

History of the Little Current Cruisers' Net

Part One 2001 - 2008

In July of 2001, my wife and I and our two cats left Spider Bay Marina aboard our sailboat Mystic Loon for what would turn out to be a nine month cruise. The winter of 2001-2002 was spent in the Bahamas where much of it found us in the Sea of Abaco where I first listened to a Cruisers' Net each morning out of Marsh Harbour. The informative weather man, a retired meteorologist gave great weather reports, then news reports ... but only American. Since over half the boats in the Abacos were flying the Canadian flag, I called in to ask if we could get some Canadian news. "Only if you do it" was the reply. As a Ham radio operator, I was able to get the Canadian news each night at 6 pm so that's how I started my new career.

In 2003, we formed the first yacht club on Manitoulin Island - the Little Current Yacht Club. I was Commodore for the first three years. Bruce O'Hare, the man who talked me into taking on the job and one of the LCYC Rear Commodores, said that if I would manage a Cruisers' Net here in the North Channel, he would provide space at the Anchor Inn and donate all the equipment needed.

In July of 2004, I broadcast the first Little Current Cruisers' Net. I didn't keep any records and frankly, I don't remember too much about those early broadcasts other than fitting into a very tiny, very hot, cubicle under creaky stairs at the Anchor Inn. Near the end of the 2004 season, I received a call from the Coast Guard about an overdue boat. Had it called in? It hadn't but I realized that I needed to be keeping track of callers and their location, or where they were headed in case of a similar occurrence.

In 2005, I started recording the names of boats and their locations. First recorded broadcast that year was on July 4 - one boat called in that day. The numbers of check-ins slowly grew and by the end of that year, I had recorded 1024 calls. On the last broadcast of the 2005 season, "Catamount" called in with Fred and Jennifer Bagley on board. Fred had written a number of cruising articles for national magazines and asked if they could interview Bruce O'Hare and me. That "Cruising World" article is now framed and hanging in the Anchor Inn lobby.

In 2006, on the first broadcast day, the number of boats calling in doubled. Yes, 2 boats called in that morning. But word of mouth and the Cruising World article spread the news about the existence of the Net and, by the year's end, 2073 calls had been recorded.

Being a ham radio operator, the broadcast from its earliest years started with the words "Is there any emergency, medical or priority traffic?" This sentence has generated calls from a boater with an embedded fish hook in his hand, a woman with terrible back pain, a boat with a genoa halyard at the top of the mast and no bosun's chair to fix it, lost dinghies, cameras, and assorted gear and one caller in dire need to know if the liquor store would be open on a Sunday. In each case we, or the boating community, were able to provide assistance. Also at this time, I report on any Coast Guard or family emergency calls which I may have received.

We are fully licensed as a shore station, granted authorization to broadcast on Channel 16 and on Channel 71. The Net is registered with both the Canadian Coast Guard and the Air, Search and Rescue unit out of Trenton and each unit has our personal phone number. In 2008, for the first time, I received a phone call from the American Coast Guard about an overdue boat so obviously they have

our number also.

The reach of the broadcast has extended to unbelievable lengths with the addition of a new antenna in 2007. Thanks to generous donations from the boating community, I was able to purchase a \$400 antenna system. With a tower situated above the third floor of the Anchor Inn, it gives us a transmission height of 110 feet above the water.

In the early years of the Cruisers Net, the report contained about 1 ½ pages of news together with Manitoulin events. Now, during the height of the season when there are so many activities, the broadcast contains 6-7 pages of text. News from the fields of sports, business, the stock market have all been added in response to boaters requesting such information be included in the broadcast. The history reports on our area, which I sprinkle in over the summer, are a result of the persistence of a very special lady who kept insisting I had to write up the tales I had been telling her and her friends. A regular feature of several of the Caribbean nets is the advertising by restaurants calling in their daily specials, stores with special sales, and items for sale by boaters. Such commercialization is not allowed on a VHF broadcast in Canada. You may note that although I certainly wish to thank the Anchor Inn for providing us with wonderful facilities to do our broadcast the only PR they get on air is the sentence “The Little Current Cruisers’ Net broadcasts each morning at 9 am on Channel 71 from the Anchor Inn, where boaters who have their own laptop can enjoy free high speed wireless internet service.”

In 2008, Fred Bagley’s update on the Cruisers Net was published in the online edition of Cruising World. In addition, a number of sailors have written about the Net for their yacht club newsletters and in their personal sailing blogs. All of this and of course, word of mouth by sailors in the North Channel, has led to a great increase in listeners and by the end of 2008, 4,708 calls had been received from 825 distinct boats.

END OF PART ONE.