

Cruise Report: CSSM Hampton Cruise

September 19-29, 2024

Cruise Captains: Keith Donald, Debbie Spear, s/v Mystic

Fellow Cruisers: Divided Sky, Gambrinus, Whisper

Divided Sky, Gambrinus and Whisper joined Mystic for a cruise down the Bay to Hampton, VA. Anchorages along the way and the pace of the cruise were designed to provide flexibility in the event weather played a role in our itinerary. For the most part, sunny skies with winds north of east prevailed on the way down the Bay, with predominately overcast skies with winds south of east on the return trip. Temperatures remained comfortable throughout the cruise. Departures from our original cruise plan were minimal with one boat returning to home port on day 10 and three boats returning on day 11. Our cruising partners were, Stephanie and Denny Sokso with their dog Lula on Divided Sky, Jennifer Shea and Peter Bruns on Gambrinus, Debbie Spear and Keith Donald on Mystic, and Carolyn Rugg and Larry Rovin with their dog Elias on Whisper.



Thursday, September 19th

Our first night's destination was Mill Creek near Solomon's Island. However, in deference to Whisper's desire to have a dog friendly anchorage, the upper reaches of Back Creek were chosen. Departure times varied as the distance to our first anchorage ranged from about 32 nm to 47 nm. With a pleasant sail or motor sail down the Bay, we all arrived in time for the 5:00 pm cocktail hour aboard Mystic. Divided Sky and Gambrinus rafted up with Mystic with Whisper anchored nearby. We all had dinghies so getting together was a non-issue.



Friday, September 20th

Our second night's destination was Cockrell Creek off the Great Wicomico River. Given the 42 nm distance across the mouth of the Potomac River, an 8:00 am departure was in order. We all had a pleasant reach with a favorable 1 knot current giving us boat speeds of 7 knots at times, at least until the Point No Point Lighthouse. If you passed close to that lighthouse, you would be amused by the outhouse cantilevered off the southwest side. The crossing of the mouth of the Potomac was uneventful. We anchored in the vicinity of the Reedville Market Waterfront Bar and Grill. Gambrinus rafted up with Mystic. Unfortunately, Carolyn's broken fingers (May injury) were taking a toll so she and Larry stayed onboard Whisper while the rest of us dinghied ashore to the waterfront restaurant. What a charming place as we sat outside for dinner overlooking our anchorage area.



Saturday, September 21st

The next three days' destinations were all less than 30 nm so departure times around 9:00 am were the norm. Our third night's destination was Jacksons Creek in Deltaville, VA. Departure was in light air. With the expectation that an afternoon southerly breeze would fill in, Gambrinus and Mystic held back and were rewarded by a pleasant sail into Deltaville for the last hour and a half of the journey. We chose the left fork of the creek, offering less exposure from the southeasterly breeze. Whisper and Gambrinus anchored individually, and Mystic rafted up to Divided Sky who hosted the cocktail gathering. Carolyn and Larry arrived by dinghy with Elias in tow. Elias and Lula met over the stern of Divided Sky.



Sunday, September 22nd

Sunday morning saw 12-17 knots from the east with lumpy seas and the best (or worst, opinions varied on this) sailing day of the cruise. Prior to departing, Divided Sky attempted to refuel, but the one marina open for business on Sunday had a broken diesel fuel pump. This was a day where one left the cockpit at their peril. Sadly, Whisper stayed behind in Deltaville, since the sailing conditions were not conducive to Carolyn's painful hand. The rest of us reefed for the conditions, starting closed-hauled until we cleared Gwynn Island, close-reaching to the decommissioned Wolf Trap Lighthouse (passing inside or outside), broad-reaching to the entrance to Mobjack Bay, then downwind to the entrance of the Severn River. Mystic arrived first and anchored in Free School Creek. Divided Sky and Gambrinus followed after taking the wrong fork in the river but eventually finding their way. This anchorage was recommended by Carolyn and Larry. Peter and I set out to find a public dock allowing Jennifer and Peter's son Nick to join us for appetizers and beverages on Gambrinus. A memorable sunset capped the evening.



Monday, September 23rd

Divided Sky was now seriously low on fuel. Fortunately, we found a marina nearby that offered fuel and pump out. After a later than normal departure, we were off to Hampton. I was expecting similar conditions to yesterday and set sail even before leaving the Severn River. Those conditions never materialized as we mostly motored our way to Hampton. I knew we needed to arrive before 5:00 pm to secure our slips and dock help. We arrived between 4:00 and 4:30 pm at the Safe Harbor Bluewater Marina and were greeted by friendly dockhands that really made us feel welcome and got us together in adjacent slips. Mystic hosted our appetizer and beverage gathering. We had made it to Hampton on schedule! Meanwhile, Whisper started her journey home, but was in no hurry, returning to Reedville for the evening.



