

Birding's Last Frontier: The Ocean

Tim Sterrett

First Boating Trip February, 1977

In 1977, pelagic birding trips were still a novelty. Winter trips onto the open ocean were not common. My first pelagic trip was scheduled for February and went out to the Hudson Canyon from Barnegat, New Jersey, on March 5, 1977. My dad quietly reminded me that if I went into the water in winter time, I would not survive.

We all survived and, in the next twelve years, I went on five more pelagic trips.

The Trip

We left Westtown, PA, at 8:00 p.m. (Tim Sterrett, Janny Sterrett, Westtown teacher Al Hay, and Westtown students Chip Blake, and Dave Moon) and drove through rain to Barnegat Light, NJ. As we came down off the bridge onto Long Beach Island, the air became foggy, and we drove slowly up the island looking for, and missing, 18th Street. When we got to the pier, the boat, *Doris Mae IV*, was lighted, lying stern to the shore.

We walked on board, checked in with Alan Brady, spoke to Kate Brethwaite, and carried our stuff on board.

We were not traveling on *Miss Barnegat Light* as stated in the advertisement. Captain Eble's *Doris Mae IV* was probably 80–100 feet long of aluminum construction with a main deck around the cabin and an upper deck area behind the pilothouse on the roof of the cabin. The cabin, with benches like those in a commuter railway car and vertical poles like those in a subway car, looked full. All the benches and most of the floor were covered with sleepers. We piled our stuff in a forward corner next to a door that was bolted shut and snuggled together. Al Hay had a seat, to sit on not to lie on. Chip Blake and Dave Moon were sort of stretched out in sleeping bags.

No one knew whether the trip would go or not. Crowded as the cabin was, people kept arriving. Now the aisles as well as the benches were covered with sleeping forms; walking in or out of the cabin meant

THE ADVERTISEMENT

Hudson Canyon Pelagic Trip February 26, 1977

A trip to Hudson Canyon, 100 miles offshore, is planned for Saturday, Feb. 26, 1977, with back-up dates of Feb. 27, March 5, and March 6. The weather at that time of year is going to be a factor, and you may find it necessary to check in the day before trip to see whether conditions are "go."

Birding possibilities include Gannets, Kittiwakes, Fulmars, and Glaucous Gulls. Dovekies, Puffins, and Murres probably winter in the area. We will try to attract Skuas, Fulmars, and other birds by chumming. It is also a good time and place for whales.

Be sure to bring your binoculars and very warm clothes and foot gear. A sleeping bag and pad or air mattress will be needed if you plan to sleep (in the heated lounge). The boat's galley will serve bacon and egg breakfast. Hamburgers, coffee, beer, soft

drinks will be available. Hopefully, fish chowder will be available as we are returning to dock.

BOAT: "Miss Barnegat Light" – twin-hull catamaran

CAPTAIN; John Larson, Jr. (Phone 609-494-2094)

PLACE: Barnegat Light Yacht Basin, 16th St. and the Bay, just south of Barnegat Light

TIME: Boat leaves 1:00 AM Saturday, Feb. 26.

We will return to dock about 8:00 PM Saturday. You may board any time after 8:00 PM Friday evening, the 25th.

FARE: \$25.00 to Alan Brady, Box 103, Wycombe, Pa. 18980. For information on Friday, Feb. 25, call Alan Brady: Work (215-968-2833) Home (215-598-7856) or call Kate Brethwaite: (215-MU8-5685)

Be a part of the last birding frontier!

Birding's Last Frontier: The Ocean

stepping over and between occupied sleeping bags while holding on to the vertical poles.

At midnight, Alan Brady walked through the cabin, saying that we would go. The sea was rough, and we would try for 50 miles out and see how it went. Looking right at me, he announced that people could back out now and get their money back.

At 2:06 a.m., a loud electric alarm bell began to ring, and the engines rumbled to life. Before I could feel any motion of the boat, a man got up and went outside to be sick.

We were under way. I asked Al Hay if he wanted to go out on the deck. He asked me if I did. I wanted to, but didn't know if it was worth trying to walk from one end of the people-carpeted cabin to the other. He said, "Let's go."

