

Bad Kitty puts a HEX on the Cheekee Monkee

Or how I blew Swiftsure 2002 by: Kim Alfreds



Swiftsure 2002, light winds predicted, light winds it was! Here we are just before the start of the race. As you can see, little to know wind with an eastward setting current (takes you away from the starting line or causes you to hit the committee boat). We located ourselves in the back eddy current behind Clover Point.

Starting Line

The Starting Line will be between a staff displaying an orange flag on the Committee Vessel (a Canadian Naval Vessel) anchored approximately 1,000 metres (3,280 feet) southeast of Clover Point and a staff displaying an orange flag on a Pin End Vessel anchored approximately 200 metres (660 feet) southeast of Clover Point.

Prior to the start, as usual, we set the spinnaker and repack it on the net so it is ready to go up straight, free and clear. Ahhhh...What's THAT...Bad Kitty has left their mark on the foot of the Cheekee Monkee's spinnaker. A tell tale paw print!

A telling print, we repack the sail and get ready for the start, Bad Kitty comes over to our back eddy and as the minutes count down she comes up

from astern and screechers right past us to leeward, we set our screecher and head for the line, the gun goes off and Bad Kitty beats us to the line by mere seconds. Both boats got off to a great start at the favoured end of the line.



Shortly after the start, we have sailed out of sight and the rest of the fleet struggles for hours to cross the line.

The tide turns early and it doesn't make sense to us to try to break through Race Rocks, by 10AM, we are at 48 22.310 N and 123 24.207W grid 5D, not bad, by 11 AM, we are at 48 21.367 N and 123 27.907 W, this is the closest we get to Race Rocks. At this point we elect to head out to the middle of the straight. A couple of hours later, Rage and Neptune's Car were first through Race Rocks, followed about an hour later by Bad Kitty. You can see our struggles over the next 5 hours on the chart shot. Between 1600 and 1700 we finally break out and are outside of Race Rocks. After our 1800 position, we make rapid progress down the shipping lanes.

The most interesting encounter is later in the evening when a submarine comes charging down the shipping lanes with a coast guard patrol boat yelling at all the competitors to keep clear of the sub. I thought they could travel under water? Wouldn't that keep them clear of all the shipping and they could go anywhere they wanted.

