is also a very worthwhile investment. Having said all that, the main thing is to have respect for the ocean and don't put yourself in a position where you can fall overboard, particularly at night. With this in mind, we decided ahead of time that we would put the first reef in the main sail before each nightfall, even if the winds were mild. Furthermore, no one was to leave the cockpit and climb on deck at night unless it was absolutely necessary. If it was necessary to climb on deck at night, the other person had to be alerted and come top-side (even if it meant waking them).

There are several different ways of scheduling watches and how you manage them differs depending on how many people you have on board. We sail double-handed and have found that three hour watches work best for us. If you've got more people, doubling up for four hour watches works. We set formal watches from 8:00 pm until 8:00 am. We were less formal during the daylight hours, though the rough on-off watch system did continue on it's own accord in the Atlantic and fairly differently from our normal Bay sailing. Be aware that there is a transition period between shifts where you are checking and logging your position. So, the person going down doesn't really get a full three hours of rest. The later watches of the evening can be a bit rough in terms of wanting to fall asleep. We read an article on watches where the author recommended preparing little late night snack packs (individual zip-lock bags of Snickers or M&Ms and the like – one per person per watch) and preparing hot coffee or cocoa in a thermos bottle. We didn't do this but think it would have been a good idea, particularly the coffee or cocoa. We did bring some hard candies and found that sucking on one did help keep us awake. A walkman / mp3 player may also help.

You should have a red light by the chart table so you can check headings and make log entries without blinding yourself and killing your night vision. We had a rechargeable spotlight on board. This was handy when leaving our home port at night and somewhat more useful in the Chesapeake than in the Atlantic. However, there can be a fair amount of reflection off the deck, or if it is remotely foggy, off the fog. They're not expensive, so are worth having. I had also picked up a Pelican Mini Mighty Light. This small, waterproof, light has a halogen beam that runs off one AAA battery. It also has a red disk for night vision and a lanyard so you can hang it around your neck. I used the red disk, hung it around my neck, and found the thing absolutely

wonderful. We ended up handing it off at shift changes. I wish we had had two on board – one for each of us and immediately purchased another when we returned.

We slept in the V-berth, so leeboards / leecloths weren't necessary. It wouldn't have been possible to sleep two to a bunk anywhere. Make sure there is a place that each person can sleep while on heel or being tossed by waves. The V-berth is a less than optimal option. We used it because the layout of our small boat. Normally it's the last choice (very bumpy). Quarter-berths are better. Bunks can be shared across different shifts.

Night sailing is significantly cooler than day sailing. We were concerned that we hadn't brought enough warm cloths to last our trip. Bring an extra pair of sweats – clothes that can be layered. Sweats also work well under foul weather gear.

Part 2 - *Moondance's* Delmarva Circumnavigation Friday 07 June – Saturday 22 June 2002

Our actual circumnavigation is described here in quasi-log format. Each boat's trip will be influenced by different choices made in the planning stage. In our case, we chose to skip the northern Bay because we had cruised it extensively the previous Fall and wanted to get in a "practice" night sail. Our timing for the Atlantic portion was driven largely by our wish to visit and arrive at the Chesapeake Light Station at dawn (giving us daylight to sail back into Bay and to Norfolk, VA). The tower was the only Chesapeake Area light we hadn't yet seen as part of our Chesapeake Bay Lighthouse Project (<http://cblights.com>). It sits 15 miles out and can not be seen from shore. Getting to it involves a several mile detour further south and out from the entrance of the Bay. This extended our ocean passage by about half a day and added a second evening at sea. Once back in the Bay, we skipped many of the more common cruising destinations, such as Onancock, Tangier Island, Chrisfield, Deltaville, and Reedville (all worthy places to visit), only because we had visited them with *Moondance* on earlier cruises. This gave us the opportunity to dedicate 3 days and 4 nights to exploring the fingers of Mobjack Bay (a luxury we wouldn't have given ourselves if we hadn't already cruised the Southern Bay to some extent) and visit a couple towns and creeks we hadn't seen before. Here is our cruise in quasi-log format:

