

# the GOOD LIFE

(five great sailing towns you may not know about)

The question was tabled after one evening's race. "What if you had to relocate?" Someone asked. "And it could be some place where there was a ton of racing and a cool, laid-back scene?"

The group instantly dismissed the talent-laden havens of San Diego, Newport, and Annapolis as high quality sailing spots, but just too known. This had to be something off the radar, the sort of place where nearly everyone on the racecourse knows your name.

Someone's road atlas, dog-eared and tattered, was soon splayed out and the search for small-town sailing bliss was underway. There was possibility with each blue blotch—lakes, harbors, bays, and open oceans—the options were overwhelming. But we caught wind of their plight and picked up the task, gathering opinions and experiences far and wide to narrow the search to a mere handful amongst thousands of underrated sailing towns. We had our demands: we had to have weeknight beer can racing—that would be our "in." There had to be a community sailing program from which we could poach new and eager crew. Sailing conditions had to be reliable, there had to be a walk-in fleet so we wouldn't have to start anew. And, of course, there had to be one good watering hole. With all due respect for the natives of the following towns and cities, we apologize for spot burning, but thanks for putting out the welcome mat at the county line.

—EDS.





Wayzata YC, and the surrounding clubs of Lake Minnetonka, serve up one-design racing practically every night of the week in the summer, including J Boats, Scows, Sonars, and Capri 25s (left and below).

# Minnesota Wayzata

The Wayzata Sailing Foundation recently bought Mrs. Rosekrans' house next door to Wayzata YC. The dilapidated home ended up here in this lakeside community some 60 years ago after being hauled across frozen Lake Minnetonka. Before the year is out, the house will be spruced up enough to accommodate the swelling populace of the Wayzata Community Sailing School, which is responsible for more than 400 tykes each summer.

Such a facility wouldn't get much attention in most towns, but to Wayzata's residents, to whom sailing is as much a way of life as surfing is to any California coastal town, the sailing school is a big deal—the school is its future. Observe Wayzata's vacant slips on any given Thursday night during the summer high season and you'll quickly understand that the racing scene is the pulse of Wayzata.

"The marina will be nearly empty," says local Steve Bren. "The town is awed by the site of so many boats on the bay. It's definitely the one thing that gives the city its flavor."

Wayzata has a work hard, play hard personality, says Dallas Johnson, a longtime resident, and life here simply evolves around the lake, whether Minnetonka is in its liquid or solid state.

"Living close to the lake in Wayzata or another Lake Minnetonka neighborhood really helps," says Johnson. "Suburbia world surrounds the lake and it's an entirely different world."

Wayzata itself is only a couple of small neighborhoods, but an idyllic place to live and raise a family, he adds. Bike trails, beaches, and a variety of small businesses maintain the lakeshore town feel. There are a few hangouts populated by sailors: Sunny's (Sunsets) and the city-owned Muni (Wayzata Bar & Grill), but the place you're sure to find them en masse is at Wayzata YC on Thursday nights. The parties are the biggest and best on the lake says Bren, and the racing beforehand pulls in 130 or so boats from all around the lake.

There are happening scenes in nearby

Excelsior and Spring Park, but Wayzata's location right off the interstate and its proximity to downtown, says Johnson, lends itself to an easy, 15-minute commute for the weeknight warriors, many of whom work in Minneapolis' biotech and financial businesses. On tap each evening at one of three yacht clubs is one-design racing in big, active fleets of small keelboats and scow classes born on the lake over the past century.

And when the lake freezes, the runners come out. "People actually like winter here," says Johnson. "It compresses the sailing season into something you appreciate, and the ice boating and kite sailing are fantastic in the winter."

—DAVE REED



## WAYZATA, MINNESOTA

Estimated population: 3,922

Chamber of commerce says: "Charming"

Conditions: Three-season if you want, ice boating for diehards

Hometown fleet: J/24 Fleet No. 1, the oldest J/24 fleet in the world

For after-race suds: The Muni

Employable if: Science, math, and technology are your thing

Next big regatta: J/24 North Americans in September

## FOR SMALL-TOWN RACING



### Bellingham Washington

Outdoor-living bliss in Seattle's shadow



### Somers Montana

High-country sailing at its finest



### Burlington Vermont

A small city with a big sailing scene



### Marion Massachusetts

Where there's always breeze on Buzzards Bay

# Bellingham

Washington



The annual PITCH Regatta pulls out Bellingham's PHRF fleet (above), and when the racing's done, there's plenty of unbeatable cruising to be had.

