

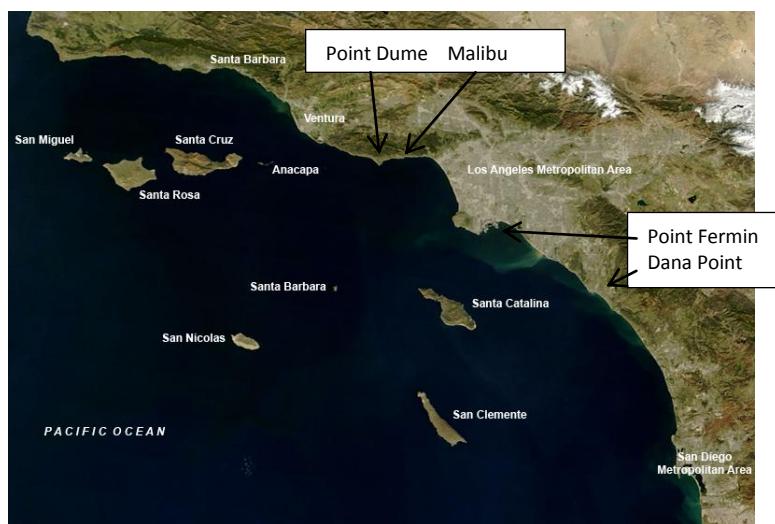
A Blue Whale from a Dolphin's Point of View

May 2016

With northwesterly winds dominant on the Southern California coast, a San Diego Dolphin can make it to the top of Santa Monica Bay and back in five days. My trip in May 2016 was a 275 nautical miles round trip. I was planning to go all the way out to Point Conception and back; but, then again, I planned to be first string on my high school basketball team.

At dawn my 6 hp Yamaha took me out of San Diego Bay and the wind filled in when I was nearing La Jolla Point. There was more north in the wind than normal, so I was forced to fall off from my goal of Dana Point. By nightfall I was headed into the lee shore of Camp Pendleton and decided to motor the rest of the way up to Dana Point. Talk about lee shore: At San Onofre I motored past our failed nuclear power plant, and, at San Mateo Point, past Richard Nixon's Western White House where he lived after the wreck of his ship of state.

The next day there was still too much north in the wind. I did not want to motor to the Isthmus at Santa Catalina Island so I fell off to an anchorage in the lee of Point Fermin. The wind tends to concentrate around Point Fermin so it was whipping in at around 35 mph when I anchored behind the breakwater. This is a pleasant anchorage if you confine yourself to looking only to the west. If you look east you realize you are just inside the largest and most active port on the west coast of North America. Huge cranes loom for miles and huge ships are lined up at anchor.



I searched for gas the next morning. The nearby small-boat harbor fuel dock was closed. I went a wandering and, after a false start, was directed down a channel in which all the docks were far above my head. Eventually I got to a fuel dock that was only about four feet higher than my deck. It seemed a bit foolish when I lifted up my little red fuel container to my chest, set it on the fuel dock, and asked for two and a half gallons. The fuel-guy did not laugh at me and was happy to oblige.

The rest of the day was spent crossing the outer boundary of Santa Monica Bay. For hours I saw no other boats while in the distance live millions of people. The goal was to get to Point Dume, but, here again, the northwest wind had slightly too much north in it. The highest I could point was to Malibu with Pepperdine University's tower on the hill. In the late afternoon the wind along the top of Santa Monica Bay is concentrated. The Santa Barbara Channel has a fast track called "Windy Lane" that shoots past Point Magu and Point Dume and finishes off along the top of Santa Monica Bay. That

