



MAINE ATTRACTION

PETE GOSS HEADS UP THE EAST COAST OF THE US TO MAINE, TO
ENJOY CHANCE MEETINGS AND ALL THE QUIRKS OF LIFE

Bursting through the Cape Cod Canal is like a voyage through Narnia's wardrobe. Huge lunar forces whisk us along as the rugged granite world of Buzzards Bay fades in our wake. Ahead is a softer world with gentle curves of pristine white sand that glow in the sun.

The bewitching beauty of Cape Cod Bay is formed in the protective embrace of an arm with a perfect anchorage in its palm. Protected by the final clasp of a finger we find that nature has gifted Provincetown a magic of its own. Fish jump, seals feed and birds wheel in the crisp Atlantic air, which gently tugs at the anchor. The predominantly gay community makes nightlife a joyous riot of exuberant colour.

Provincetown proves to be the perfect staging post for our final 160-mile push north to Penobscot Bay. The Mayflower made its first landfall here but, finding it





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tough, they crossed the bay to put their roots down in Plymouth. The alluring beauty of summer belies a harsh winter, the first of which was to rob life from half of their number. The America that we know has been hard won by those whose yearning for home is reflected in the familiarity of place names: Plymouth, Biddeford, Bristol and Falmouth are mixed in with Isle au Haut and Castile.

Maine has been on Tracey’s bucket list for years. Jetlag, a prelaunch job list and long days to get here from Chesapeake has left us with a weariness that’s started to take the shine off life. So we stop for a restorative day which offers an opportunity to reflect on an all-consuming trip home for our daughter’s beautiful Cornish wedding.

Names with tales to tell

There are more islands to explore off the coast of Maine than in the Caribbean. About a third of these are 10 acres in size and only 15 of them are inhabited year-round. Studying the charts, Tracey and I marvel at the stories that might lie behind the likes of the Infidelity and Hypocrite islands, our imagination running wild as my dividers trace Two Bush Channel. Camden is chosen as our starting

point and we bid Provincetown a fond farewell as we cross the Stellwagen Bank, a haven for whales. A distant fluke and traces of whale breath is all we are gifted by these elusive giants.

Camden is lovely but we suffer one of our worst nights since leaving the UK. The wind backs further than forecast and opens our anchorage to a short chop on the beam. It’s the worst frequency for *Pearl* and we are jerked back and forth. We nail every rattle but the motion remains too sharp for sleep. I wish I’d listened to that nagging voice yesterday afternoon, for the



Above: navigation needs cware – lobster pot markers are everywhere. Right: Pete and Tracey Goss are living aboard their Garcia Exploration 45, Pearl

