

An autumn cruise to Tacoma/US

On the tail of a typhoon



COSMIC DANCER V

Clive Woodman & Angela Lilienthal, Cosmic Dancer V – Sweden 38, 10-31 Oct 2019

CRUISE LOG

This isn't the log we thought we would be writing in 2019.

After 2 seasons of gently getting to know the Pacific North West, we were determined this year was going to be the "big one". We resolutely intended to make an early start to the season, something that had eluded us for the previous 2 years, hoping to dash across the Gulf of Alaska and then spend the rest of the summer exploring Kodiak Island and the Alaskan Peninsula.

The fates decreed otherwise. Instead, we found ourselves flying out to Vancouver at the beginning of October, wondering what could be salvaged from a season that had unexpectedly been disrupted by family illness earlier in the year. It was a surreal feeling to be launching and fitting out at a time when everyone else was busily laying up for the winter. However, there are occasions when going against the flow brings unexpected delights and this proved to be one of them.

Setting sail from Sidney on 10th October, our expectations didn't go beyond simply taking a break from the seemingly endless cycle of hospital visiting earlier in the year. The plan was simply to head south to the sheltered water of Puget Sound on the grounds that no matter what the autumn weather threw at us, there was a moderate chance of at least getting some cruising in.

It soon became apparent us that this was going to be a very different experience from our 2 previous summers sailing in the region. The most immediate difference was that within minutes we were able to hoist our sails and turn the engine off, an all too rare occurrence in the largely windless summer months.

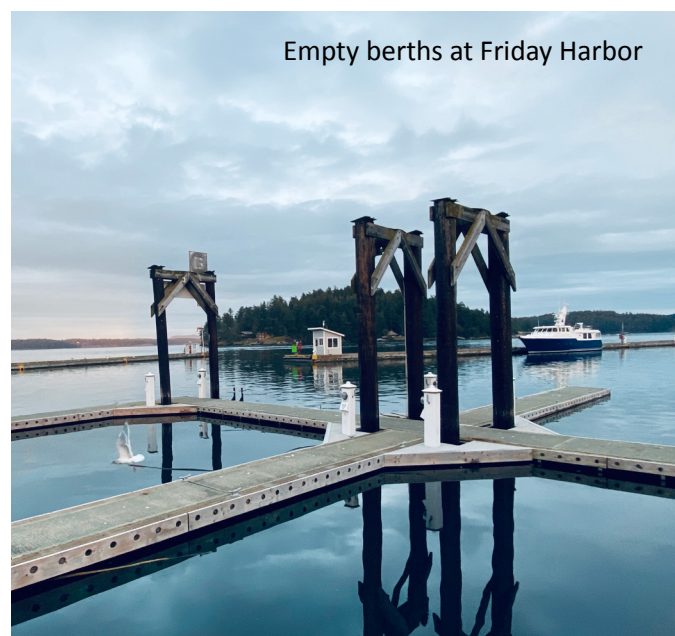
The second was a wonderful sense of seclusion. We were almost the only boat on the water. Our first port of call was Friday Harbour in the San Juan Islands. On previous summer visits we had to wait for hours on a waiting list hoping that a space might become available. This time when we called the harbour office, they simply said "Pick any empty slip that takes your fancy".



Setting sail from Sidney, BC



Peaceful anchorage



Empty berths at Friday Harbor

For the first 4 days we were blessed with gentle northerly winds, glorious blue skies and calm seas. As we wound our way southwards through Puget Sound we were treated to magnificent views of Mount Baker, the Olympic Mountains and Mount Rainier, all resplendent with the first snows of winter. Each night we anchored in an east facing bay with wonderful views across to these mountains as we went for our evening kayak paddle.

Day 4 saw us pass under the Tacoma Narrows Bridge into Southern Puget Sound. At the time it was built it was the third largest suspension bridge in the world, but it soon earned the nickname „Galloping Gertie“ because of the vertical pitching of the deck during windy conditions. The bridge spectacularly collapsed into Puget Sound on the morning of November 7, 1940, just 4 months after the it was officially opened. Its successor was altogether better behaved as we uneventfully passed under it to enter a world apart from Northern Puget Sound.