Friday 07 June 2002	Arrive at dock (Deale, MD) 19:30. Lots of work stowing provisions, filling water tank, launching our dingy, <i>Moondink</i> , strapping down spare water and diesel cans, etc. Leave dock at 21:30 (after nightfall). Winds about 10 kt. From NE, waves about 2 feet. Good sailing. We finally get a chance to relax and eat dinner on the way out - Italian subs, we'd picked up. The new filling in my rear tooth shatters while still exiting Herring Bay. (My tooth had broken a week earlier with my dentist on vacation. I had gone to someone I didn't know to have it fixed. He did a lousy job.) I give thought to various options and decide I wouldn't be able to see anyone till Monday anyway, so it might as well be in Cape May, NJ. We continue on. Gail takes the first watch at around midnight.
Saturday 08 June 2002	Thomas Point light off port bow at 00:30. 02:15 pass under the Chesapeake Bay Bridge. Waves settle down to 1 foot. Wind shifts to E. It was cooler than either of us anticipated. We're not used to seeing the big dipper so late at night. It sat at a different angle, upright over the glow of Baltimore like a saucepan on a stove. We make excellent time. 09:30 at the base of Turkey Point. 12:00 noon arrive in Chesapeake City, MD in the Chesapeake and Delaware (C&D) Canal. After making sure the anchor holds, we take <i>Moondink</i> to shore, walk town and also photograph the replica of the Bethel Bridge Lighthouse.
Sunday 09 June 2002	Pull anchor 04:45 (early stages of flood tide, about 1 hour after slack tide in the C&D with the light of dawn just starting to filter over the horizon). Dawn is at 05:35. 06:00 we pass under the new Rt. 1 and St. George Bridges. Our speed touches 8 knots by the GPS (Max flood still an hour away – after we finish the C&D). 06:40 we exit the canal and enter the Delaware River. The wind is 5 – 10 knots and puffy. We alternate between motoring and trying to sail. Our course is not as direct as it could have been because we want to visit and photograph a number of lighthouses on the way down (Liston Front Range,

Ship John Shoal, the two Cross Ledge ruins, Miah Maull Shoal, Fourteen Foot Bank, Brandywine Shoal, and Cape May) Unbeknownst to us, the camera has broken and none of these photos will come out. Eventually, as the day progresses and we look at the distance to be traveled, the motor wins out because of our wish to arrive at Cape May during daylight hours. By the time we reach Fourteen Foot Bank Light (14:50), the waves are 3 feet, right on our nose, and the going is slow and somewhat unpleasant. We give Brandywine Shoal (which we see in the distance) a pass and alter course directly towards the Cape May Canal. 16:45 I barely catch sight of a large sea turtle head as he/she ducks under water. 18:30 we enter the Cape May Canal. 19:30 *Moondance* pulls into Utsch's Marina. We top up diesel and water.

Monday
10 June 2002

My tooth isn't in pain, so I decide to deal with it after the cruise. We check the weather forecast, top up the ice, and pull away from dock at 11:45 (There is a 5 foot tide at Cape May and it is near low tide). 12:25 *Moondance* clears the breakwaters and we are in the Atlantic. Wind 10 knots from NE, waves 1 foot. (forecast was 5 – 10 from W turning S, waves 3 feet). Deploy preventer and pole out the Genoa to keep it from being blanketed by the main. Beautiful sailing, almost a run. 13:15 a pod of about 25 dolphins appear off our starboard bow. Groups of 2 – 5 break off and join us for a little while. It doesn't get any better than this. 16:30 we can barely make out the outline of the Indian River Inlet, DE bridge in the distance off our starboard beam. 19:45 take in first reef in main in preparation for the evening and cook dinner. 20:30 beam reaching on an E wind with only a reefed main, speed 3.5 knots. Passing Ocean City, MD we discover the boat sails beautifully, keeping a steady course with the wheel locked – no Autohelm or further attention needed. (Of course we discover this only after using up much of the active battery with the Autohelm). While we are both below checking our position Gail looks up to see something alive land in the cockpit. A dark blue / black bird about the size of a dove has flown into our sail and slid down. Bewildered, he struggles back to his feet and flutters off. 22:15 winds have died to the point where speed is 1.4 kt and start to shift. We've made such good time we are afraid of arriving drastically early. Decide to head 30 degrees off course, following the wind in order to relax, burn time, and wait out the night in comfort. (In hindsight this was a mistake, since we were still 70 miles from our destination.)