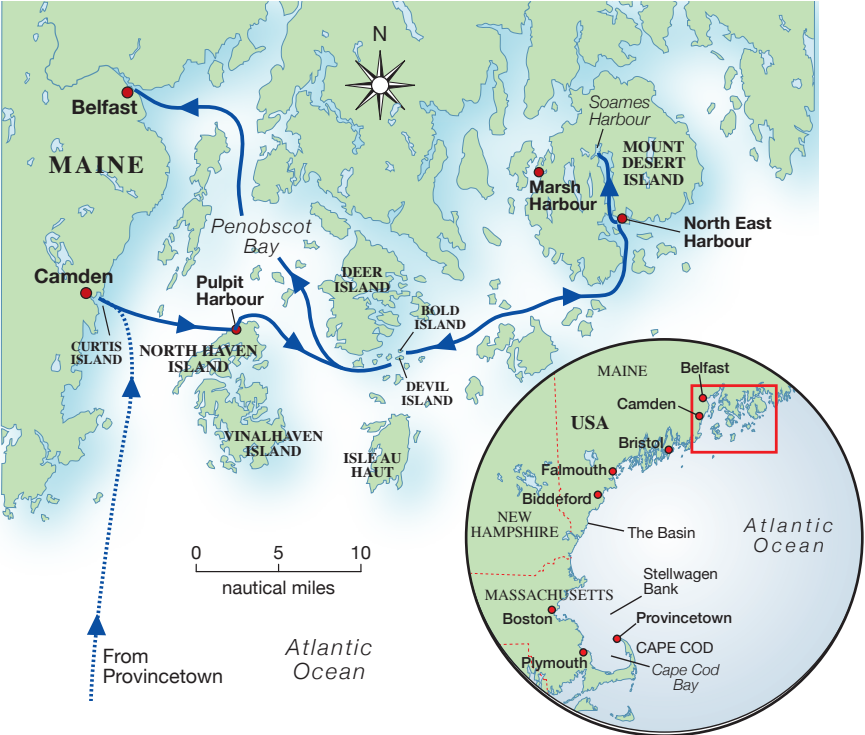


abundance of lobster traps precludes a night departure. We have no choice but to tough out a night of the long knives. A ghostly windjammer is given substance as the sun, carving its early morning arc for the heavens, struggles through the fog. The blanket is heavy, all is momentarily still, birdsong is amplified across the anchorage. We are going nowhere. Time for boiled eggs, soldiers and extra strong coffee.

The forecast has strengthened and will back further, we have to move. We prepare the mainsail, strap everything down and I zip the rubbish ashore with a handheld GPS in my pocket. This is our first brush with Maine fog and I chat with a crusty old lobsterman who explains that while it might be thick as porridge here it could be bright sunshine a mile away. Think of it as thick banks that are on the move. “Get on with it, brother,” he advises.

Struggling to find *Pearl*, I give thanks to my GPS and, as newbies, we decide to see if the bank will move. Traffic is diminished but I’m surprised at both the volume and speed of what movement there is. Another coffee and Curtis Island, which sits at the entrance of Camden, takes substance. We walked it the day before and explored the lighthouse which is run by a charity. The air had been crystal clear and we could easily see Pulpit harbour, our

chosen destination, not more than eight miles away. I have reintroduced myself to the radar. It’s time to haul the anchor and make our move. We raise the main with two reefs as the wind is freshening with a vengeance. It’s a relief to be breaking out of the exposed anchorage. Fog and lobster traps keep Tracey fully occupied as lookout. I helm through the short, steep seas and watch the radar. Its high tide so many of the traps dip below the waves, sometimes staying down for a couple of passes. It feels like a high stakes game of ‘Whack a Mole’, for to hitch a trap now would be disaster. Halfway across the bay, we wriggle our way through some Islands which have the inconvenience of narrow channels and random rocks. The wind rises to 30 knots, torrential rain machineguns out of a new fog bank and light is further robbed as heavy clouds scud above. Its full-on and we are loving it. Every sinew and sense is on full alert as gusts of 35 knots blow away the accumulated cobwebs of many hours under motor to get here. Small voids in the fog provide reassuring glimpses of orientation beyond the 12in screen of wizardry that demands absolute faith – something, as someone who grew up using dead reckoning, a well swung compass and Walkers log, I can’t quite give.





Left: Maine is dotted with hundreds of small islands. Above: restored windjammers still sail the waters of Maine without engine. Below right: Seine netters with a haul of pogies (from the herring family)

‘ONE OF THE JOYS OF MAINE IS THERE ARE LOTS OF OLD WINDJAMMERS’

light aircraft descends into the trees as a latecomer leaves the chaos of modernity and drops in for the weekend. The sun silhouettes an old boy who drifts past in his punt, completely lost to fly fishing.

Absorbing life

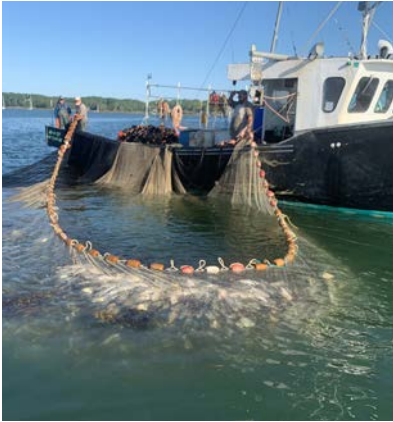
One of the aspects of our waterborne life is the looseness of having aspirations as opposed to plans.

