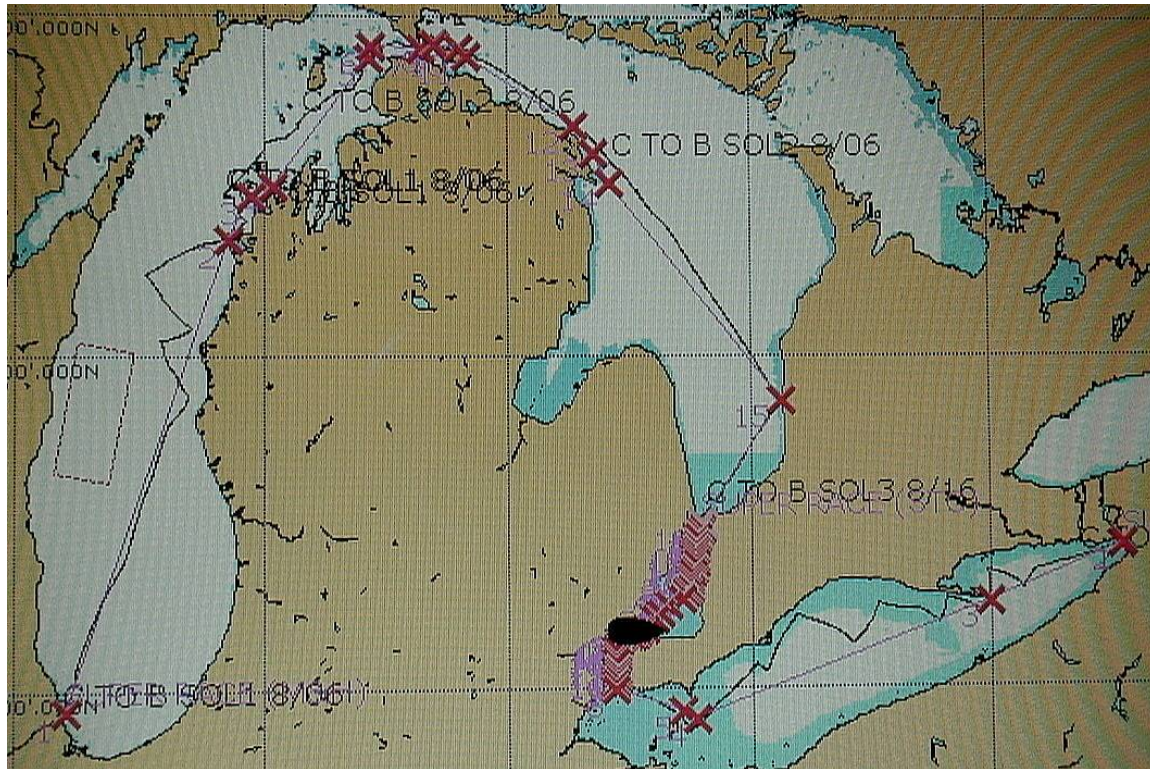


Chicago to Buffalo, Singlehanded, Nonstop – Part 2 by Bill Tucker

Part 1 described our preparations for this trip and the voyage up Lake Michigan, down Lake Huron, and down the St. Clair River to Lake St. Clair.

The following photo shows the track as recorded on my chart plotter. The intended course is also shown as the obviously straight lines. The periods of tacking in the northern part of Lake Michigan and across most of Lake Erie are obvious.



GL3 – Chicago to Buffalo – Chart Plotter Track

Two Rivers and a Lake - Continued

At 1500 on August 31, we entered Lake St. Clair and continued down the lake just outside the shipping channel. In the lake we passed a 3rd freighter. At the south end of the lake I contacted John Holt at Edison Boat Club and he brought Ron Zimba, Dennis Turner, and John Solden out to meet me in his sailboat Audacity. He motored along beside me for a few minutes while we exchanged greetings and a bit of trip travel log. Ron took a cell phone photo of GL³. As they departed at about 1715 we were headed out of Lake St. Clair and into the Detroit River.



**GL³ entering the Detroit River
Photo by Ron Zimba**

In the Detroit River good wind continued to push us along as before. At 1832 we passed under the Ambassador Bridge in Detroit. In the lower part of the Detroit River the sun went down adding to the navigation challenge. The GPS chart plotter proved to be an invaluable asset and greatly assisted in keeping the boat in the channel, especially in areas where there appeared to be lots of water much of which was not very deep. In the narrow Amherstburg Channel the winds died and boat speed was only a couple of knots making navigation more interesting. At 2145 we passed the Detroit Light leaving the Detroit River behind and entering Lake Erie.



Detroit Skyline from GL³

The rivers portion of the trip had been completed in just less than 12 hours. The winds had been great making the trip relatively easy. The last few miles of narrow channel were completed in the dark and proved to be more of a challenge. My preparation had paid off. No doubt my going aground in the Detroit River several weeks before had been a good object lesson on the need for constant vigilance!

