

Nicola Ratcliffe – UK to Canada 2017



My Canadian adventure was truly a once in a life time adventure for me and I got to have this amazing adventure thanks to the James Myatt Trust and ASTO. These organisations paid for and helped me organise my experience. At this point I would like to thank Marcia in the ASTO office without whom I would have been completely hopeless at sorting all the logistics out. The work and money these Trusts have put in to me and my development has really meant a lot to me and helped me gain back much of my confidence after a hard year.

My adventure started on the 30th June at Gatwick airport, I have never flown or been out of Europe before so I was a tad nervous and the flight was going to be 9 hours long. After successfully boarding the plane and leaving England I arrived in Vancouver international airport, I can't remember what time I landed only that it was light when it should have been dark which was most upsetting to my jetlagged mind. Next I got on a bus then a ferry then another bus and arrived at downtown Victoria on Vancouver Island.

The next day was joining the boat day, I arrived to the dock down through the celebration of 150 Canada Day, this was a big deal. Joining the boat was a hectic experience of meeting 39 new people all at once while learning all about how I was to spend the next 10 days. There were 40 people on the boat 30 of which were trainees and 10 crew, 5 of which were full time. The 5 full time crew were Cook, two Watch Officers, 1st Mate and Skipper, there were also 3 Watch leaders, an Assistant Cook and Trainee Bosun who were volunteers.

We set off the same day at 3pm, got to know our watches and sailed right through the night in our watch system, this seemed to be a big deal according to the crew but I could not tell if they were just exaggerating a bit. However we did not do it again for the remainder of the trip so it must have been a relatively infrequent occurrence for them. The night sailing was good and we had the courses up which were of an interesting design, two on each side of the forward mast. They were fun to put up also.

Day two we carried on sailing up towards Desolation Sound, in the morning we put the topsail up, we got the dories out, which are a very wobbly row boat, to row to shore at a place called Musket Island. We had anchored overnight in the Malaspina Strait we pulled up the anchor at 0900 and set the fore and main sails for the first time. We also did a tack, though quite often during the trip if we were to beat in to the wind we would just take the sails down and motor as to beat in to the wind was deemed to take too much time.

There were formal lessons at, junior, intermediate and senior level. I was deemed to have too much existing sailing knowledge to be in junior and was put in intermediate. They were unlike anything I have heard of, very much sit down read out of the text book lessons with an exam at the end with a pass/fail grade during what was just a normal sail training trip, there seemed to be less learning by doing and hands on experience and more learning from the book. Whether this was because of the size of the ship, too big to safely leave any trainees unaccompanied in a job or because they thought it produced better results I am not sure. The lessons were interesting although for me more of a recap over some of the stuff I need for my Yachtmaster Coastal.



That night we anchored at Cortez island. The next day we sailed over to Savary Island. After chores, we took the dories out to the beach on the island and played football. Then we sailed all afternoon, we had 9 sails up. We anchored at Teakerne Arm. Day 5 we went to a freshwater, water fall and had a shower under it. Then we went swimming in Cassel Lake it was so deep the 100ft tree logs were upright in it. I swam for nearly 2 hours as the water was incredibly

warm. Unfortunately the wind had died so we could not sail and had to motor however an amazing highlight was we saw a Humpback Whale mother and baby. During the motoring we did more lessons, rules of the road, and then stopped at Carington bay. Day 6 we were sailing through the Strait of Georgia some of the most stunning landscape I've ever seen. We also saw sea lions sunning themselves on a buoy. The wildlife I saw on this trip was amazing and diverse.



That evening when we anchored we had a party and swam in the ocean there was also a rope swing rigged up. Lots of the sailing was pretty much rig the sails and point the boat because of the nature of the channels we were sailing through. There was no room for tacking so we did not sail against the wind but we did some fantastic running with the courses and the topsail up and some good reaching with the jib and the main up.



The seventh day was something called boat Sunday which I think implied a day of rest. This meant no sailing but a great trip to Jedediah Island in the dories and a swim in the lagoon there as well. The next day we weighed anchor but no wind so we motored. We did see Orcas, at least 5 with a calf. We did more study - lights and charts. We stopped for the night at Montague which was near Galiano. Day 9 was a finishing and saying good bye day. We had a talent show, I participated, had watch like the other days when it was our turn. On the final day we brought the Pacific Swift back to safe harbour at Victoria and departed from the boat.



I met a whole boat full of new people many with a real passion for sailing and learnt so much about how other sail training operations run, and their objectives and goals and why they thought they were important. The SALTS sail training society value time spent with the young people, helping them to become more responsible, but also allowing them time to just be kids with none of the stress of school or pressures of home life. You can see it as a retreat, a chance to focus on physical and mental health and their mobile phone ban shows they value the bonds formed and how important that is to the success of the trip. It was very different from the type of sail training I have seen and been part of before, with less emphasis placed on the learning about the boat and more on being part of the boat community.