
The Shallow Water Sailor

Number 169 *A simple boat, a bit of marsh, a redwing's song, and a friend or two*

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*Here is Brian's Report
excerpted for the
Shallow Water Sailor Newsletter*

Thoughts and Memories of Raid Finland 2011

by Brian Forsyth

Somehow we had the good sense to accept Norm Wolfe's invitation to crew on board his 24' Jim Michalak-designed, Estonian-built **Raider** for this 10th anniversary edition of the event. We included me, Brian, wife Valerie, son Sam, 21, and daughter Emma, 17. The plan was for Sam and me to be Norm's primary crew, with Val and Emma also sailing in **Raider** for a few days, depending on conditions and island logistics.

This year was the smallest Raid Finland in the event's history, with 6 boats participating. In addition to **Raider** and her all-American crew, there were:

Doppio - a Graham Byrnes-designed Bay River skiff 17 cat-ketch, built and captained by Wojtek, and his crew Jacek, and Jacek's daughter Martyna, 16, and son Kuba, 14, all from Poland.

Elinor - a bright-finished 18' Finnish-built lapstrake wood Bermudan sloop, sailed by Yves from Switzerland, and his French crew Bertram.

Meander - a 15' Swedish GRP gaff-rigged day boat, sailed by American (living in Finland) Mike. Mike's wife, Sousa, and their two young kids Nellie and Nate came along for the first couple days.

Penni - a Herreshoff/White Haven 12.5, built and sailed by Seppo, his wife Elena, daughter Anna, 20, and son Sergei, 16, from Finland.

VIPS - a Tom Dunderdale-designed 16' Apple cat-yawl, built and sailed by Australian (living in Sweden) Peter, and his German crew, Ralf.

Everyone spoke amazingly good English (even Australian Peter!) Over the course of the week, I had the opportunity to talk individually with all of the participants, and sail with several, as we occasionally swapped skippers and crews among the different boats. As good as the sailing, scenery and food were, the highlight for me was getting to know these wonderful, interesting people. Most of these folks were multiple Raid Finland repeat offenders, and it was easy to see why.

This year's raid was all about islands. On the first day we departed the mainland near Kotka and sailed to a different island for each day's destination, only returning to the mainland at Kotka again on the last day. While sailing to each day's destination, we sometimes stopped at random islands for lunch or a break. These islands (and there are a lot of them) are mostly smaller than a mile in diameter and are made of granite, an unforgiving substance unfamiliar to this Chesapeake sailor. This material glows orange-pink in the evening sunlight and retains a soothing warmth best appreciated via direct skin contact. Most of the islands of any size had trees and grass. Many in the area we sailed were part of a national park and were completely natural. Others had a few ubiquitous red wooden houses where shorelines provided good harbors.

Our course for the week took us to the southern exposed rim of the archipelago for the first three days, and then into more protected water for the last 4 days of the circuit. After two days of sailing Val and Emma were ready for dry land adventure and along with Sousa, Nellie and Nate caught a ferry (30-40 ft utility/excursion boat, not a car ferry) back to the mainland. The next few islands we were headed for were smaller national park islands without any ferry service so this worked out very well.

Days 4 and 5 gave us steady 25-knot winds and some wet beats to windward in the more open channels between islands. **Raider** sailed triple reefed for much of these two days, proving able and seaworthy under Captain Norm's hand and

Mate Sam's bailing. I have new respect for God's miracle fiber W after watching *Raider's* boom, a debarked sapling, bend and spring back continuously over those two days. But it was not all slogging. We had a downwind sleigh ride on day 2, with *Raider's* GPS showing a record max speed of 8.8 knots. And when winds were light we brought out *Raider's* secret weapon, the 9 ft oars that made for almost effortless rowing with one person per oar, sweep style.

This year's raid was not a race in any way, other than the natural competition any time two or more sailing boats are headed in the same direction. Mike and Peter's organization was spot on, nothing over-wrought, just everything (food, lodging, campsite, etc) there when you needed it. Food deserves special mention. Chef Janne (Finland) and his assistant Jason (originally from Scotland) followed the fleet in the "food boat", a sturdy 30-some foot motor cruiser that also hauled extra bags for the fleet. I was expecting "expedition" chow, filling but unspectacular. Raid Finlanders have much higher standards. Janne has been the chef for Raid Finland for 8 of the 10 years for reasons now obvious to me. Every meal was gourmet. All organic veggies, freshly butchered meats, serious breads, and then there were the desserts. Janne and Jason typically were preparing food underway as they followed the fleet. It was quite a treat rafting up to the food boat anchored at a lunch stop and being handed a three course lunch over the rail on china plates and all drinks in glass glasses. Fortunately it was shallow and the Baltic clear as we had to dive for the odd piece of cutlery bobbed over the side.

Throughout the week, I learned much about Finland in conversations with Seppo and his family, and Janne. I hope when the occasion arises that I can be half as good an ambassador for my country. We talked about boats (of course), Finnish traditions like sauna, home construction, food, school, work, etc. I left with a strong impression of Finland as a place where tradition, family, and nature are valued, and the natives are gracious and thoughtful, with a dry sense of humor and perhaps something unexpected up their sleeve. Like Seppo's boat gramophone. It was his father's and was carried on the family motorboat. So of course it is now standard equipment on their beautiful Haven along with a stack of vintage 78's. Seppo cranks it up "on special occasions" which was pretty much every day on Raid Finland and I couldn't agree more.



Some lessons learned:

The good charts we had for the entire route and all the islands made for a navigator's paradise. These charts and a hand bearing compass were all that were needed for navigation. The GPS was an interesting speedometer.

Don't leave your self-inflating PFD in the bilge with a forecast of rain. Good news is they work as advertised. I got to use that spare inflation kit.

My "breathable" foulies which have worked well in the generally benign conditions on the Chesapeake were not up to the job on the couple days we had of constant spray and occasional rain. I'll be looking for some seriously waterproof ones for Christmas. When scanning the sea looking for other boats in our fleet I was impressed at how visible some day-glo orange PFDs were, even a very long way off. I'm going to look for orange foulies.

Finally, if Norm invites you to raid with him, say "Yes" quickly. It will be the experience of a lifetime.

You can review all of Norm's past Raids and enjoy Brian's photos of Raid 2011 on the Internet by going to our web pages and clicking on Cruise Stories, then on Cruise #26.