Even in summer the southern sound receives relatively few cruising boats, but in autumn the tranquillity is even more absolute. Almost every harbour and anchorage enjoys wonderful vistas of Mount Rainer, whilst the deciduous lined shores were a veritable cornucopia of autumn reds and golds, a true feast for the eyes after the endless evergreen pastiche that is the British Columbian coast.



Kayaking from our anchorage in Port Ludlow





Autumn has arrived in Olympia, Washington

The tranquillity was not to last. Fresh from wreaking havoc with the rugby world cup programme in Japan, the tail end of Typhoon Hagibis was heading our way. We decided to seek refuge in Olympia, a small city at the very southern extremity of Puget Sound, and about as far away from the open ocean as it is possible to get in this part of the world. The plan worked and whilst we were subjected to 4 days of truly torrential rain, the like of which we had never come across before, our anemometer barely registered above 20 knots.

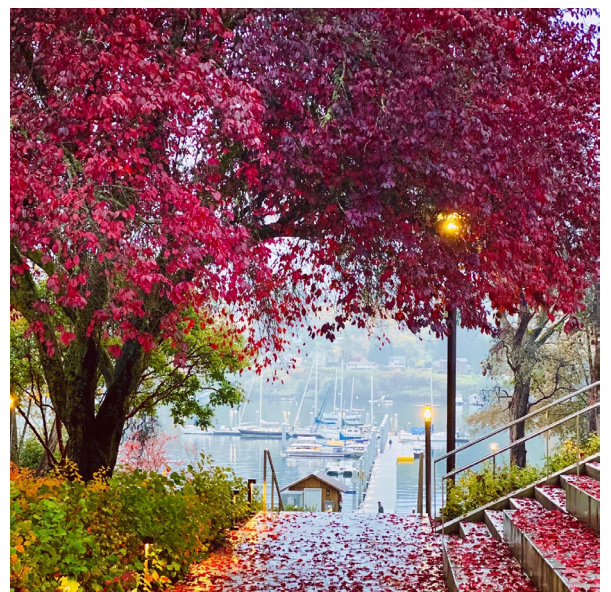
With the worst of the storm over we headed north to Gig Harbour, the most protected natural harbour in Puget Sound. Once famed for its wooden ship building and large fishing fleet, today Gig Harbour is a popular yachting destination with enough cafes, bars, restaurants and micro-breweries to keep even the most Bacchanalian of crews happy for days on end.

From Gig Harbour a short dash across the bay took us to the city of Tacoma. Tacoma came to prominence in the 19th century as the western terminus of the Northern Pacific Railroad and the city earned itself the epithet “where rail meets sail”. Today Tacoma remains one of the USA’s busiest deep-water container ports and approaching it from seaward you would be forgiven for thinking that this was no place for a yacht.



Autumn Golds in Langley Harbor

Eagle Harbour Government Dock





Time for full Foul Weather Gear

However, in common with many of the great industrial cities of the Great Lakes, Tacoma has undergone a massive environmental clean-up and urban regeneration in recent years. The city spent over 100 million dollars in turning the heavily polluted Thea Foss Waterway into an extremely attractive city waterfront, with a collection of world class museums and the bustling downtown and theatre district all within easy walking distance of the many modern marinas that now line the waterway. After gorging ourselves in Gig Harbour, we decided it was time to nurture something other than our waistlines and spent an enjoyable day in the museums and the arts district!

By this time the worst of the typhoon had past, but Admiralty Inlet and the Juan de Fuca straits were still experiencing 30-35 knot winds so we decided to take the more sheltered route northwards through Possession Sound and Saratoga Passage. It was nonetheless still a fast and furious passage running before 25-30 knot winds with 2 reefs in the main and a pocket handkerchief for a jib, before getting spat out through Deception Pass, a narrow steep sided gorge, not more than a few boat lengths wide, through which the tide can run at up to 8-10 knots.

We hit the pass shortly after slack water with a mere 3 knots of tide running in our favour. The result was merely “exciting”, but had the tide been running any faster we have little doubt it would have come into the “terrifying” category.



Approaching Tacoma



Museum of Glass in Tacoma



Kayaking until the sun sets

With another blow looming we sought refuge for 3 days in the San Juan Islands where we were able to kayak around Friday and Roche harbours in mirror calm waters whilst 35-40 knot storms blew through no less than 20 miles to the north and south of us respectively in the Georgia and Juan de Fuca Straits.