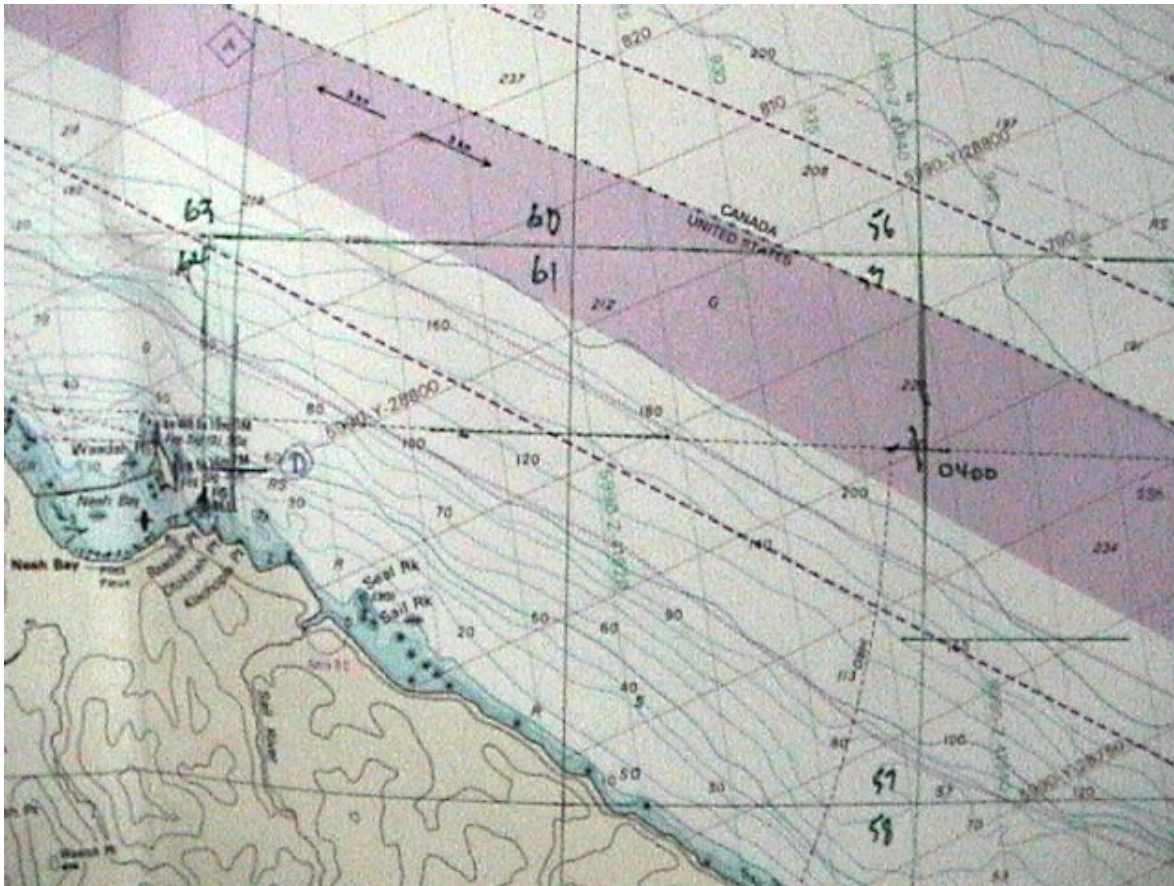


By 0400 we were at 48 23.442 N 124 39.987 W, 6 1/2 miles due east of the mark and 4 miles off the US shore.

On board the Cheeke Monkee this year was my son Shane, my son-in-law Jason and my cousins daughter Kate (a CYA sailing instructor from Calgary). Since 99, I have been having the crew race the boats, so each of these 3 were doing 1-hour rotations on the helm from 10AM on. My role was to coach and handle the start, rounding and the BIG finish. 0400, I decide I will take the helm and for some reason at that point, my ears shut, my mind went AWOL, I ignored the GPS, the charts, everything that could help me and I just pointed the boat at the mark. With 2 - 4 knots of boat speed, I figured we would round at 0530.

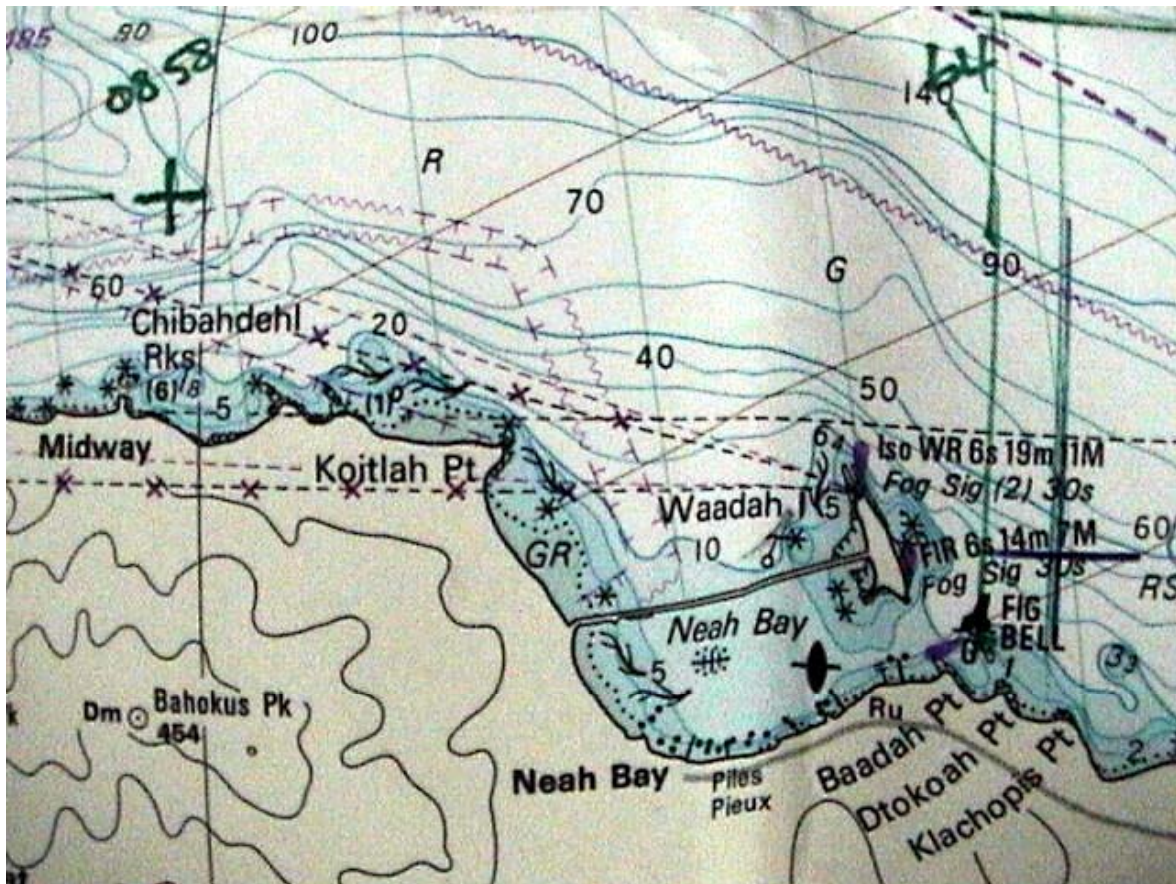
The problem was, I completely ignored the current. At this point, only 3 boats were ahead of us, Rage & Renegade on the Swiftsure bank course and Neptune's Car on the Flattery Unlimited course. Actually, I think we might have been ahead of Neptune's Car at this point, but events changed.