This means we are able to absorb and embrace the quirks that lie in every corner of life. We’re in North East Harbour and I can’t help noticing a small pilot cutter make a couple of furtive and admiring passes of *Pearl*. On hailing the crew, it turns out that Dana and Melissa are keen on taking up the cruising life.

Offering them a tour, we agree to meet in Soames Harbour. The following afternoon a bottle of rosé precedes their clamber aboard. This is followed by a cold box and an old, rather large enamel cooking pot which turns out to have been grandma’s.

A fun and detailed tour of the boat concludes with a lesson on how to cook lobster ‘Maine style’. Melissa has a license for five lobster traps and out of the cold box comes four large lobster and a bag of clams. An inch of harbour water, rich in plant life, is brought to the boil. In goes the lobster, clams on top. The result is amazing and it’s a delight to be taught the tricks of how to tackle a lobster without tools – it’s easy when you know. Once again, we make great friends as we chatter into the early hours and learn about a family that goes back through Maine’s rich history. Melissa has fond memories of staying with her grandparents who were among the last lighthouse keepers.

Dana insists we must visit Merchant Row and so it goes as each highlight hands us on to the next on this



Above: Pearl at anchor. Right: fresh Maine lobster on the supper menu



In our ongoing quest for a safe anchorage we thrash through the last turn of the Island maze as a final blast heralds clear bright sunshine. A switch has been flicked, *Pearl* lurches upright, the seas flatten under the approaching lee of North Haven Island. I start the engine, *Pearl* steams in the sun as we strip off thermals. We have burst through a portal to a warm and welcoming world.

Weather transition

The perfection of Pulpit Harbour makes the transition all the more extraordinary as our anchor plunges through the reflection of a safe haven. *Pearl* is once again dry and we enjoy lunch in the cockpit as we watch an Osprey pluck fish from the sea with predatory efficiency. Did the last two hours of action and excitement really happen?

I launch my paddleboard and have a vigorous hour exploring the many arms of Pulpit Harbour. My paddleboard goes by the name of *Mindy* after our much-loved and missed dog. Post school run she became our lightning rod for meeting people. It’s now through paddling about that I meet the most interesting and diverse of characters. It’s not uncommon to find myself drawn into a long yarn.

I meet a descendant of the Cabot family who came here

before the Mayflower. The extended family still owns a headland in trust with over 20 houses to cater for future generations.

One of the joys of Maine is that there are lots of old windjammers that have been rescued by tourism. Many are based in Camden and pull into Pulpit Harbour on Friday night for the convenience of a short sail home. Some of these ships don’t have engines and so we are mesmerised as two of them sail through the narrow entrance, tack and give about the congested harbour before finally dropping their anchor under sail. I don’t think I have ever seen such a demonstration of seamanship and it really opens my eyes as to how manoeuvrable large sailing ships of old can be.

There is a floating dock beside us that turns out to be a collection point for lobster boats as they roar in with the throaty growl of open exhausts. The catch is sorted into floating baskets and I row over to buy a couple of fresh lobster, for this amazing day deserves to end with a date night. Good old YouTube shows me how best to barbecue these local delights.

Tracey rustles up a salad and we pull a chilled white from the fridge. The table is set, candles are lit and music complements the sizzle of lobster with garlic batter. A



‘AT ANCHOR WE HEAR POGIES BOIL UP LIKE A GIANT SILVER BUBBLE’

wonderful chain of discovery. We anchor between Bold and Devil Island and my paddleboard reveals an abundance of wildlife. I creep round a rocky outcrop and am in the majestic presence of royalty. Not more than ten metres away is a bald eagle tearing a large fish apart that’s dwarfed by its talons. Standing just short of 1.5m it exudes the confidence of being at the top of its food chain. It’s me that’s intimidated as I’m held in its haughty gaze. Thrilled by the experience I ease back and paddle like a madman to return with Tracey in the dinghy so she can see it too.