## THE BELLINGHAM BACKDOWN

It was my first time racing at PITCH on Bellingham Bay, and I was excited as we tuned up for the start. With about seven minutes to go, the skipper says, "Stop the boat. Let's sail backward." What? We headed up, back winded the main, stopped, and preceded to sail backward with the clock ticking down. Interesting. As I soon discovered, the eel grass can get pretty thick in the bay in late summer, so, in order to make sure they shed all that weed on their keels, Bellingham sailors are proficient in the art of backing down, and it's common practice do so right before the start. The grass drops off and off you go. Ready, set, reverse, go! —R.H.

**P**ick up almost any magazine that has a top-10 towns whatever list and Bellingham will be there: best walking town, biking-friendly, hippest and healthiest, best adventure towns, you name it. And that's just the stuff on shore. For cruisers, the San Juan Islands, arguably the best cruising grounds anywhere, are only three or

four sailing hours away. For racers there's the steady winds and challenging currents of Bellingham Bay, all with snow-capped, 11,000-foot Mt. Baker providing a spectacular backdrop.

The bulk of the racing in the area is out of Bellingham YC, founded in 1925, which hosts everything from PHRF club races, to one-designs and dinghy fleets. There's a particularly strong Etchells presence, which regularly sends a team to the world championships. BYC's dinghy armada includes Lasers, Bytes, Optis, 420s, scows, and many others to the start line all summer long.

The Corinthian YC of Bellingham doesn't have a roof over its head, per se, but rallies its members on the water for its Thursday-night PHRF racing. "I race both Wednesdays and Thursday nights," says Todd Koetje, owner of *Havrn*, a J/133. "Both clubs have fun racing. Corinthian has more cruisers, BYC is a little more competitive."

As far as measuring that competitive level, he says, "It's pretty zealous racing, it's just that there aren't as many boats here as there is in Seattle. And, because there's fewer boats, there's less like boats racing together."

True to their outdoorsy lifestyle, and par for this corner of the U.S. of A., you'd be hard pressed to get Bellingham sailors indoors after racing, says Koetje. The socializing typically takes place right there on the Bay or at the docks. "Some go to the clubhouse for burgers and beer, or the Boundary Bay Brewery, but many boats, like ourselves, just stay out on the

water, float around, and enjoy the suds, sea, and the scenery."

This year BYC will host its 35th annual PITCH Regatta. The name itself hints at how long this regatta has been around. Originally, it stood for Pacific International Ton Championships. When the tonner classes disappeared, the regatta changed to an everybody-welcome format, but kept its name. Its posters tout, "Bellingham, where the wind always blows," which is bit of a dig at the light-air sailors in Seattle, 85 miles to the south.

The well-run, two-day regatta draws racers from Canada, Washington, and surrounding states. It's hard to say whether the visitors come for the sailing or the hospitality, but the two are a great combination.

"The outstanding thing about racing on Bellingham Bay is that there's a steady wind on a big bay without commercial traffic to worry about," says Michelle Hurst, a BYC member. "There's lots of room to run multiple courses if needed."

Bellingham is also home to Western Washington University, which has a long history of intercollegiate sailing. More than just a college team, many of their members also act as instructors for the area's youth sailing camps and junior racing programs.

Good wind, challenging currents, and unobstructed racing in an expansive bay, all set in a spectacular panorama of sea and towering mountains, make Bellingham an exceptional and fast growing place to sail.

—RICHARD HAZELTON



## BELLINGHAM STATS

Estimated population: 75,150

Chamber of commerce says:

"A refreshing change"

Conditions: Year-round sailing for diehards, summer cruising is a must

Hometown fleets: PHRF, Laser

For after-race suds: Bella Marine

Employable if: Education or construction

Next big regatta: Ski to Sea 2009



Smoke from far off forest fires spread across Flathead Lake as the weeknight PHRF fleet enjoys a summer evening's race. Nearby Kalispell (below) is western living to a tee.

# Montana Somers

The story begins 10,000 years ago when a glacier created the massive bowl now called Flathead Lake. At 28 miles long and up to 15 miles wide, it's the largest natural freshwater lake in the western United States. Before the modern era brought roads and railroads to the region, steamers and barges transported goods toward Canada, 80 miles north. Today, the lake has changed from a water route to a water playground—and the old logging and

railroad town of Somers, Mt., a point of rock at the foot of the lake, 10 miles south of the small city of Kalispell, is the town of choice for racers.

North Flathead YC, in Somers, was formed in 1975 and has grown into a leading racing venue. Sixty percent of the 130 boats moored at the docks located next to an old renovated lumber mill participate in the race program, an intense, short-season schedule with as many as 40 different contests from the first week in June through Labor Day.