The cruise finished as it had started with fine weather returning, giving us a wonderful close fetch in 10-15 knots of breeze for the short passage from Roche Harbour to Sidney. As we woke the following morning the decks were covered in the first thick frost of winter. It was clearly time to put Cosmic Dancer to bed for the winter.

However, it had been a wonderful and unexpected mini-cruise, visiting some fascinating places that lay off the normal Pacific North West beaten track, and conducted whilst the tail end of what the press had dubbed a “Super Typhoon” blew through.

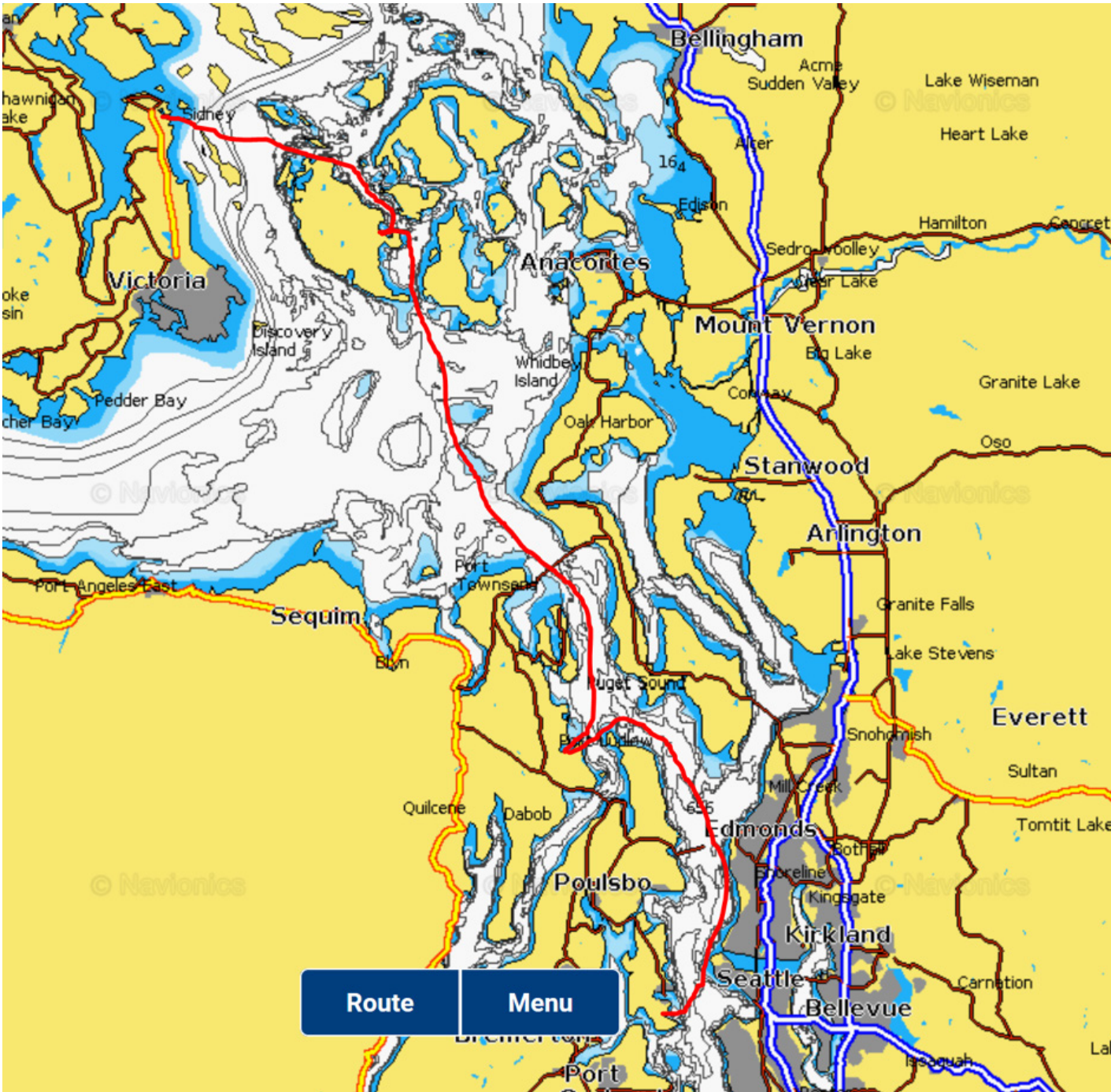


Must be close to Halloween

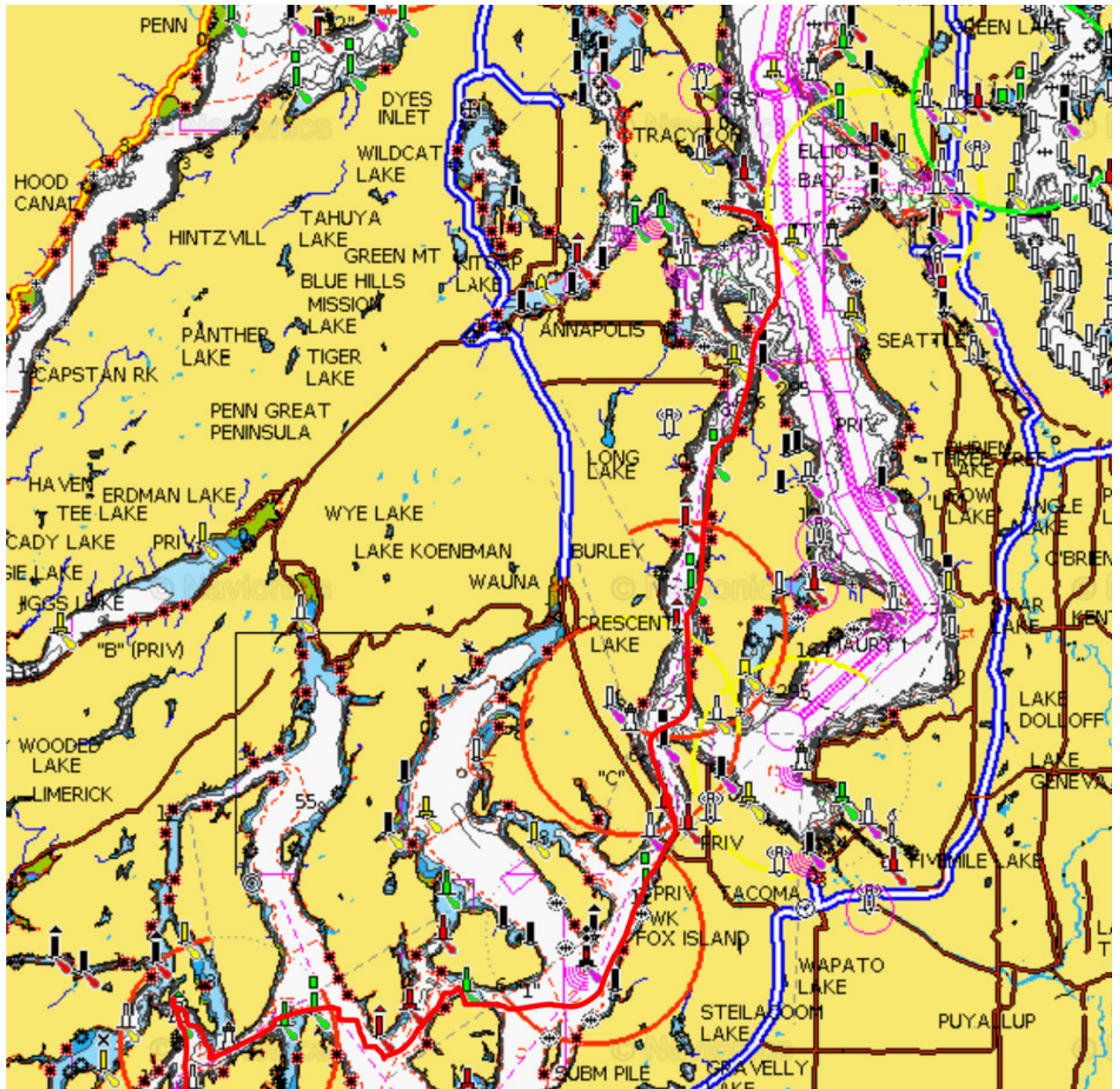


Laying up in Sidney, Vancouver Island

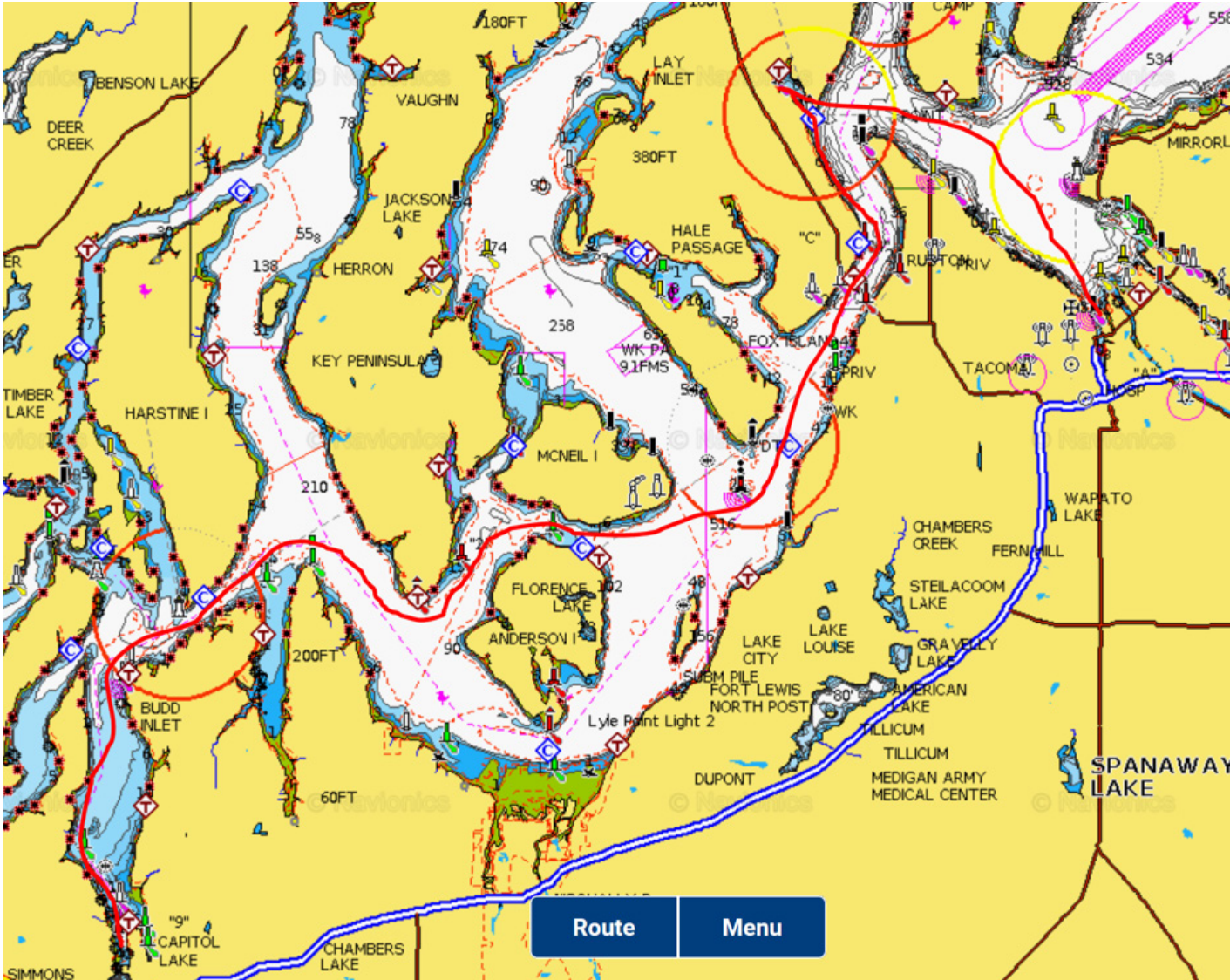
Southbound Track – Part 1



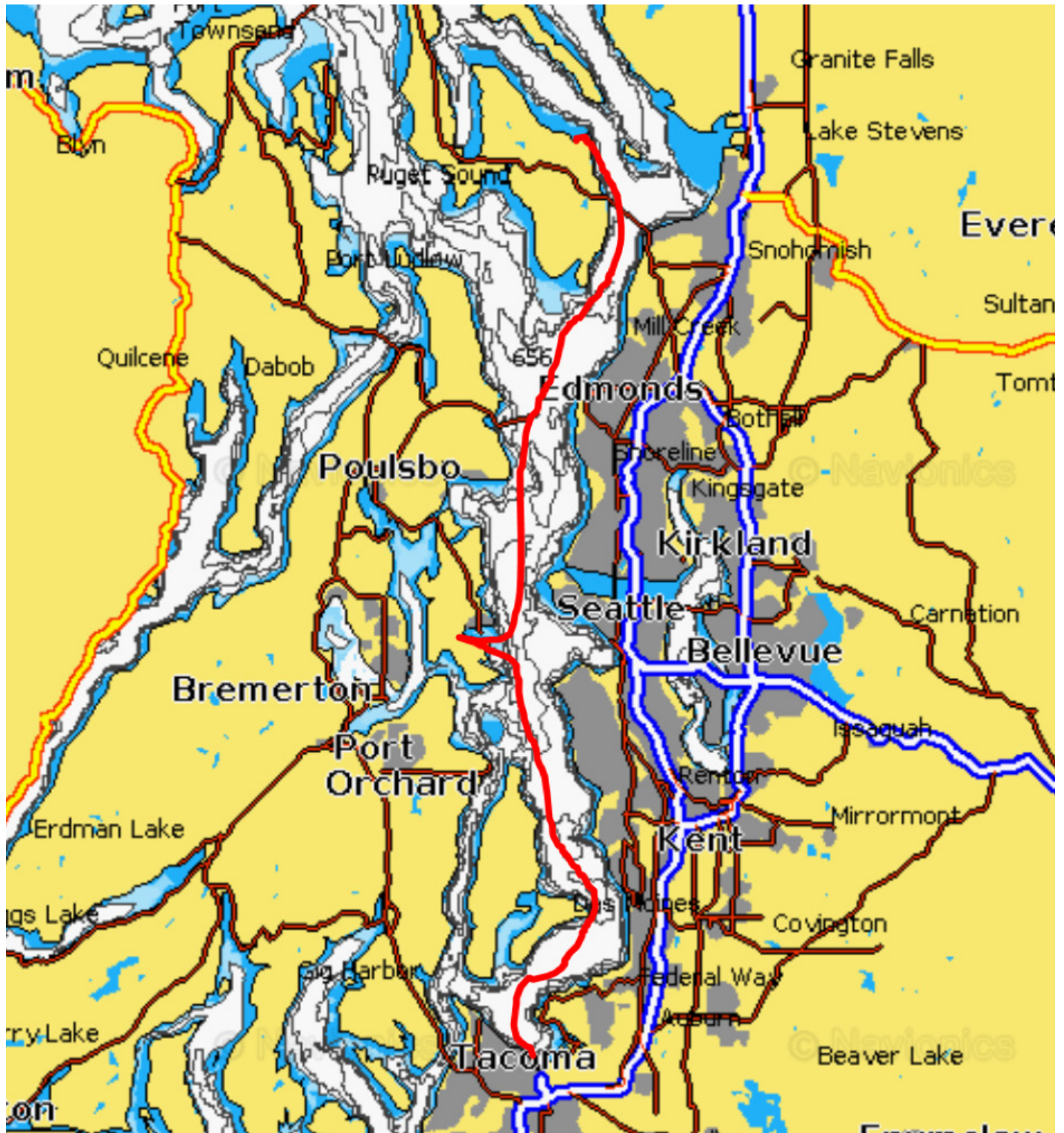
Southbound Track – Part 2