Outside, the fog had lifted, and we were gliding north past the end of Long Beach Island. We turned east with the spotlight picking out buoys and landmarks in the misty darkness. Everyone on deck was happy, looking forward to the trip. We stood near the bow.

As we came around past the lighthouse (the floodlights on the lighthouse are turned off at midnight), we felt a gentle swell.

I wanted to see how rough it would be getting out the channel. As we passed the two towers which mark the ends of the jetties which protect the inlet, I could see ahead of us a ridge of creamy waves which marked the bar at the entrance to Barnegat Inlet. The leaping water did not look friendly. It looked as though the boat would have to go uphill and over a ridge of rough water. A voice came down from the pilothouse above us with a friendly suggestion that we might get wet unless we went to the stern while the boat crossed the bar. We moved. I looked forward from the stern as the boat ground its way up the ridge of rough water and into and through the foam. No water came aboard. Then we were out on the ocean. A big swell was running and the boat rolled; it jumped when two waves met. The trip was still fun. I went to the upper deck. Seven or eight people were sleeping up there, but I had plenty of room to stand and walk around.

By holding on with one hand and wrapping one leg around a railing support, I was able to stand as the boat pitched and rolled. Dave Moon came up. We talked to the eldest Eble son who stood nonchalantly with a cup of coffee in one hand and a cigarette in the other. He was friendly, but when I asked if we could visit the pilothouse, he said no. I noticed that he did hold on with one hand when he went down the ladder of steps to the main deck. At the rail around the main deck, lots of people were getting sick now. I still felt fine.

I spent some time standing at the stern with Dave Moon. We talked to Number One Eble son about the boat. *Doris Mae IV* has three V-12 diesel engines; only two were running now. Our speed was 12½ knots. He said sea-sickness was all in the mind as we joked about the people being sick all around us. I said I wasn't so sure by then. It must have been about 3:00 a.m. Four of our group were on deck. Chip Blake said Janny Sterrett had taken a Dramamine and gone to sleep.

Al Hay had been sick. I went back up on the upper deck, trying to keep my stomach calm. I looked down and Dave Moon was there, looking up at me. He asked me to get him a pill because he was going to get sick. Janny Sterrett had come out on deck a bit earlier and, handing me her glasses, had been sick. (She got sick at 3:00 a.m.) I went into the cabin.

The floor inside the cabin was covered with sleeping people. I had to get to the far end where our stuff was stashed. As the boat pitched and rolled, I stood and planned where to put my foot and where to grab a pole. Progress was one step at a time, placing a foot near someone's nose since most of the floor space was around people's heads. I got the Dramamine pills and put on my down jacket because I was cold. Then I made my way back out by the same process.

Out on deck, I gave Dave a pill, and then I took one myself. Following Wayne Marshall's advice, I chewed the Dramamine to powder and swallowed. Then I walked to the stern and got sick over the rail. I had chewed the pill pretty thoroughly because I suspected what was going to happen when I took it. My stomach heaved about three times; a little dessert came up, and then I felt fine.

For the next hour or so, Dave sat, sleeping, on the steps to the upper deck. I stood, leaning against a vertical pipe with my hands locked around the railing of the steps, and slept in fits. I could not keep my eyes open, and I would sleep for a few moments at a time. When my eyes came open, I hallucinated. The first thing I saw was a blurry, full-rigged sailing ship right behind us. As I stared, telling myself that the ship with billowing sails was an illusion, it dropped astern. Next was a raft made of fork-lift pallets which bobbed right past the boat. Geez, I thought, the captain went too close to that. The last illusion I remember was an oil derrick on a barge. The derrick had a big incandescent light on top of it. As my brain woke up, the light became the setting moon, and the derrick dropped astern.

During the night, I was sick again and lost the delicious cheesecake from dinner. To get warm, I stepped into the cabin to stand next to the door. I stayed inside about 30 seconds. Inside the cabin, the motion of the boat was too much for my stomach. The rest of the night, I stayed outside and did not get sick again. The stern deck was well-lighted all night and the roar and smell of the diesels kept me from sleeping more soundly.