Tuesday and Friday evening beer can race leagues are the staple, with long-distance races every weekend, in addition to the Montana Sailing Championships and several other regional PHRF and one-design regattas. Visitors can stop by the docks on race nights and jump on a boat to crew, or if towing a boat, rent a slip, grab a chart, and receive local knowledge from club members for a weekend tour.

"Flathead is a great sailor's lake because it's large enough to have thermals," says Jennifer Fisher, an avid racer who has been sailing the lake for almost 40 years. "But it's not just about the racing, it's just so beautiful to be here."

The allure of this mountain-ringed lake has made Somers a sweet spot for retiring baby boomers. Intimate gatherings on larger boats have altered the hangout scene at the large fire pit at the yacht club, but Dell's Bar is hopping with rowdy sailors on race nights when the yacht club steward delivers the results. It's getting harder to find a seat at the Sunday brunch at the Somers Bay Café.

But for now, development has slowed,

## LEISURE RULES ON FLATHEAD

Even in the autumn as the weather begins to turn colder, leisure cruising continues to prevail as the essence of the Flathead Lake experience.

"I love late September when the weather is changing between seasons," says Bill Reed, of Whitefish, who has sailed the lake for 28 years. "The changes in the lake color are dramatic. Between the dark lake, the shoreline with green trees, the mountains and sky in the background charcoal

grey, it's beautiful and some of my favorite time to go out and sail. You feel like you have the lake to your self."

And while not as well publicized as its Scottish cousin, according to a variety of reports, people have sighted the Flathead Lake monster regularly since 1889.

—B.S.



### SOMERS STATS

Estimated population: 550

Chamber of commerce says:

"Warm and friendly"

Conditions: Three-season (you'd be silly not to ski in the winter)

Hometown fleets: PHRF, J/22, J/24,

Thistle

For after-race suds: Dell's Bar

Employable if: Construction, health care

Next big regatta: Montana Cup,

August 2009

CRAIG MOORE (3)



The Etchells fleet always gets a strong turnout on Lake Champlain.

# Burlington

Vermont

**B**urlington residents have a guarded reluctance to sing the praises of their city. They know they've got a great thing going, and if everyone knew what they did, the city would have to deal with an influx of people, and they kind of like the place the way it is. What's so special about it? Simply put, it has the best of both summer and winter sailing. With one of the country's largest freshwater lakes lapping against the city waterfront, and with some of the country's best skiing less than an hour's drive to the east, what could one possibly not like about this little city? Those who love the outdoors love Burlington.

In the summer, there's plenty of sailing, and the public access points are bustling. At the Lake Champlain Community Sailing Center, located on the city's vibrant waterfront, you can rent dinghies and small keelboats, take sailing lessons, and even store your own small sailboat. Center activities aren't confined to the summer, either. In the spring and fall, you'll also find the University of Vermont sailing team practicing there, as well as area high schools. You can also take sailing lessons in Solings at the International Sailing School, just north of Burlington. Plus, there are a number of public launching ramps in the area, including one right on the Burlington waterfront.

Natives can easily travel just a few miles from Burlington to one of the lake's two most active sailing clubs—the Lake Champlain YC to the south and the Malletts Bay Boat Club to the north. Between them, you can race four nights

a week in various classes: Lasers, PHRF, Portsmouth, Etchells, and J/24s. And on any given weekend you can enjoy club racing in all of those classes. Let's not forget the venerable Lightning and its zealous following.

If that's not enough, the area has a great track record of hosting major events, including regional Etchells and J/24 championships, and North Ameri-



## BURLINGTON STATS

Estimated population: 38,000

Chamber of commerce says: "One of America's most livable cities"

Conditions: Four seasons, with iceboating  
Hometown fleets: PHRF, Etchells, Lasers, Lightnings, J/24s

For after-race suds: Leunig's, Breakwater's Café

Employable if: Education, technology

Next big regatta: Lightning Worlds 2009

can or national championships for Lasers, Lightnings, and Finns. The upcoming calendar includes the 2009 Lightning World Championship.

One of the area's favorite sailing sons is Andy Horton. A product of the local junior sailing programs, Horton, along with two top-flight local sailors, Bill Fastiggi and Heather Rowe, won a gold medal at the Pan American games in Lightnings. Horton was also a team member aboard the America's Cup contender Luna Rosa. But he's not the area's only claim to fame. Locals Erik and Karl Johnson, along with Bretton Gardner, won the triplehanded Sears Cup a few years back, and another world-class sailor, James Lyne, who will be coaching the 2008 U.S. Olympic Yngling team in China, has chosen Burlington in which to settle down.