Tuesday
11 June 2002

By 06:30 the wind has shifted to S – SW (on our nose), 10 – 15 knots and building, waves 3 feet. Weather forecast for the next couple days increases by 5 knots across the board. We begin beating towards the Chesapeake Light Tower. 10:30 pass red #2 into Chincoteague Inlet. Not getting very far. Battery 2 low from Autohelm. Start engine for a couple hours to recharge. Resume beating. After 5 hours the winds have increased to 15 – 20, waves 4 feet. We have only made about 4 n. miles of progress beating. Time is now a factor as a thunder storm is forecast for Thursday. We consider our options and decide to turn on engine and plow headlong into the waves. Initial speed: 3 knots. 16:47 winds now 20 – 25 knots, waves 5 feet. A rogue wave hits us, engulfing the bow, coming completely over the top of the cabin, flushing debris from under the companionway top, drenching the cockpit (and Gail who was in it). The water

swirls around the cockpit and rushes through the companionway into the cabin (the top slider is shut, but we have no dodger) splashing both the top of the galley and the chart table opposite. I pull out towels and sponges and mop up the mess. No similar waves follow. It is now reasonably unpleasant but does not feel unsafe. We're really getting pounded, have no appetite and skip dinner (which would have been extremely difficult to make anyway). At 18:30 we have averaged only 2.3 n. miles over the last two hours.

Wednesday
12 June 2002

At the midnight shift change our speed over ground has increased to 3 knots. The waves die down to 4 feet. We've lost our starboard running light due to water getting inside and cracking the hot bulb. The Cape Charles Light is visible 20+ miles out and is somewhat comforting. We've been taking a good pounding for quite a while now and alter our course 20 degrees inland so we will have the option of cutting straight into the Bay after Cape Charles (skipping the Chesapeake Light Station) if we so choose. The wind shifts with us, still on our nose. By 04:00 our speed has increased to 3.5 knots. 08:00 we spot the Chesapeake Light Station in the distance off our port bow. Our altered course has placed it on a nice tack. We put up a reefed main and reefed Genoa and alter our course towards it on a close reach. The boat responds nicely. Whereas she had been pounding hard and mercilessly when going straight into the waves, now that she's on a proper tack she cuts through the 4 foot, choppy seas beautifully. We are struck by how really nice it is to sail in these seas and how different and neat the ocean waves are when compared to Bay waves of the same size. We're also proud of how well our little 28 foot, production, boat has handled everything. 09:45 loop and photograph the light tower then head in towards Norfolk. (We have now visited every lighthouse and lightship in the Chesapeake Bay region.) Seas eventually subside to 1 foot. As we pass Cape Henry, we can clearly see the two towers. 15:35 pass over the Chesapeake Bridge – Tunnel. 16:45 pull into Little Creek Marina. Its quite hot on shore. We have spent comfortably over two days at sea, though not all was comfortable. *Moondance* and *Moondink* are both covered in salt. Everyone gets showers (including the boat and dink). We fill up with diesel, water, and ice, top off the engine oil, check batteries, belts, etc. The land rocks badly.

Thursday
13 June 2002

Sleep late. Pull away from dock 10:50. We hadn't planned to do much with this day – just get past Hampton Roads, anchoring in Back River. When we leave Little Creek wind is less than 5 knots and the seas are calm. Within a couple hours the wind increases to about 15 knots from the NE. We put up a reefed main, let out the Genoa and literally fly across the waves on a great close reach. The current is with us and the GPS shows us doing 7.8 knots (which is a new record under sail for us, and more than our hull speed). We decided to shoot past Back River in favor of the Poquoson. We are parallel with it in no time and on a perfect tack for Mobjack Bay. Neither of us want to stop, so we don't. Our plans change again and we head for the North River. The afternoon progresses. We enter Mobjack and can see a night-black storm cell off our starboard bow. The forecast is winds shifting to the S with scattered thunder storms throughout the late afternoon and evening. Our destination doesn't offer protection from the south, so we change our minds again and aim for the East

River. We pull in the sails just before the entrance buoy. The temperature drops, the wind shifts, then the storm cell glances us – just enough to make us put on our foul weather gear and catch about 5 minutes of shower and some gusts. We anchor deep in the East, a bit past Put In Creek. The scattered storms miss us for the most part.

Friday
14 June 2002

We stay at anchor in the East River. Throughout the day there are some brief scattered showers. We put the outboard on the dink and explore the length of the river, including a chunk of Put In Creek. We skip Mathews (a small town like Andy Griffith's Mayberry, good Irish Pub named "The Irish Cottage"). We had been there via Put In Creek before. The weather is iffy and we didn't want to risk getting stuck with a couple mile dink ride returning at night to *Moondance* in the pouring rain. We also encounter problems with air in the fuel line to the external tank stopping the outboard. I cut and re-clamped all hose fittings. This helped, but the problem persisted for the remainder of our trip in a most annoying, on – off, fashion.