Tuesday, September 24th

With two nights scheduled in Hampton, this was our morning to relax, check weather forecasts, and consider provisioning needs for the return trip north. One of the highlights of our trip to Hampton was a private tour of the NASA-Langley Research Center. Our tour hosts, Steve Smith and Will Johnston met us at the marina at 1:00 pm and provided transportation to the Center. This tour was both a trip down memory lane regarding the Apollo program as well as reminders that this site provides a critical function with resources as necessary to provide response to both space and aeronautical needs. After our tour, we gave Will a tour of our fleet with our usual appetizers and beverages. Steve and his wife Penny stopped by shortly after and joined us for dinner at the Marina Surf Rider restaurant. Meanwhile, Whisper continued north, spending the evening anchored off the Coan River Marina on the southern shore of the Potomac River.



Wednesday, September 25th

One of our considerations heading north was the track of hurricane Helene. Although this storm was projected to track well west of the Chesapeake, it pays to remain vigilant. Wednesday morning provided perfect sailing for going north with 10-15 knots out of the southeast. Remnants of hurricane Helene were expected to arrive sometime on Friday. Two approaches to going north were considered. One was to attempt to cross the Potomac River on Thursday. The second approach was to continue our planned trip to Cape Charles, but to reroute to Crisfield on Thursday, then on to Solomons on Friday, taking the more protected route up Tangier Sound and through Hooper Straights and on to Solomons. Both alternatives made sense and a departure time of 7:00 am allowed progressing up the Bay as far as possible or a noon arrival in Cape Charles. Gambrinus choose the expedient trip up the Bay arriving in Cockrell Creek that evening. Dolphins guided Gambrinus out of Hampton, a sign that they were doing the right thing. The favorable winds allow Gambrinus to cover 58 nm in one day, the same distance that was covered in three days during the trip south. Divided Sky and Mystic sailed comfortably to the Cape Charles Town Harbor Marina and arrived in plenty of time for a fuel stop, pump out and an afternoon visit to town or just chill. The four of us had a delightful outdoor dinner at the Shanty restaurant with a walk back to town for ice cream. Meanwhile, Whisper had a great sail to Solomons, anchoring at the top end of Back Creek.



Thursday, September 26th

Whisper remained in Solomons. Gambrinus had a pleasant journey to Solomons and secured a slip at the Safe Harbor Zahniser's Marina. With 51 nm from Cape Charles to Crisfield, Divided Sky and Mystic left at 7:00 am. Winds were mostly easterly at under 10 knots. Motor sailing was the mode of the day. Mystic arrived just ahead of Divided Sky and set anchor. Divided Sky rafted up. Denny and I dinghied ashore to grab ice and had the opportunity to board the tall ship Nao Trinidad from Spain, that was laying over, waiting for a weather window before proceeding to Norfolk. This ship is a replicate of the flagship that Magellan used, along with four other ships, to circumnavigate the globe in 1519-1522. Of the original 245 men that started this journey, only one ship and 18 men survived to complete the journey. Overcast skies prevented witnessing the sunset and star gazing. We consulted our weather sources and determined that an early Friday morning departure was warranted.



Friday, September 27th

Gambrinus and Whisper remained in Solomons. Divided Sky and Mystic took the inside route up Tangier Sound and through Hooper Straights, then crossing the Bay to Solomons. The 45 nm journey to Solomons included motor sailing and sailing, keeping in mind the prospect of remnants of Helene impacting the mid-afternoon conditions. Mystic had a couple hours sailing across the Bay but abandoned that effort upon entering the Patuxant River. Weather radar clearly showed we needed to be anchored by 3 pm. Both Divided Sky and Mystic found shelter behind the marina mooring field putting out generous amounts of scope as the southeast winds built and the rains came on. No rafting up this evening! We were now all gathered in Solomons but one day earlier than the original itinerary.



Saturday, September 28th

Prior to our departure, I dinghied the 0.5 nm up Back Creek to reconnect with Whisper. I then went ashore at Zahniser's to connect with Gambrinus. Whisper made the decision to head for home port. The rest of us decided to make our final night in Dunn Cove off Harris Creek. This made for a relaxing trip under sunny skies. Some sailing opportunities arose as an early afternoon southerly filled in briefly but died out eventually. I was pleasantly surprised to find Peter's Star crew Mike and his wife Jeanne had arrived on their trawler Karisma. They had the perfect setting for our final gathering of appetizers and beverages. Their patio like foredeck with lawn chairs were a stark contrast to our sometimes-cramped gatherings on the chosen host boat of the evening. What a wonderful way to wrap up ten days of cruising together.



Sunday, September 29th

Cloudy skies returned as we proceeded to our home ports. Divided Sky made the 200 yard journey to their slip from their anchorage. Gambrinus and Mystic took the short cut through Knapps Narrows for the four-hour 24 nm trip home.

I would like to thank my fellow cruising companions for putting their trust in me as we adjusted our itinerary to suit all those involved. My memories of good times together and working together will last a lifetime.

Divided Sky	10 nights
Mystic	10 nights
Gambrinus	8 nights
Whisper	4 nights

