

The Ten Bridges Cruise – September 25/26, 2004

The need for an overnight getaway and a long-standing desire to cruise to downtown Portland combined for our season-ending Ten Bridges Cruise. The roughly 16 mile route from Tomahawk Bay on Hayden Island in the Columbia River to the River Place Marina on the Willamette River in downtown Portland would slip under ten bridges. We actually snuck in an eleventh, but more on that later.



Little more than a half-mile down stream from our moorage we passed under the Interstate 5 Bridge connecting Oregon and Washington. This is actually two side-by-side spans but we only count it as one. Since our 19' West Wight Potter "Second Wind" needs just 27 feet of clearance, we pass easily under almost any section. Much of the barge traffic even avoids the lift span by using the alternate channel under the raised roadbed section.

Three-quarters of a mile further finds us at the Burlington Northern railroad bridge. On the St. Helen's cruise last year we passed thru the pivoting section because it had been opened for something bigger. This year we opted for a more direct route on the south side of the river.



The next three miles to Kelly Point at the confluence of the Columbia and Willamette rivers, passed thru the anchorage and turning pool for large ocean going freighters traveling in and out of the ports of Portland and Vancouver. You really get an appreciation for how huge these ships are when passing them in a sailboat that is smaller than their lifeboats!

Once we turn the corner and head up the Willamette we are between industrial and agricultural environments. To our left, after we pass the entrance to the Columbia Slough, are mile after mile of industrial leftovers where rust is the dominant color. On the right for the first three miles is the southeast end of Sauvie Island, Portland's bucolic backyard. At mile three we pass the entrance to Multnomah Channel, a pleasant 12-mile meander down to St. Helens.



We continue up river towards the industrial NW section of Portland with the elegant St. Johns Bridge in view. It is in the middle of a major restoration and upgrade so there is limited vehicle traffic at this time. The beautiful spires and arches of the bridge obviously inspired the name of Cathedral Park under the NE end of the bridge in St. Johns.

Another railroad bridge looms ahead but there is plenty of clearance. The lifting portion of this bridge replaced a center-pivot style about 30 years ago to provide better horizontal clearance. Still in the NW industrial zone on the right bank, the left offers views of “the bluffs”, an older neighborhood with a great location, overlooking the river in the foreground and the wooded hillsides of Forest Park in the distance.

Four more miles upstream we come under the newest Willamette River bridge – the Freemont. Interestingly, the arch span for this bridge was built on barges in the river just off Swan Island then floated under the approaches and lifted into place. One of the local news stations did a time-lapse of the 36-hour lift so you can see it happen in about 90 seconds. This double-decker bridge carries Interstate 405 from the westside of downtown to reconnect with Interstate 5. Having stood atop the center span during the Portland Bridge Pedal, I wanted to sail under it too. And now I have!



Next is the Broadway Bridge, followed quickly by our only obstacle in the route – the Steel Bridge. The Steel Bridge is unique in that it has two levels that can be raised independently of one another. The upper level carries vehicle traffic and the Max light rail. The lower deck is for the railroad and includes a pedestrian and bicycle path connecting the new Eastbank Esplanade to the north end of Portland’s Tom McCall Waterfront Park. I couldn’t remember what VHF channel the bridge tender monitors and didn’t seem to get a response on ch.16 so I gave him the one-long followed by two-short blasts on the air horn. Holding the horn in your hand, it seems loud enough to

be heard all the way to Salem but I had to repeat two more times and idle around in circles for almost 15 minutes before he opened for me. Before the return trip I discovered that he monitors ch.13 so I was able to connect directly but he had me wait for an inbound Amtrak before he could open up. This gave us a few minutes to putt around in the upstream pool and check out the north end transient moorage on the Eastbank Esplanade.



The next three downtown bridges – the Burnside, Morrison, and Hawthorn – come in rapid succession. I was once again struck by the fact that in August I had ridden my bicycle over most of these bridges, now I had sailed (motored) under them as well. Pretty cool!

The city breakwater at River Place Marina provides a secure solid moorage on a first-come first-served basis. On a busy summer weekend, especially if there is an event going on in Waterfront Park, it would be impossible to find a spot here unless you came in the previous Wednesday! There are two shorter courtesy docks across the river, upstream and downstream from the Hawthorne Bridge. Their ramps access the pedestrian/bike path on the eastside so I'm not sure how comfortable I'd be tying up there overnight unless I was with a group.

After dinner at Newport Bay at the River Place, we watched from the boat as the lights came on in the city and the various dinner cruise ships steamed by. A pleasant end to a pleasant day.



When we got underway on Sunday morning we added the bonus bridge (#11) to our cruise by going another 200 yards upstream passing under the Marquam Bridge to get a better waterside angle for a photo of the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry (OMSI) where our son works.

Reversing our path, we were back in our slip in Tomahawk Bay in three and half hours with no incidents. Our Autohelm ST1000 steered the bulk of the way and I am now convinced that I would never make an extended cruise without some form of self-steering. Being able to enjoy the ride, take pictures, check the charts, bird watch, and just keep an eye out for traffic all while not worrying about the helm is a real joy.

Although we didn't *sail*, it was a fun cruise through the "City of Bridges".