A grim dawn came about 5:30 a.m. I was tired and my stomach was queasy. I went into the cabin to get my binocs. Al was asleep just inside the cabin door. Dave was asleep on the galley counter with his feet sticking out over the end. Janny was asleep sitting in the scuppers on deck. Chip was wandering around.

During the night, I remembered moments of beauty. Then the moon broke through the clouds to make patches of silver light on the water.

Dawn was gray and a surprise; suddenly I could see big waves. People began to appear on deck, some to be sick, some to look for birds. An occasional gull swept past the stern, then gannets appeared. They were moving in ones and twos across our path. The big white gannets were an impressive sight for the beginning of the day.

Soon the galley just inside the cabin was in operation. Grease and coffee odors spread from the cabin each time the cabin door was slid open. People appeared carrying sandwiches of ham and cheese or

egg; I did not look closely. The odor from the cabin made a trip to our equipment dump at the front of the cabin unwise. Janny was still sitting by the rail, asleep.

More people came out on deck to be sick. Chip, Dave, and I walked to the bow and talked and watched for birds. Chip had not been sick. We were all three feeling a little better with the brightening day. Standing in the bow of the boat, with its up and down definite motion made me feel better. I wedged myself in between boat gear and the bow and was comfortable looking over the prow of the boat as it rose and dropped. We were still running diagonally to the swell.

Viewed from the starboard side of the boat, the seas were tremendous. A wall of water moved diagonally toward the side of the boat. Just when it seemed that the wave would come aboard, the water would lift the hull and we would ride up, over, and down as we had been doing since 2:30 a.m. From the bow, I watched the boat edge up onto the wave, and then the bow would be suspended over the trough as we slowly drove over this wave and up to the next. We hit the troughs with almost no splash.

We soon noticed that gulls were following the boat and went aft. There Alan Brady was flicking pieces of store-bought white bread into the wake. Gulls, seeing the bread bits, would turn and drop on them. This turning and sudden change of silhouette, a wing flash, is a signal to other birds that food is present. As more birds came in, we waited for something other than gulls (herring, ring-billed, and black-backed) and gannets to appear. We passed a manx shearwater which unfortunately I did not see. Then a fulmar appeared on the right as we looked out over the wake. A small sea bird, it flew on straight wings which it flapped without bending, then glided, standing on a wing. A distinctive flight pattern. It followed for a while then disappeared.

Alan handed me the bread, and I spent half an hour feeding gulls and controlling my stomach which was jumping around because of the smell and feel of the bread. Store-bought bread feels greasy to a seasick person. After the bread throw, I got Janny up out of the scuppers and put her on the narrow bench which runs down the outside of the cabin. There we sat. She slept.

Birding's Last Frontier: The Ocean

I watched for birds. Soon someone spotted a skua coming in from our (port) side. I had a good look at it and saw the dark shape and wing patches.

We seemed to have been gone from land a long time, but my watch said only 8:30 a.m. Al Hay had retired to a bench in the forward part of the cabin.

The boat had a head (toilet) on each side outside the aft end of the cabin. When I stepped inside, I discovered that at least one person had been sick all over the floor. Signs were posted urging people to throw-up over the rail, not in the heads.

I spent the morning alternately standing in the stern watching gulls and sitting on the portside bench. At mid-morning we hove to. The engines were stopped and the boat really rolled. While the boat wallowed, fish was ground up into chum and thrown to the birds from a bucket with a ladle. Not much came in. We had by this time seen several kittiwakes and perhaps half a dozen fulmars. While we were chumming with fish, a fulmar flew around the boat, coming in close to the stern.

