

The Fishing Trip

Doug was in the local Marine Supply Store thinking of buying a GPS for his aluminum, sixteen-foot, Alaskan style fishing boat. As he perused the counters full of GPSs of all sizes, shapes and prices, he soon became aware they were too expensive for him. But as he was leaving the store, he saw some small compasses that were easy to install and they required no batteries, setup or configuration. They were only five dollars, so he bought one. When he arrived home, he immediately installed the small compass on the dash of the center console in his boat. He was pleased to at least have something which would show him his direction when or if the fog descended while he was out fishing. Doug had been out fishing on other boats when fog had descended, encircling the boat he was on, and if it wasn't for their compass they would have been lost. Thick fog, locally known as pea soup, came and went with frequent regularity where he lived. Doug was planning on going salmon fishing on Saturday, as he had heard the salmon were within three to five miles of shore, and since he would be fishing in the ocean it was important not to venture too far out without a means of knowing which direction he was going in case fog appeared. Doug had exclusively used his boat on lakes, so this was the first time he was taking it out on the ocean.

Saturday morning came and Doug hooked the trailer with his boat to his truck and he set off to drive to Bodega Bay. He drove through thick fog for several miles in some areas, but as he arrived at the ocean the sun was shining and he could see far out towards the horizon. He then drove several more miles to Spud Point where the public boat launch was located. While waiting for his turn to launch his boat he looked back towards where he had come from and there appeared to be a wall of fog inland. He also noticed that while the line in front of him was only

about ten boats, the line behind him already stretched to the main road. *It is going to be a very busy day at the boat launch*, he thought.

After a short wait, as the others before him launched their boats, it was finally Doug's turn. His boat now in the water, he then parked his truck and trailer in the vast parking lot. The line of trucks and cars with fishing boats now stretched as far as he could see along the main road. He was happy he'd gotten here earlier than all these other fishermen. Soon he was headed out along the miles long channel which led him out past the seawall, and into the ocean. The sun was bright, the air was warm, and, best of all, the ocean was relatively calm. The right turn from the channel and out around the seawall and into the ocean had been the scene of several boats capsizing over the decades, so one had to stay very aware of the ever-changing conditions. Doug's sixteen-foot aluminum boat was very sturdy. Its high bow stopped most waves from crashing over the bow and into his boat, and the sturdy railings allowed him a safe hold as he maneuvered anywhere around his boat. Doug could see his compass was working correctly and that he was headed west. A bell was ringing slowly from a buoy marking some rocks, and he noticed the fog was still far inland. After travelling several miles out into the ocean Doug readied his fishing pole by tying a quick release weight holder onto his line. He then added several feet of line and he attached a foot long flasher to the end of that line. Next, he attached a two-foot length of line to the flasher, and to other end of that line he tied a snap swivel. Doug bent the four-inch shaft of the hook he would use, aptly named a crowbar, twice, so it would do a slow, erratic roll as it traveled through the water, mimicking an injured fish, and then Doug threaded a sardine onto the bent hook, pierced the sardine's jaw with a copper pin, up through one hole in the hooks shaft and out the sardine's head. He then wound thin copper wire around the pin in a figure-eight pattern to secure the bait to the hook. He then attached the hook to the

snap swivel, and finally, he attached a two-pound sinker to the quick release weight holder, and he let out line one foot at time until he had counted to thirty-five. At his slow trolling speed, he believed he was down about thirty feet.

After Doug finished getting his now baited and weighted line to the right fishing depth, he again looked back at the shore and he noticed the fog was moving quickly back towards him. He was shocked because this was the first time he had ever seen fog moving from the land back out to the ocean. But, always the optimist, Doug hoped the fog would simply dissipate before reaching him. The once calm ocean began to get choppier, the wind was also gaining in strength, and the fog was getting steadily closer. Doug was five miles offshore now, he knew couldn't do much of anything to avoid the inevitable conditions that he now found himself in, so he decided to continue fishing. Within what seemed like only minutes the fog surrounded his little fishing boat, the wind had picked up significantly, so he and his boat were being tossed around like they were but a small piece of cork, and the center console and steering wheel were what he gripped to avoid being thrown around or completely out of the boat as rogue waves now broadsided his boat.