For Horton, Burlington's magnetism is simple. "It's the people and the lifestyle," he says. "It's got great, down-to-earth type of people, the nicest people in the world. It's an outdoors type of lifestyle. You can do anything from mountain climbing to berry picking. I've been to a million different places and I keep coming back here."

Sailing doesn't stop in Burlington just because the temperature drops. Lake Champlain's many bays freeze at different times, providing the opportunity for lots of fresh ice for iceboating, and the area regularly hosts DN racing and has hosted major championships for the fastest boats on ice, the Class E Skeeters. And if it snows too much or there's no wind, there's always skiing.

—DAVE POWLISON

# Marion

In 1982, Hew Russell sailed into Sippican Harbor for the first time as a young delivery crew and was instantly taken aback by its beauty. Nearly 20 years later, when looking to relocate his family from San Francisco, his search for an idyllic hometown on the East Coast led him straight back to Sippican—more specifically the quaint coastal town of Marion.

“It came down to the right community, the right house, and great sailing,” says Russell. “It was about the sailing community, the wind, and having a safe place for the kids to run free.”

Six years later they’re entrenched in Marion’s hyperactive racing scene, day tripping in the summer to any one of the half-dozen harbors on nearby Buzzards Bay. Martha’s Vineyard, Nantucket, Cape Cod and the islands are right around the corner. For the Russell clan, it’s a little slice of all that’s good about life on the water.

## MARION STATS

Estimated population: 5,200

Chamber of commerce says: “Rare natural beauty”

Conditions: Four seasons

Hometown fleets: Herreshoff 12 1/2s;

J/80s, 420s, PHRF

For after race suds: Beverly YC, The Wave

Employable if: Education, technology

Next big regatta: Buzzards Bay

Regatta '09

Downtown Marion, with its general store, post office, and small shops, has the brochure charm of an old New England town, even as its summer population swells. The harbor, surrounded by stately, year-round and summer homes, has a protected inner anchorage with a large mooring field. The outer harbor, though open to the prevailing southerlies, has a protected stretch behind what’s called Converse Point, providing smooth flat water for racing and sailing classes. Sail beyond the outer harbor, and you’re on Buzzard’s Bay, known for its consistent smoky southwester.

Beverly YC, established in 1872, is the epicenter of the sailing scene, and hosts races and regattas every weekend and runs its storied Marion to Bermuda Race every other year. In August, hundreds of boats turn out for its (and New Bedford YC’s) Buzzards Bay Regatta.

To the casual observer, the racing seems to have no end; there are the family friendly and spirited PHRF and Shields Wednesday night series to consider. There’s Lady’s afternoon keelboat series in classic Herreshoff 12½s and Bullseyes, J/24s on Thursday nights, and the rapidly growing J/80 fleet. There are pursuit races, scavenger races, moonlight races, and in the daytime, the harbor is packed with Optis, Lasers, and 420s. It carries on through the fall and winter with the highly touted Tabor Academy high school



## SOMETHING IN THE WATER?

There are a whole bunch of notable names to come out of the Marion racing scene, both young and old, including Glenn Foster, who won a Bronze in the Tempest at the 1972 Olympics, Little America’s Cup winner Steve Clark (Cogito), and there’s the latest superstar, Men’s 470 crew Stuart McNay, competing in the 2008 China Olympics. —P.M.

team and the fanatical frostbiters.

Early in its history, Marion’s primary industry was manufacturing salt for preserving food for the rapidly expanding population. The industry’s eventual collapse ushered in a reputable traditional boatbuilding scene, which is still vibrant today.

Bill Saltonstall, whose family has been in the area for nearly 70 years, appreciates his roots to Marion’s early days, and at the age of 71, the town’s appeal is hardly surprising. “You don’t have to go across a bridge or use a ferry,” he says. “But people [tourists] tend to go right by on the way to the Cape, and that’s good.” Spoken like a true Yankee.

Saltonstall has raced nearly all of the one-design classes that have come to Marion over the years; Herreshoff 12½s, 110s, Shields, J/22s, and J/24s. Marion was the base for his Olympic class Tempest campaign, and the testing ground for his bids with fellow Marion speedster Van Alan Clark at the Little America’s Cup with C Class Catamarans *Patient Lady* and *Beverly*. These native and wind-tossed waters, he says, are perfect for such ventures: “You don’t see a lot of power boats here; the vast majority of moorings have sailboats on them. Why? Because when you leave the harbor, it gets too rough to have much fun on a powerboat.”

—PETER MCGOWAN



Ladies’ racing in Herreshoff 12 1/2s is as quintessential Marion as you get. While the old-timers go at it, Marion’s next generation (above, right) learns the ropes.