Saturday
15 June 2002

We pull anchor at 09:15 and head over to the North River. Pull into Mobjack Bay Marina, top up the water, buy ice, and pay \$3 each to use their showers. (A salt water wash with fresh water rinse off the walk-through transom works well, but it doesn't match a real, hot shower.) When done, we pull around the bend, up the River and drop the hook in front of Hampton Creek. The bottom here is very soft clay and after several hours the anchor drags. We pull and re-set it with an extra liberal dose of full throttle reverse. We don't have any more trouble holding. However, once you've dragged once on a cruise, it sticks in the back of your mind and you're always checking.

Sunday
16 June 2002

At 10:20 we pulled anchor and turned up the River to explore the northern reaches. There are some beautiful large homes lining the bank, including an impressive pillared white mansion by Elmington Creek that has a commanding view straight down the river. We turn around and headed back towards Mobjack and the Ware River. Gail spots a (loggerhead ?) sea turtle at the river entrance. Its about 2 feet across and continues paddling leisurely at the surface as we pass. At 14:00 we anchor in Wilson Creek. The "women of the ware", a group of kayakers paddles by in a large chain. More dink exploring. We get a tour of a Cape Dory 30 that a guy in the house on shore had bought on one of the Great Lakes and sailed down with his son and a friend. We're impressed (as we always are with Cape Dorys) with how solid and seaworthy it feels. He, in turn, is startled by the beam and roominess of *Moondance* – "This is really only 28 feet".

Monday
17 June 2002

Time to move on. We pull anchor at 05:15 and leave with the dawn – destination Urbana, VA on the Rappahannock. This was somewhat of a windless day. However, even this far up the Bay, there was quite a current. At 10:10, in between Wolf Trap Light and the Piankatank River, we run over a stray crab pot – mid-Bay, no other pots anywhere in site. It wraps around the prop and we can definitely tell by the sound of the engine that it's there – no matter how much we hope we're wrong. (We've never done this before and feel quite guilty.) We drop anchor and the knot meter reads 1.8 from the current. We clip a "geriatric line" off to the bow (75 feet of light polypropylene

with a fender on the other end) and I go over the side with a mask and a rigging knife lanyarded to my wrist. Using the line and rudder to hold myself in place against the current, I dive under to find about 15 wraps of line around the shaft, prop, and cutlass bearing area. It cuts away fairly easily, but requires several dives. I also scrape the honeycomb of new barnacles on the prop and shaft. Since I'm already wet and we're alone mid-Bay, we decide it's bath time. (The current makes washing long hair much easier.) 16:05 we pull into Urbana and anchor in the basin. The town is quite scenic and has everything a cruiser needs – marinas, hardware / marine store, Laundromat, supermarket, and restaurants all within easy walking distance. (Of course we arrive on a Monday night and most of the restaurants are closed.)

Tuesday
18 June 2002

Pick up ice from shore and top up water via the 5 gallon Jerry can. We pull anchor at 09:50. While underway we go on a cleaning binge. What started as a simple wipe-down turns into a strong scrubbing of the teak and holly sole, companionway and some of the walls, followed later by teak-oiling most of the interior. Big improvement! Turn wing on wing past Stingray Point. The half-a-dozen gray ships of the menhaden fleet are mid-Bay and two spotter planes make slow circles overhead. 15:55 we pulled into Prentice Creek off Dividing Creek. The bottom is soft and it takes us several tries before we set.

Wednesday
19 June 2002

We pull anchor at 06:05. A schooner-rigged skipjack that had been converted into a private yacht had pulled in after us and anchored around the bend. They've done a nice job on her, right down to the carved nameplate below the bow pulpit and we admire her as we motor out. Here we have a choice. The original plan was to go to Smith Creek off the Potomac. We'd been there a couple times. It offers numerous quiet, scenic, anchorages, a great restaurant, and we like it a lot. However, I wanted to pull into Smith Island, one of the two remaining inhabited islands on the Bay. We'd also been there before, but had anchored in Chrisfield and taken the tourist boat over. We'd never sailed into it. Furthermore, Rukes General Store sells the best crab cakes on the Bay – big chunks of fresh back-fin with only enough filler to hold them together. To the Smith Islanders there's nothing out of the ordinary with this. Over 50% of the crabs caught in the Bay come from the Smith and Tangier area. So, they just slap them in a bun and sell them for about \$7. Smith is surround by marshes and shoals, but has a well marked channel going through it. This proved easily navigable from our western approach. However, June is green fly season. These are inch-long, large, biting cow flies that swarm each year like a Biblical plague. As we motored past the marshes about a hundred engulfed the cockpit area of our boat. Gail, who was at the wheel trying to steer while dancing and swatting to keep them from landing on her, paused a moment to stare me straight in the eye and give me these loving words – "I'm going to kill you for this". The flies finally disperse (mostly) once we pass the marshes and approach the half a dozen slips of the one marina in Ewel that is open to transients. Because of the depth, we tie off with our stern towards the channel. There's only so much to do on Smith. We walk Ewel several times, swatting flies on and off. I visit the small museum. We try to dink to Taylortown. However, there is a good chop, our fuel line problem resurfaces, and we were