Suddenly he heard a boat coming closer and closer and when the large aluminum, commercial fishing boat passed closely by him, Doug realized that his little boat was so small the much larger boat's radar probably hadn't even picked his boat up. The waves were now getting too large for his little boat and they were becoming disorganized so they lacked a steady direction. Waves were coming at his boat from multiple directions, and the conditions were getting tense. Doug laughed nervously as he thought this was probably what boating in a washing machine would be like; with waves coming at him from all directions. The conditions deteriorated further, and the wind driven waves were coming at his boat faster and harder. Usually, waves

are measured by their height and the seconds between the waves. Mariners know that the shorter the wave height, and the longer the seconds between waves, the better the conditions, but now there were barely any seconds between the waves. Add to that, that these waves were being blown by the wind meant that some of the waves had a ramp for his boat to climb up on but then there was no back to the wave, so the bow of his boat would tip down and plunge straight down into the ocean, only to be caught and violently popped back up. Waves coming in the opposite direction sometimes had no front for his boat to climb up onto, so hitting the wave was very violent.

Doug was holding on as tightly as he could for fear of being thrown overboard by a rogue wave. During a moment of relative calm Doug shut his eyes and thought to himself *which way is east?* He then pointed to where he thought east was, and then, glancing down at his compass, he saw that he had pointed one hundred and eighty degrees in the wrong direction. So instead of heading back to where he had launched his boat he would have been heading towards Hawaii. He smiled and thought what a great five-dollar investment his compass had been.

Just then a large, rogue wave smashed into the bow of his boat with such force that the entire boat shuddered from the collision. Water poured over the bow soaking him, and the boat's forward progress came to a violent halt. Doug was thrown off his feet and into the air, where he landed between the center console and the starboard side. Luckily, he had held on tight to the steering wheel but the force was too great for the rivets that held his center console to the deck, and the console broke free and crashed down onto the deck, with Doug still holding on tight to the steering wheel.

Doug knew he was now in a grave predicament, and that there was not much else that could go wrong before he would be in very serious trouble. Then Doug heard the faint sound of the bell

ringing from the buoy he had passed while leaving the channel earlier that morning. It was as if the wind had carried the sound to him. Doug managed to carefully steer his boat towards the bell without breaking or further damaging the now stretched and taut steering and throttle cables. Because his center console was broken and because the ocean was tossing his little boat around violently and incessantly, he was forced to stay sitting or kneeling on the floor of his boat, both for his safety and to steer his boat towards the sound of the bell. Doug was beginning to feel seasick and soon the motion of the ocean became too much for him. Doug leaned over the side and vomited the contents of his stomach. Over and over again he retched until finally there was nothing left to vomit, but he kept heaving yet nothing was coming out. Doug was sweating as if he had just exited a shower, but there was nothing he could do to change anything. The erratic motion of the ocean was relentless, and, as he wedged his body, as best he could, between the broken center console and the boat's starboard side, the unpredictable waves kept battering his boat without any rhythm, and his body was flung wildly at times against the hull or against the console.

Doug's pole bent down hard, and the drag on his reel, that was set to release line before a large fish could break the twenty-five-pound test line, began releasing, making what was usually a very exciting, rapid clicking and whirring noise, indicating he had a fish on his line. Still very seasick he grabbed the pole, and he could feel there was a very large fish that had grabbed his bait. The tip of his sturdy rod bent and tugged repeatedly as the heavy fish tried to swim away. Doug reeled his line in, but the large fish would often swim away peeling yards of line from his reel again and again. This played out over and over, but steadily Doug was reeling the fish towards his boat. Doug was on his knees fishing and several times, when waves crashed into his boat, he would lose his balance, but each time he managed to not drop his pole into the ocean or

to get hurt, and eventually, between waves and more than forty minutes later, the large King salmon was close enough to try to net it.