The engines were started and we continued. I would have been just as happy to head for home, but rumor said we were headed for the Hudson Canyon after all. I went up to look into the pilothouse to see whether the crew was steering the boat over the waves or whether we were on a fixed course through them. I was looking in the big back window of the pilothouse when Alan Brady yelled, "Go on in." I opened the door on the side of the pilothouse and asked if I might come in. The Captain said, sure, as long as there were not too many people up there at once. The pilothouse was roomy with windows in all four walls and a daybed bunk along the back wall. To the left of the helmsman was a radar screen. To the right were two Loran sets. Loran derives the position of the boat from four radio beacons. "One of the Loran sets is so accurate," said the captain, "that the last digit changes as the antenna swings when the boat rocks at its mooring." Standing in the pilothouse, I started to feel better.

While I was in the pilothouse, we passed a small dragger, the *Duchess*, out of Atlantic City. Two larger ships were visible several miles away. The captain said they were Russian draggers, hove to, waiting for per-

mits to fish inside the five-day-old 200-mile territorial limit. The captain asked me if I thought the bird people wanted to see the draggers. I said yes. While we headed for them, Captain Eble vented his feeling against the Russians. They used bigger ships and stayed out longer. One of his sons asked, "How do you know they're Russian? They could just as easily be Japanese." "They're Russian," said his dad. In the midst of this, someone opened the pilothouse door and said that a woman had fallen on the deck and hurt her back. The engines were throttled back, and all but one crewman left the pilothouse. I stepped out too; I never found out who was hurt or what had happened.

As we approached the big draggers, we saw hundreds of birds around the fishing boats. The sea was covered with gulls, and one ship was surrounded by a cloud of gulls. The fishing boats were Japanese. Each one was named "something Maru" from Tokyo. Maru means "round," in this case "round-bottom" and is frequently part of a Japanese ship's name. They were both dragging; big cables angled down from their sterns as they rolled in the swell. They were really rolling, too. They were the size of small freighters and covered with rust. As we examined them through our Japanese binocs, Japanese crewmen appeared and examined us. They waved. According to the *New York Times*, 3/6/1977, no permits had been issued yet and the Japanese were protesting the 200-mile limit. So I guess they were fishing illegally. We motored around the bow of the lead ship and, as we passed down the side, someone stepped out of the cabin of our boat and yelled, "Why don't you get the hell outa here, ya goddammed Russians!" I looked around startled to see Captain Eble taking a moment off from his shift at the galley stove to speak to fellow mariners.

In spite of the waves and the way my stomach felt, some people were eating. Hamburgers and cheeses-teak sandwiches were readily available. At mid-day, I was not hungry. In fact, I was still avoiding the cabin.

I had planned to take lots of photos, had bought some B&W film, and had thawed out some color slide film for the trip. The camera and film were in our knapsack at the front of the cabin. In the morning, the waves had been spectacular, looming up beside the boat and then sliding under the hull. In our churning wake, when the waves lapped over themselves, the water was

clear, emerald green, the green of a glass Seven-Up bottle. Birds had flown close to us. Many people had taken photos of gannets, fulmars, and kittiwakes. But I could not face the trip through the cabin. The thought of bending over the bag to extract the camera was too much. And then I would have to load it. What would I do if stricken while wearing binocs and holding a camera? I took no pictures.

When we turned toward the fishing boats, we were traveling with the waves. And the boat surfed. Standing in the bow, I felt the boat ride over a wave and hang on the leading, rounded crest. As we hung there, the bow would dip as the engine revs increased, and we skidded down into the trough. Looking down, I saw no bow wave. Our bow wave was about a third of the way back under the hull as we slewed over the wave crests.

After we circled the fishing boats, we were over the Hudson Canyon. I was shown later on the depth recorder that we had passed across it then run along the canyon for a while. The depth recorder chart shows our journey across the continental shelf, a gradual deepening of the water, then, suddenly, the bottom drops away to beyond 300 fathoms, the limit of the machine.

For a time, the boat ran parallel to the waves. I remember sitting on the side bench (always the port side for some reason) as we traveled through deep valleys of waves.

About 12:30 p.m., I was so tired that I went in the cabin, lay down on two sleeping bags, and was lulled into sleep by the same motion which had driven me out of the cabin earlier. I slept for about an hour and a half.

