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2004 NHN&WR letter/story #16)

**Boats**

This months subject will be boats, the gist of which may reinforce the quote, *"The second happiest day in a man’s life is when he buys a boat."*

(Editor’s comment, *"Shouldn’t we tell everyone the happiest day?"*

Consensus, *"Nah.")* Ken’s mother Betty irritated him by referring to naval ships as ‘*boats’*. (She also called his navy uniform a *‘sailor suit’* which didn’t set too well either.)

*"Have you been out on a boat since we talked last?"*

*"Mother, ... they’re not boats. A boat is something you put on a ship."*

Futile, ... boats they were and boats they remained along with his darling, little sailor suit.

Old Vermont lore claimed there were more cows than people in the state. In North Hero there are more boats than cows. On Pelot’s Point almost everyone has a water craft of some sort. We’ve neighbors, four removed to the north, who have a fleet of five, ... all beautiful self-crafted wooden vessels and don’t think they own any cows. The boating philosophy here is,

*"If God meant us to have plastic boats he would have made plastic trees."*

Boat owners are a widely divergent group. Fisherpersons do not regard boats as pleasure craft, but as a necessity to their real addiction. The rest can be categorized as : Sailors, Non-Sailors, ‘My Toy is bigger than your Toyers’ or Marina Rats. Pleasure craft can be divided into three groups; power boats, sailboats and muscle-powered. Seadoos/Jetskis are obnoxious. We try to ignore them and will do so here. A high percentage of local boat owners stay inside Carry Bay to the northeast of Pelot’s Point and use them as floating camps. Sailboats venturing out into the lake usually do so in perfect weather. If one watches patiently for a few days they may even see a sailboat with sails up, ... no ‘Moonrakers’ here, but still a beautiful sight.. Obviously for most owners the big deal is just "Having a Boat!" Your NHN&WR staff relates more to the third grouping: rowboats, canoes, kayaks and surfers, ... but in keeping with the flow so to speak, had not had their small boat in the water for three years. (see below.) Our ‘Ultimate’ boat owner resembles our favorite status athlete, ... they who ride around with skis on ski rack all winter and have not the slightest idea how to ski. Namely, they who trailer their boat all over the place and hardly ever put the darn thing in the water.

So much for the boating diatribe, ... now to the weather. This summer has been the wettest in Vermont in ages. After snowmelt and runoff passes in the spring, the lake usually recedes slowly all summer. Small boats are dragged a minimal distance from the water when not in use, say about one inch clear of the lake. Larger boats require a lift and dock. This equipage is installed into the lake when it is assumed the lake level will remain fairly constant for the rest of the boating season. A bad assumption in 2004

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Dock sections are put in the lake in spring. They have four leveling legs on each section and are adjusted about one foot above lake level. Boat lifts also have four leveling legs and are placed adjacent to the dock. Altogether about a half days work for two people on a calm day, ... two young people. As the lake level changes, lifts/docks are moved in/out to accommodate the change. A dock less than a foot above water sort of resembles an old time player piano when a wave passes underneath and water riffles up through the spacing in the planks. Waves too high will carry off the dock sections leaving the lift ,which is anchored by a heavy boat, stranded out in the lake. The term ‘Cedarvale Beach’ is an anomaly. We don’t have beaches, ... we have rockies, which become slimy and slippery when wet. A normal rocky will be 10 to 30 feet wide depending on lake level from water to cliff which also is rock and about 20 feet high. To protect the innocent, if there are any, we will refer to Cedarvale boat owners/rescuers by their original 1960’s Cedarvale lot #. Example; with English & French speaking females & males involved, we may refer to Mme #6 or Mr/Ms #14. (If we mentioned Canine #13 it might give the whole scheme away, so Editor, ...you’re ‘out’a here.) End of scene setting, ... on to the action.