Suddenly, a much larger wave literally lifted his boat up and slammed it back down many feet away. His body had been swung violently to the right when the wave hit, and when the boat landed his body was swung violently to the left, but through it all he remained in his boat. His reel screamed as line peeled off, and Doug was more than a little surprised that the fish was still on, and even more surprised that he still had a hold of his fishing rod. Glancing at his compass he saw he was now no longer headed in the direction he had been going, so turning the steering wheel slowly so as not to get his line caught in the propeller, he slowly turned the boat back towards the east. Slowly Doug reeled his large fish closer to the boat until it was near enough to try and net. As Doug stuck the net under the salmon the salmon stiffened its body which made its body too long to fit into his net. The fish fell off the net, and with a single swish of its massive tail the salmon was ten feet away and again pulling line from his reel. Doug needed to once again kneel and wait for the large salmon to tire even more before he could begin to reel it back in to within netting distance. Sweat was dripping down Doug's neck, and he was shivering as the cold ocean air blew into and down his open, wet collar. Finally, the salmon, now tired, was near enough to his boat, and Doug stood, stabbing his net into the ocean under the fish, and he shook the net forward and backwards as he raised it, until the large salmon finally dropped into the net. Doug dropped to his knees to avoid falling overboard, and using two hands he grabbed the net, using his armpits to briefly pin himself to the railing, and in one move he simply manhandled the net with the large salmon safely over the railing and into his boat. The salmon landed on the boat's deck with a loud and solid thump.

Doug whacked the fish on the head with his welcome aboard club, killing it. He then got the hook disengaged from around its jaw bone, and he smiled a seasick smile as he saw there was no way this salmon would have gotten off that hook. He grabbed a length of rope he kept for these occasions and slid it through the fish's gills and out its mouth. He passed the length of rope through a loop he had previously tied so the fish was tied securely. The other end of the rope he attached to one of the cleats on his boat. This way, if he dropped the fish while gutting it overboard, he wouldn't lose it. Doug guessed the salmon weighed about forty pounds but he was so sick he wasn't in the mood to celebrate his catch. He could still enjoy the massive fish, its beautiful coloring, and he briefly patted the fish's side to show respect. As he braced himself against the inside of his boat, seagulls appeared and ate the scraps of guts and blood Doug tossed their way as he cleaned the salmon. Doug dunked the salmon into the ocean several times to rinse the blood off, and he then pulled the fish back onboard. After removing the rope from the fish's mouth Doug opened the large cooler he had onboard and placed the salmon on the bag of ice inside the cooler. Finally, he could relax a little bit. *Cleaning that salmon overboard while being flung around so violently was crazy*, he thought. Landing and cleaning the salmon while remaining in his boat were his uppermost thoughts. Doug had always held the rock-solid belief that he would not die while doing whatever it was that he was doing.

Doug was still feeling very ill, so after attaching the hook to his reel and taking up the slack, he simply left his fishing pole down on the deck and continued to carefully steer his boat towards the ringing bell. Doug knew he had traveled about five miles offshore, and he also knew he had been trolling at about two miles an hour, so he was probably two or more hours away from land. His dry heaves continued as he continued to hold on tight, and he slowly but surely made his

way towards the ringing bell. Doug was wet from the waves crashing over the boat, and he shivered uncontrollably inside his wet clothes.

After what seemed like several hours, but was probably only half that, his little boat suddenly came out of the fog and into bright sunshine. It was as if there had been a curtain of fog and he had passed through it. One minute he was surrounded by thick fog and within only several seconds he was out of the fog and into lovely warm sunshine. Doug could now see where he was, he could finally see the ocean around him, and he could finally accelerate slightly. He headed towards the seawall which protected the channel, which he guessed was still about a mile away. As he carefully steered around the ringing bell, his little boat was now broadside to the ocean, so he ever so carefully steered towards the point of the rock seawall, while keeping a steady eye on the incoming waves. He finally entered the channel leading to where he had launched from earlier that morning. The water around him now grew increasingly calm, allowing him to accelerate even more. He passed the Coast Guard cutters safely moored at Doran Beach, and he smiled a wry smile at that sight. Ten minutes later he could see the launch ramp and a wave of accomplishment swept over him. He slowed the boat to a crawl as he was nearing the boat dock, and two men who were standing on the ramp both hurried down to the dock to help him. As Doug tossed his bow line towards them one of the men laughed and told Doug his skin was literally green. He asked Doug if he wanted him to go get his truck and trailer and Doug handed him his keys, simply telling him his truck was the white F250.