Most of the people on the boat got sick. When people got the heaves, they just made their way to the rail and threw-up. After a while, this was no big deal. A new bird appeared and a crowd gathered at the rail to examine it with binocs. I felt someone pushing in beside me. The person stuck his head through the rail, threw up over the side, and retreated. Once, the sliding side door of the cabin was flung open and a person carrying a cheese steak stepped out, threw-up over the rail, and went back inside.

I felt much better when I woke from my nap. I got Janny to chew a Dramamine tablet, walked her into the cabin, and left her sleeping. She stayed there for the rest of the trip.

The weather began to clear. We were on our way home now; I was glad. The Sun came out and the wind came up as the temperature dropped a little. For a half hour or so, I stood near the bow with Alan Brady and Kate Brethwaite as they watched for an alcid. Dovekies, razorbills, murrees, and puffins are alcids. We had not seen any on this trip. This was a needle in a haystack business and cold. Then I did sit on the starboard, not the port, side for a little while, out of the wind.

I made another visit to the pilothouse with Chip and Dave. The boat stopped three times on the way home. Once for a possible puffin, which I did not see. Once for a false alarm. Once for a flock of five razorbills which I saw but which were too far away for me to identify. They flew as if they were ducks, in a tight group. The captain's sons talked about fishing trips. One of them will run the boat on day trips this summer; the other will do the night fishing trips.

Back down in the cabin, I sat on a bench; I was tired. When the captain burned some toast in the galley, I was actually hungry. Not hungry enough to take a chance, though. While we had been running through the wave valleys over the canyon, Chip had bought a cheese steak sandwich and eaten it in front of us. Dave had one bite. I thought I would see bits of the cheese steak again, but I didn't.

In the cabin, we looked out and saw wisps of fog on the water. Then I fell asleep. I woke when the engine slowed. Through the windows, the sky was almost dark. Wanting to watch the passage over the bar and into the harbor, I went outside. The weather was cold and foggy.

I arrived in the bow just as two buoys appeared out of the fog right in front of the boat. They were both to starboard. I knew that we should go between them. I looked up at the pilothouse where the captain and one of his sons were each on a side of pilothouse, outside where they could see. The captain shouted that the boys were going around the wrong buoy. The engines stopped, then reversed, and we backed until we were

Birding's Last Frontier: The Ocean

lined up to go between the buoys and evidently lined up to go over the bar. The water was quite calm, no waves. We proceeded slowly, picking markers out of the mist. Then we were near a huge white, lighted edifice. At first, I did not recognize the flood-lighted bottom half of Barnegat Lighthouse. We passed it and began smelling our way slowly into the foggy harbor. A loud voice, amplified through a PA system, came out of the fog, telling us to watch for a marker just to starboard. A Coast Guard patrol boat was helping us; we never did see it.

Another 200 yards, and then we could see our dock. The engines reversed, and we backed into a full-length slip with one yard of space on either side of the boat without touching a piling, a neat parking job. We were home.

We straggled off the boat into a warm March foggy night, still wearing our down jackets and wool hats as a small crowd watched silently.

Was the trip fun? No. The early morning was grim for me. I do like boats and being out on the ocean. I do not like being exhausted and sea sick.

During the next week, I typed this ten-page report to keep as a reminder so that I would never be tempted to go on another pelagic trip.

In our Westtown School living room, students read the story and laughed; they thought our experience was funny! After about six months, Janny and I began to laugh, too.

I saw three new life birds on the trip. Chip Blake commented that my lifers had cost eight dollars apiece.

Second Ocean Trip, May, 1978

We leave Westtown at 4 p.m. under a warm, sunny sky. We are the same group of five as last time. As we approach Long Beach Island, the sky clouds over and rain begins. The wind is from northeast. No way are we going out into a northeaster.

But the trip is not canceled. We arrive early enough to claim benches in the cabin of *Miss Barnegat Light* for sleeping. Benches are about 4 feet long and just not wide enough. Could be worse. As the evening

progresses, the boat fills with people. About half are people I recognize; many of them I know by name.