Lighthouse family

We visit Segwin Island and explore its lighthouse; a small museum illuminates a unique and hardy way life that is ruled by a duty to passing seafarers. The whole family played their part, supplementing basic stores with shooting, fishing and tending the vegetable garden. The lighthouse absorbs a lot of time and effort for its steam fog horn burns through 100 tons of coal a year. All of which has to be hauled up a long tramway to feed the boiler. Like all lighthouses of old there are tales of great heroism.

Belfast is one of our favourite towns as it is a blend of bustling commerce and tourism, each complimenting the other to create an authenticity that some postcard towns lack. My eye, during a morning paddle, is drawn to what turns out to be a Cornish Gig. As ever, *Mindy* makes the introductions and I am soon rowing my heart out for 45 minutes on *Selkie*. Belfast is sending a team to the Isles of Scilly to compete in the world championships. Later that day we find ourselves in a huge marquee for the Thursday evening live entertainment. Picnics and dancing pulls the whole community together on a weekly basis.

We never cease to be amazed by the huge shoals of pogies that roil about these waters. At anchor we hear them boil up like a giant silver bubble of thrashing fins as they are hunted from below. They are about the size of mackerel and oily enough to be smelled when to windward. I often paddle over giant shoals and am mesmerised by the patterns created as they starburst away.

Above: glassy waters and a Maine sunset. Right: foghorn at the Segwin Island Lighthouse was steam powered by coal hauled up a tramway by hand



Maine is a remote place and the people are grounded in its rugged beauty with an easy confidence and friendly demeanor. I spend 40 minutes chatting to lobstermen as they shovel barrels of Pogies out of their Seine net for lobster bait. Three generations work side by side in quiet harmony. A staggering three million traps make the seas of Maine look like a giant has spilt a bag of M&Ms, so dense in places that it’s hard to find passage. Tons and tons of bait means that lobster are now being farmed.

There is nothing like a hurricane to focus our minds as Dorian tears her way up the league table. We watch with horror as her dark and destructive heart settles on the Abacos to feed with wanton destruction. We were anchored in Marsh Harbour six months ago and to see images of nothing left but foundations is truly shocking. The Abacos consumed, appetite unfulfilled, Dorian moves on for more. She sniffs the air and starts to carve a belligerent path towards us. Her predicted cone of uncertainty makes for sobering viewing.

Plan for the worst and hope for the best is a motto that has served me well and so we scour the charts for a safe haven. Maine, with lots of hurricane holes, doesn’t disappoint but its ‘The Basin’ that catches our eye. A quirk of nature has a gifted a narrow entrance with a final

protective bend before opening up to offer a harbour with the confidence of good holding.

With Hurricanes tending to pinball off Cape May for Nova Scotia ‘The Basin’ conveniently lies up in the north-West armpit of Maine. We set our anchor two days ahead of her arrival, back up on full throttle and watch the forecast crystallise. A guilty relief settles on *Pearl* as Dorian passes us to consume Nova Scotia. We thank our daughter’s wedding for taking Nova Scotia off the table. The twists and turns of life.

Rising before dawn our six-week chapter in Maine comes to a close as we make for a returning tide through the Canal. Boston’s sky scrapers, standing tall above the morning mist, light up as they catch the first of the rising sun. Like sentinels they give our passing a nod as we toast them with our morning coffee. Thanks Maine. ■



Round the world racer Pete Goss left the UK in 2017 with his wife, Tracey, to go cruising in their García Exploration 45, Pearl. Their aim is to eventually head through to the Pacific and towards New Zealand.