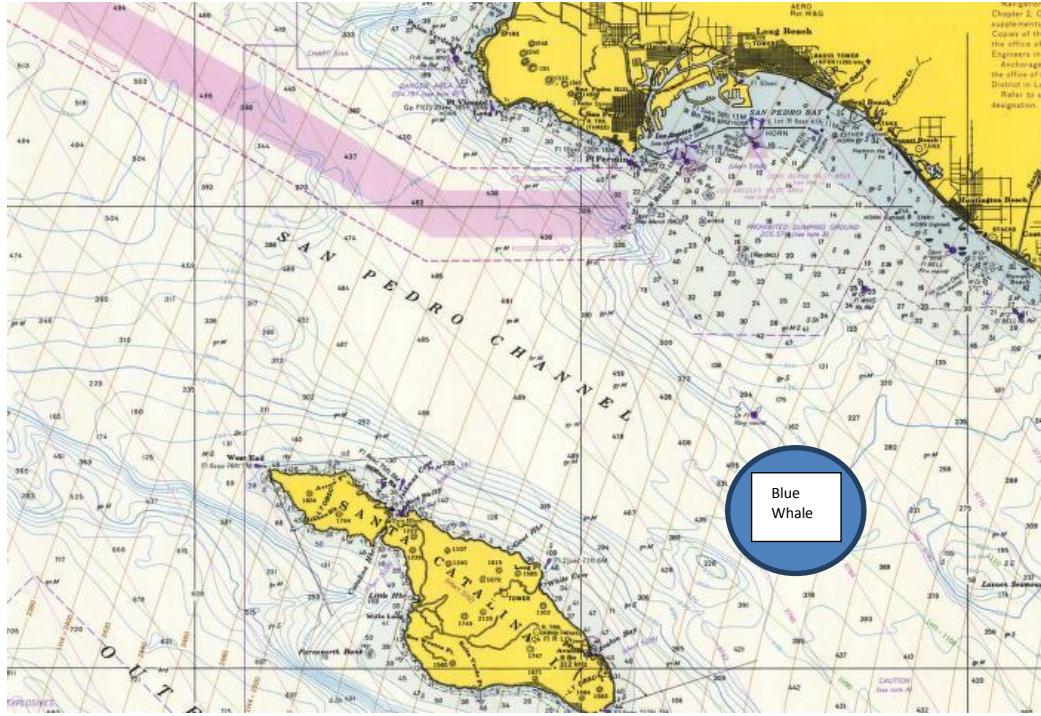
morning I had planned to sail one tack through that heavy wind and round up in the lee of Point Dume. But now, with me six miles east of Point Dume, I would need to round up at Malibu and motor straight into the wind and waves to get to my anchorage. Like playing first string in high school, this was not to be. I got within a mile offshore of Malibu, heading toward the beach, with the wind and sea unrelenting from my starboard. I got a bit further, tugged my mighty 6 hp motor to life, rounded up pointing west, attached my autohelm to the tiller, and went forward to take down my jib. With my weight on the bow, we crashed deep into every wave. Water poured over me as if in huge buckets. I tied down the jib and then lowered the main. The motor was keeping me headed into the waves and wind, but at full speed we were making no movement forward.

Grabbing everything to grab, I hunched back into the cockpit, water still flying down on everything at every wave. The wind was probably around 35 mph. The computer-generated NOAA weather voice that morning seemed so calm when it said "Gusts up to 35 mph." Windy Lane usually runs in the late afternoon at constant gust.

I was not in danger, I just could not go forward to Point Dume. Behind me I knew was a "temporary shelter" near Malibu Pier. I had never anchored there, but I had read about it in the guide to the coast. I figured I could check it out. If it did not work out, I could run downwind about ten miles to Marina del Rey. So, still getting beat up by the waves and with my motor running a full, I pulled the tiller toward me, my bow rounded toward shore. At just the moment my bow was swinging round and I was again pointed at shore, I looked straight ahead and realized I was just a few hundred yards out from the Malibu Colony, the most celebrity-concentrated set of beach houses in America. I smiled as I realized I was cocktail-hour entertainment. Tom Hanks was probably standing, looking at me out his floor to ceiling window, yelling to his family: "Come look at this idiot in a sailboat!"

But our Dolphins are safe boats. Mine, named *Boethius*, easily rode the swells around the corner of Malibu Point, swung up fifty yards off the end of the pier. I payed out two hundred feet of chain and another thirty feet of rode in thirty feet of water.

The night was rough. In the morning I motored away heading west just before dawn. I was just past Point Dume when my wife sent me a text saying I was needed at home. I turned left and spent the day first headed toward Avalon on Catalina Island but later swinging to head further down to Dana Point. The northwest wind was now behind me, and I rode wing-and-wing for several hours, the wind around 20 mph with choppy swells. It was in the middle of the afternoon when I heard a whale exhale close behind me. I turned to see one spout finishing and another starting. I watch both whales slowly lift their backs and descend. On this trip I had seen whales, dolphins, pelicans, and even a bright finch-like bird that spend thirty minutes exploring my boat. But these whales were close and their backs did not look like any whale I had seen before. I checked my book, and sure enough, it was not the back of a Gray or Humpback, it was a Blue. I had never seen a Blue Whale before—the largest mammal on earth! Imagine! A leviathan like that likes to frolic here in my home waters!



Dang it! A little later my wing and wing failed. I broke my boom. I had needed something out of the cabin. I don't remember what. I set the autohelm, raced forward, knelt on the cockpit step, reached down to the table, and BANG! Within seconds *Boethius* had swung north on a swell, the wind had backed against the preventer, and the boom snapped. Happily, the mainsail was not ripped. I limped into Dana Point and spent the next day limping into San Diego.