Alan Brady says we will leave at 1:00, 1:30, or 2:00 a.m., depending on which person has asked him. We had planned to sleep outside, but the rain keeps us inside. Some people are sleeping out in the rain.

I wake up at 2:00 a.m. and hear Captain John Larson and Alan Brady discussing the weather. The captain says he won't go out in the dark in this weather. He says he will try in the morning about 5:00 a.m. when he can see. Hearing that, I pick up my sleeping bag and place it under the bench which runs down the port side of the boat outside the cabin. This is the lee side in the harbor but would have been the weather side if we had gone out of the inlet, so the bench is deserted and dry. I sleep about two hours.

While I am prowling around early in the morning, waiting for something to happen, a car drives up to the stern of the boat, a guy gets out, comes on board, asks me what time we are going to leave. I tell him we may leave at five. "How much does it cost," he wants to know. "Twenty-five dollars," I tell him. "We are going to watch birds," I add. "Watch birds," he says in disgust, "I want to go fishing." He leaves.

We leave about 5:30 a.m. Now I know that the fire alarm noise is the low oil pressure alarm that rings when a boat engine is switched on and stops when the oil pressure rises as the engine runs. Still raining; wind from NE. No one is allowed on the upper deck or on the forward part of boat as we cross the bar into the ocean. The crossing is smooth.

Because we have left later than planned, we will travel faster. The two engines push us at 23 knots, heading almost into the waves. The waves are 8–10 feet high. Still no one allowed on forward part of boat. As the boat smacks into each wave, a sheet of water flies up over the bow, lands on the upper deck, and sluices off the back edge of the upper deck onto the stern. About 15 people are crowded under the overhang of the upper deck near the stern, hoping to see birds. We are crowded like people in a full subway car, but the only hand holds are protrusions on the underside of the upper deck. I am near the edge and getting wet from the wash running off the upper deck. Water

falls into my sleeve and runs up my arm when I hold on above my head. Water that splashes onto the deck has soaked my sneakers and drenched my pant legs to the knees.

People have begun to get sick.

We see sooty shearwaters sitting on the water as we churn by. A lighter-colored shearwater flashes past the boat, flying. "A manx," someone yells; I don't see it well enough to say I had identified it.

Janny Sterrett gets sick. Al Hay, under the influence of Bucladin, a prescription seasickness medicine is not sick; he is asleep.

My wind parka is wet; my down jacket is damp. One of our encounters with a wave drops the stern of the boat about four inches in no seconds. For an instant, we are all airborne and then follow the boat down.

We drive into wind and waves for two and a half hours at flank speed. This would be exciting if the sea were not quite so rough, if I were not so wet, and if it were not so crowded in the sheltered part of the stern.

Soon I realize that I feel queasy, and I take a Dramamine, chewed to powder. About 20 minutes later, I step around the corner to get sick. Suddenly, almost alone, out in the wind and rain and waves, and thanks to modern medicine, I don't feel sick. Three people are sitting along the bench on the side of the boat getting soaked. Janny is one of them.

Eventually we spot a flock of birds sitting on the water; we stop and drift down on them. They are greater and sooty shearwaters. They take wing as we drift among them. When they are all gone, we search again. The rain has stopped. Visibility is about one eighth of a mile.

The forward part of the upper deck has been roped off to prevent watchers from standing in front of the pilothouse windows. This rope also deters entrance to the pilothouse. At one of our stops, I ask the captain if I can come up to the pilothouse while he is driving the boat. He says sure. From that time on, I spend most of my time in the pilothouse while we are under way.

Janny comes back into the cabin and gets into her sleeping bag. I am actually hungry and eat saltines and drink a soda from our bag of seasick-safe food. And I nap sitting in a booth in the cabin. *Miss Barnegat Light* has a wider cabin with bigger windows than *Doris Mae IV*. We have been on a pelagic trip before, so our stuff is in one of the booths closest to the door where we can get to it without spending much time in the cabin. In the cabin, people are getting sick into the trash cans. Not pleasant.