somewhat concerned about even having enough fuel for the round trip. So, we turn back half way. We had crab cakes for both lunch and dinner, the latter we took back to the boat, asking them to skip the buns and accessories. They are as good as I had remembered. Bar none the best on the Bay.

Thursday
20 June 2002

We wake up to find we had been boarded over the night by a pirate of the feline kind. He/she had managed to pull out a bit of the mosquito netting from the companionway track, but failed to gain entrance to the cabin. We cast off from dock at 08:30 and head towards Solomons. At 9:30 we are sailing on a nice close reach. The *Old Hannibal* (Navy target ship) is on our port beam and Solomons Lump Light on our starboard. Soon we pass the spider-legged light platform that had once been the Holland Island (screw-pile) Lighthouse. It's not hard to visualize how Holland Island and Solomons Lump once worked in concert, guiding shipping through Kedges Strait. Holland Island is interesting. It once had a community, a few hundred strong, similar to Smith and Tangier. However, the island is being reclaimed by the Bay and the people have left. Some of the houses were moved to Smith and the Chrisfield area. However, a few remain, including a big white colonial on the northern end. Through the binoculars, we could see the water lapping against their foundations. The history of the Bay is full of stories of islands that were, but no longer are. We have good wind out of the NE and made about 6 kts much of the day. At Solomons, we anchor in Mill Creek amongst a number of other cruising boats. We've been to Solomons several times and don't bother going ashore.

Friday
21 June 2002

The trip is definitely winding down, though we're not ready for it to. Pulled anchor at 08:10 and head towards Tilghman Island. The wind is from the N, directly on our nose (despite the SW forecast). We had plans to meet a friend at Tilghman. However, he bailed last minute. So we pull up to the Knapp Narrows fuel dock just long enough to pick up ice and water and continue under the bridge and over to Duns Cove off Harris Creek. This is a pretty, but popular cove. It's a fairly short sail from our home port and we chose it largely so we could get back with several hours to spare for cleaning and unpacking. Duns has a good sized shoal off the starboard side once you've passed the main entrance. As we sit at anchor, we watch a 42' Catalina motor straight onto it. When it's apparent they can't motor off, we put the outboard on *Moondink* and go over to offer help. Another couple boats do the same, but the tide is receding and soon there are three inches of bottom paint showing above the water. It's clear that they aren't going anywhere soon. We reset their anchor in deeper water and return to our boat to watch them sitting there, facing the opposite direction of all the other boats in the cove, Genoa out, sailing nowhere in wait for the tide change that is after midnight.

Saturday
22 June 2002

We pull anchor at 9:05 and head home. The winds diminish rapidly and barely a ripple shows on the water until we reach Herring Bay. We arrive back at our slip at 15:30 with a large "to do" list before our next trip.

At the time this was written in 2002, we had been sailing our 1990 28 foot Hunter sloop *Moondance* on the Chesapeake Bay since 1997. This was our first off-shore trip and was a great

learning experience. Some of the choices we made were due to the size and type of boat we had and the simplicity of her electronics. There are some things we'd do a bit differently today. In 2004 we sold *Moondance* and upgraded to a Caliber 35 Long Range Cruiser (our "dream boat"). We christened her *Alisios*, the word the old Spanish explorers gave the trade winds that carried them across the ocean. Since our initial Delmarva circumnavigation we've made a number of long trips, including sailing to New York City, circumnavigating Long Island, and returning. We used the lighthouse quest as a way to see the Chesapeake Bay and have built a website dedicated to the Bay and all of its lighthouses at <http://cblights.com>. Though our lighthouse project is over, we continue to explore and love the Chesapeake. We welcome emails, feedback, and inquiries. We can be reached at cblights@earthlink.net.