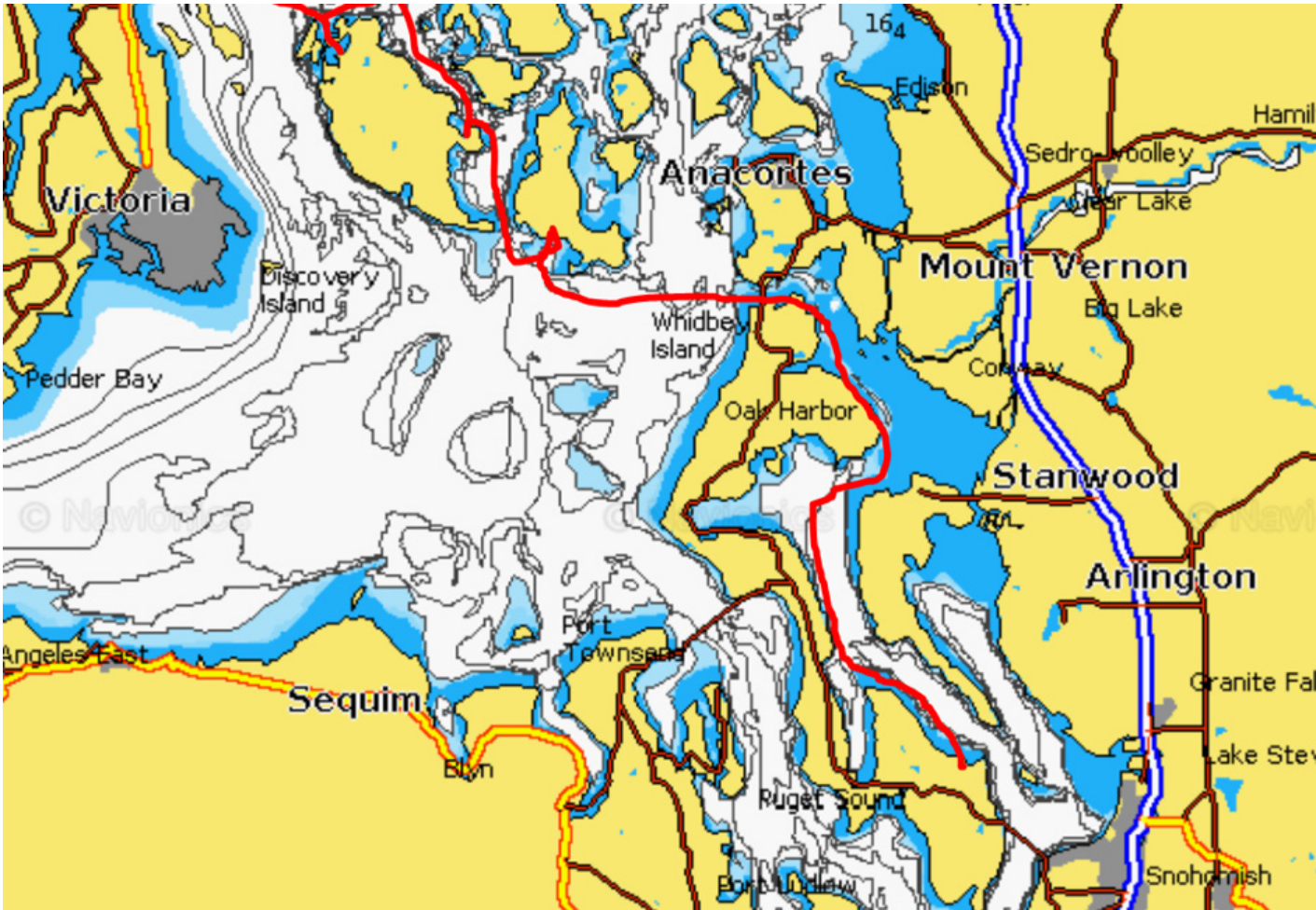
Northbound Track – Part 1



Northbound Track – Part 2



Northbound Track – Part 3



Places visited:

10/10/19 – Canoe Cove
11/10/19 – Port Sidney
12/10/19 – Friday Harbour
13/10/19 – Port Ludlow
14/10/19 – Blakely Harbour
15/10/19 – Hope Island
16/10/19 – Olympia
19/10/19 – Gig Harbour
20/10/19 – Tacoma
21/10/19 – Eagle Harbour
22/10/19 – Langley Harbour
23/10/19 – Mackaye Harbour
24/10/19 – Friday Harbour
26/10/19 – Roche Harbour
27/10/19 – Sidney – start winter layup

Crew:

Angela Lilienthal and Clive Woodman



Angela & Clive