In the pilothouse, the captain finds a blip on the radar screen and heads for it at one third speed. It appears out of the fog and mist. The *Princess* out of Seward. That's right, Seward, Alaska. She is captained by our captain's cousin, and we have been watching the birds that gather in her wake. At one point, we come alongside and *Princess* (which is dragging for scallops out of New Bedford) tosses us a line and passes our captain a burlap bag of scallops.

When we see birds, engines are shut off and we drift. Disgusting chum is ladled off the stern, making an oily slick hundreds of yards long, and we watch for birds. Most are greater and sooty shearwaters. We see about two hundred Wilson's petrels, robin-size, which dance on the water about five feet from the stern. Parasitic, pomarine (dark and light phase), and one long-tail jaeger appear. Skuas and fulmars are seen. Every skua creates a stir because, besides their being impressive birds, skuas are the subject of a dispute about the hemisphere of their origin. Each one is photographed. We are hoping see south polar skuas which spend the Antarctic winter in the North Atlantic.

Then we start the engines and search in the mist for *Princess* again. Most species seen (except the manx shearwater) are seen often enough so that, later, I can spot a bird and say, that is a pomarine jaeger. Only one long-tailed jaeger is seen, and it does not have a long tail. I ask someone why not. The feathers may have broken off, I am told.

I spend a lot of time in the pilothouse. Captain Larson gets on the radio and calls other boats. "I'm out here with a party of birdwatchers," he says. "Yes, *birdwatchers*." Then he asks them whether their boats are surrounded by birds. If they are, we go and find them, using the radar.

Birding's Last Frontier: The Ocean

Dave Moon and Chip Blake are both sick and disappear. Al Hay appears on deck with a camera. I take a few pictures of people. Not good enough light to waste film on birds.

Captain Larson takes us to see an offshore oil rig. It looms out of the fog, looking like a huge apartment building on stilts. The upper stories disappear into the fog. The rig is being anchored, so we don't get close. We see only the equivalent of two or three stories, but it appears to be much taller.

On a previous trip, when an essential part broke on one of *Miss Barnegat Light's* engines, the machine shop on an offshore rig made a replacement part.

Just before we are to head home, a different bird is sighted. It looks like a sooty shearwater, but with patches of white above and below. Pandemonium. Cameras click and whirl (electric film advance, of course). The crowd runs from one side of the top deck to the other as the bird circles the boat. Bird not identified.

Then we head for home, traveling with the waves, the boring part of trip. I am tired. Places in the cabin to sit or lie down are all occupied. Deck seats are either crowded or wet by constant spray.

Miss Barnegat Light is a 91 foot, twin-hulled catamaran with two engines. She is not well maintained, I think. The heads both break down.

No one is allowed on the forward part of boat on the trip home. The up and down motion is so sudden in the bow that the captain is afraid that people may get hurt. The bow was the most exciting place to ride on *Doris Mae IV*.

As we approach the inlet, Dave, Chip, and I are asked to leave the pilothouse. Then the people on the upper deck are asked to go down to the main deck. Then everyone is asked to crowd into the cabin for the trip in over the bar.

Not all ocean trips are in such big boats. I heard about a trip with 65 people on a small cabin boat. We were about 80 people. Having arrived at the dock early to stake out a cabin space this time, I saw most of them come on board. Men, women, and even kids. A number of them got sick and were not seen until we disembarked.

Third Boating Trip, May 1981, on *Miss Barnegat Light*

Janny and I went on one more trip, an uneventful, 1981 May trip in sunny weather. We had prescription Trans-Derm Scop band-aid patches that did prevent seasickness.

When the captain says, "Let's go home," he punches coordinates for home into the Loran and a compass course, distance, and a travel time of seven hours (!) appears on the screen. The ride home is dull. The comfortable seats are all taken, and we sit perched on the narrow bench on the outside wall of the cabin and doze.

Boating Trips Four and Five on *Miss Barnegat Light*

I took son James and then son Nat on a May pelagic trip on *Miss Barnegat Light* when each was a senior in high school. On those two trips, we slept on the upper deck and used Trans-Derm Scop patches.

Tim Sterrett

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