Picture this, you point your boat at the mark, and the boat carves a slow arc as we sail past the mark with the ebb tidal current. I was in denial, I was sailing as if there was no current. What supreme arrogance, much like the Emperor's new clothes.



About 0700, up pops a nice westerly wind, so what do I do (still being in denial)? We set the chute on Starboard Tack and I promptly sailed west at 6 - 7 knots with the current to get down to the port lay line. We arrive and gybe over to Port Tack and start being carried into the shore, not making the lay line, then the wind quickly veers to the East and now we have to sail upwind back to the mark which was now at least a mile to windward and up stream. Oops! By 0858 we have continued to sail backwards into grid 68A our position was 48 24.512N 124 40.622W at this point, I gave up. I can't believe it, but I gave up. The HEX worked, it frazzled my brain. I was in current denial.

The tide book indicated that the tide changed from ebb to flood at 0755. By 0900 we had seen no evidence of it, the current continued to flow westerly sweeping us past the Chibahdehl Rocks. I decided that with an 8 hour motor trip back, no wind and no co-operation from the current and the desire to get back before the current changed again, I decided not to wait for the noon cut off as I didn't see us getting back to the mark by noon. The crew didn't argue with me too much, but it was clear that this was a disappointing result based on the excellent sailing we had done to get out to the mark in the first place. The skipper (me) was solely at fault by having his brain go off into la la land instead of understanding the current current situation as he approached the mark.



Above is the last position of the Cheeke Monkee before we fired up the motor and headed back to Victoria under power. During the trip back, we had absolutely no wind the entire way, none, nada, zip, no wind.

Now back to the HEX. I the skipper is no stranger to currents and light winds. I had lots of hints, for example, I kept us out in the stronger flow carrying us westward prior to 0400. The crew was doing a great job of sailing the boat with their one-hour rotations at the helm of the Cheeke Monkee. When I took the helm at 0400 for the first time since the starting line, Shane asked me a question about the variance between the GPS track bearing and the fluxgate compass heading on the boat. I dismissed the question with a glib "I don't know, it's probably magnetic vs. true, who knows". Well we all know that the answer is the difference is the result of the set of the current on the vessel. The GPS gives us the actual track over the bottom and the compass gives us the direction the boat is physically pointed. Did this go through my mind? HEX no! Shane took the GPS with him below to call in out 0400 position. Supreme sailor me, I never looked for or asked for the GPS again, HEX no I don't need a GPS to point the boat at the mark!

Jason came on deck about 0430 and asked, "Why we don't sail over that way?" (Pointing to the shore) where Neptune's Car was heading. I said that wasn't the right way to sail, we were pointed at the mark and that was where we wanted to go. Kate came on deck about 0530 and wondered if she had missed the mark rounding. We said HEX no, not yet, as it seemed we were having a little trouble getting there.

At no time did we recognize what was happening to us and try to correct the problem, all I could do was point at the mark as we were slowly swept past the mark until it was too late and I then decided to actually sail away from the mark at high speed under spinnaker. HEX was the mildest of thoughts that raced through my mind as I realized that I had stubbornly refused to acknowledge what was actually happening to us on the Cheekee Monkee. Arrogant Current Denial! My cardinal sin of the Swiftsure 2002.

I hope not to be repeated, see you all next year, same time same place!



Bad Kitty leaves her mark!

Winner Swiftsure 2002 Multi-hull division, congratulations to Karl and crew from the Cheekee Monkee!