Nasty Little Lake Erie

With the rivers behind us I figured the hard part was over, but Lake Erie proved to be more of a challenge than I expected. After passing the Detroit Light at 2145, on August 31, I headed east toward Pelee Passage. Due to the heavy shipping traffic in this area I knew that a nap was out of the question until I got well clear of Pelee Passage and the shipping lanes. The first few hours were a nice sail with the boat close hauled and a 20 knot wind. The wind quickly picked up and moved onto the nose. To get past Pelee Passage I tacked south close to Pelee Island. At 0510 on September 1 we were well past Pelee Passage to the south.



Lake Erie after the Storm, Buffalo Ahead!

With apparent wind speeds of about 20 knots on the nose we continued to tack down the lake. By the morning of September 2 wind speeds had increased to over 30 knots and were still on

the nose. The weather man stated that waves were 10 to 14 feet. Winds for 2 days were over 30 knots on the nose. The highest wind speed I saw on my wind instrument was 42 knots. I tacked up toward the north shore of Lake Erie hoping that the shore would provide some reduction in the fetch and thus the wave height. I put 2 reefs in the main and rolled my genoa down to a very small triangle. The aft reef line on my main sail reef chafed through twice and had to be retied. When I leaned on the table in the main cabin it shifted noticeably to leeward. Investigation revealed that the self tapping screws that held the base to the hull liner had worked themselves out. Even with the wind and waves on the nose we kept on moving at 3.5 to 4 knots in the right direction. Early on the morning of September 3rd the apparent wind decreased to fewer than 20 knots and gradually shifted aft so we were on a broad reach. The waves decreased to less than 2 feet and we had a delightful sail under overcast sky into Buffalo. At 1217 GL3 passed through the break wall into Buffalo Harbor. It had taken 2 days and 14.5 hours to cross little Lake Erie. The entire trip had taken 8 days and 17.8 hours, just between my estimate of 8 to 10 days. The distance between the waypoints had been 799 nautical miles, but the log showed a distance traveled of 946 nautical miles.



The End: Buffalo Harbor Break Wall

Twenty years earlier my family moved from Southport, North Carolina to Detroit. For GL³ this involved sailing offshore to New York, then motoring up the Hudson River and through the Erie Canal. Along the Erie Canal all the local nautical experts told me how treacherous and rough Lake Erie could be. When we got into Lake

Erie there was not a trace of wind to be found and we motored almost all the way across a very flat lake. We nearly ran out of fuel but fortunately a light wind came up for the last few miles leaving about 15 minutes of fuel for final docking. It took 20 years before I saw a real demonstration of just how nasty little Lake Erie could really be!

Buffalo to Detroit

I had planned to spend 2 or 3 days in Buffalo for rest and relaxation. Again listening to the weather it appeared that if I waited I would again have the wind on the nose. So with a rest of just over a day we got under way on September 4 at 1732 from the Erie Yacht Basin at Buffalo. We motored most of the way home with relatively light wind on the nose. On September 6 at 0815 we tied up at Edison Boat Club. The entire round trip of over 1600 nautical miles had taken just under 18 days.

Things to Do and Things that Broke

During the trip I kept a running list of things to fix, change and buy. Here are a few of the highlights:

Things to buy:

1. New Edison Boat Club Burgee (the old one blew to shreds in the Lake Erie Gale)
2. Fly swatter (this device was clearly missed as it appeared twice in my list)

Things to fix or change:

1. My Simrad Autopilot (It failed the first day out due to water damage that clearly occurred last season. I carried 2 Simrad Autopilots fortunately.)
2. The forward reef line on the second reef did not pull the sail tight against the boom due to interference with a baton and the new low friction strong track.
3. Water faucet in the head sink needs a shutoff valve (Leaks into the sink when the boat is heeled and the water tank is higher than the sink.)
4. Install a latch on the galley silver drawer (Although an indentation in the sides holds it in place most of the time rough weather can open the drawer. Fortunately it does not dump the silver as it hits one of the companion way steps.
5. Replace the screws that mount the legs of the main salon table to the hull liner. (The self tapping screws had all worked their way out.)
6. Replace burned out deck light
7. Fix leak on starboard shroud tang
8. Modify bow anchor locker so it is leak tight (With green water coming over the bow it tended to fill up adding a couple hundred pounds to the bow. I discovered this on the way to Chicago and used duct tape to seal it.)
9. Replace both aft reef lines (They were the oldest lines on the boat. The 2nd reef line chafed through twice in Lake Erie.)
10. Glue pencil holder at chart table back in place.
11. Replace burgee halyard (The halyard tore the burgee during the trip across Lake Erie)
12. Figure out why one of the spinnaker halyards had a spot chafed 30% of the way through near the top of the mast.
13. Put chart plotter mounting in cockpit.

Why not?

Why not a new race? My voyage during the summer of 2006 demonstrated that it is feasible. It would be the longest race in the Great Lakes. It would include passage through 4 lakes and 2 rivers. It would include three races rolled into one: The Chicago Mackinac Island Solo Challenge, The Chicago to Port Huron Super Mac, and The Great Lakes Super Race. The rivers portion would offer a unique challenge. Just completing this race would be a major accomplishment that any sailor could be proud of. Many with the time and resources will take this on as the ultimate Great Lakes Race just because it is there. To those that say why undertake such a race. I can only reply: "Why not?"