Saturday night, Mr & Mrs #14 are in bed. They hear a banging down on their rocky. Concerned? Yes. Get up and check? Well, ... not that concerned. With daylight the cause is revealed. A blue kayak is being pounded to death on the rocks by high waves. The #14’s run through their kayak repertoire. They know of no one with a blue one. The #14’s have no rocky stairs. To rescue the kayak Mr #14 puts on a wet suit, goes down the #15’s stairs and drags the blue kayak up on the sliver of rock remaining under the cliff. It becomes an A.M. conversation piece. M. ( Monsieur) #6 thinks it might be Mr/Ms #29’s. They come to the #13’s and gaze at #14’s find from the top of the cliff. They recognize the blue kayak as Ms #22’s. She comes. Down the #15’s stairs go the #13s, 14s & 22 with her paddle in hand. It is hers. She’s had it only one month and had left it on her rocky in case the younger #22s wanted to us it. Fearing it might sink en route home, she dubiously gets in and paddles away. Guess she made it, ... haven’t heard.

Over Sunday the lake continued to rise, weekenders departed and a skeletal crew remained in Cedarvale to cope with Mother Nature. Mr #13 rose Monday at dawn to check the dock/lift situation. Not good, ... Section one of #14’s dock was washed up on the rocks, sections two & three were slowly walking toward #10’s dock. The #14’s were still in the area and could look after this. Water was riffling though the planking on #10’s dock and looking north things got worse. # 9’s Outboard and canoe needed immediate attention. Sloshing his way north Mr #13 reaches the outboard. The stern and motor are under water, waves are breaking over the gunwales. The saw horses under the canoe are about to become sea horses. Water was inboarding on the outboard faster than hand bailing could cope. Pails were needed. Up # 9’s stairs goes Mr #13. He meets M. #6 who had come to the same conclusion a few minutes earlier. They get two pails, return and start bailing furiously. With every two pails out and one wave in they gain about one glassful. Finally, the waves no longer clear the stern. Bailers collapse, recover and resume at a more comfortable rate. #9’s boat is now light enough to haul up on rocks away from waves. The same is done with the canoe and Sea Saw Horses, ... or should that be Sea Horse Saw Horse. (‘Word’ is no help and thinks it should be Seesaw Horse.) On to the ‘crazy’ 8s! WOW, ... a sailboat, a dinghy, a wherry and two kayaks. Only the kayaks are safe and sound, nestled up on their own racks. The dinghy is small and man-handled to safety. The sailboat is off its dry dock and taking water through gaps in the canvas cover. Even completely bailed out the boat will be too heavy to drag and too big to fit on the few dry rocks left. Mr #14 (en wetsuit) is summoned. The sailboat is bailed out and towed to an offshore buoy by #14. The wherry is then addressed by the weary. Actually, we thought wherry was spelled weiry. We asked Mr #8 and he spelled it for us. Trouble is, ... we can’t remember. No room for this one ashore either. M. #6 rows it to the Cedavale Public Beach, (#0). While his own outboard is not in immediate danger M. #6 decides to take it up to the Public Beach also. The morning’s work is done. An Email is sent out to inform the blissful absentees, something like,

*"Your boats are temporarily out of danger."*

In retrospect, perhaps a bit curt and non informative. Mr #8 dashes up from Burlington. Mrs #8 obviously not a boat aficionado, has a more important engagement, ... Bridge Club and will come later. Upon arrival at #8, Mr #8 calls Mrs #8. Now normally, from the cabin phone, Mr #8 can see the top of his beloved sailboat’s mast. In mid conversation he suddenly realizes, ...NO MAST! Panic. Phone is dropped, cabin exited, clifftop reached and there, ... out on the lake, safe and serenely bobbing at its mooring is Mr #13’s hand crafted sailboat. Taa Daa! 45 seconds of terror, ... so much for ambiguous status reports.

Remaining were two lifts and two docks which had to be moved and trailering salvaged boats from the Public Beach to back lots. This involved ingenious use of: pickup trucks, cedar poles, a little red wagon, chains, ropes and come-along. #13’s rowboat was even pressed into service to tow dock sections to the Public Beach. Our self-imposed 4 page limit prohibits a blow by blow/contestant by contestant narrative of these operations. Suffice it to say,

*"Gosh, if neighbors didn’t have boats we would never have had all this fun."*

That’s all for now from beautiful North Hero, Vermont where Lake Champlain is still on the rise.

Lucile & Ken

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