The man laughed aloud and said to Doug, “Your truck is the only truck still in the parking lot with an empty boat trailer dude. All the others came back in and left hours ago. Everyone who came in said it’s way too rough to go out today.”

Doug thought to himself *Don't I know that!*

A short time later the two men had Doug's boat on the trailer, securely fastened, the outboard engine raised and locked in place, and parked in the now nearly empty parking lot. Doug thanked the two men many times. Doug climbed into his boat, checked on the King salmon in his cooler, and put his fishing rod in the rod holder. He ripped open the bag of ice, he secured the cooler lid, and slowly climbed out of his boat. Before getting into his truck Doug removed his wet clothes except for his t-shirt, jeans, shoes and socks. Then he got back into his truck. As he slowly made the drive inland to his home he felt the air warming through the open window, and, as each mile passed, his shivering slowed, his clothes dried, and he began feeling better and better. By the time he arrived home he felt no more ill effects whatsoever from his seasickness.

Doug backed his boat and trailer to the side of his driveway, unhooked his truck from the trailer, and, taking the cooler and rope from his boat, he walked over to the hose pipe by his front lawn. He put the rope and salmon on the lawn, rinsed the bloody rope, and was rinsing out the fish's insides when his little cat came upon the salmon. The cat had always looked like a kitten because she was so tiny, and Doug laughed aloud as the tiny cat tried to steal the large salmon by pulling it away. The cat's small feet, even with her claws extended, slipped on the grass and she could gain no traction at all to move the large, heavy fish. Smiling, Doug took out his knife, cut off a piece of fresh salmon for the cat, and she ran off with that. Doug then used the garden hose to blow off the fish's scales, he rinsed out the cooler and he left the lid open, facing the sun, to dry out. Then he took the fish inside to fillet it.

The salmon was too large to fit into Doug's sink, and too large to fit on his cutting board. This was the largest salmon Doug had ever caught himself. Doug smiled as he thought this may well be the largest salmon he would ever catch in his life. These large salmon were often referred to

as hogs by fishermen. And this was indeed a hog. The belly of a hog salmon was a light ocher color, and it was unlike the color of the belly of any other salmon. Hogs were not only huge salmon, but they all possessed this very unique, and identifying, belly coloring.

Doug's fillet knife was very thin and extremely sharp. The blade was eight inches long, and the knife's cutting edge was slightly curved from the years of sharpening. Luckily the countertop next to his sink was able to hold the hog and Doug placed the fish atop his cutting board despite it not fitting. Doug's normal fillet routine was to place the fish flat on one side with its head to the right and spine away from him. He would then slice in just behind the head and fillet the fish along its spine down to its tail. This fish though was so large Doug needed to have his hand, holding the fillet knife, inside the fish's belly as he filleted. Once the first side was done, he flipped the salmon over and this time the spine was nearest him, so as he filleted this side, he needed to hold the stomach flap up to stop his knife stabbing the belly meat, and to make the process easier. The two fillets were huge, the hugest fillets Doug had ever had in his kitchen. Each of the side fillets needed to be halved along their length, and then he filleted the skin from all four pieces. He cut out the strips of fat that run along each side as he detested that taste. He then cut the four large fillets into six-inch pieces, made his special brine, and put pieces of the fish into that large bowl until it was full. He then covered the bowl and placed that into his fridge until the next day when he would smoke the pieces of fish for several hours. For the rest of the pieces, he got out his vacuum sealer and made about two dozen half to three quarter pound bags of beautiful salmon fillets which he placed in the freezer. Next, Doug got a tablespoon and scooped the most tender salmon meat from along each side of the fish's spine, placing that in a bowl which he would soon cook in olive oil, with fresh garlic and ground pepper, for his lunch. The salmon's large skeleton he broke into pieces, placed the pieces in a large garbage bag, and

then put that in the freezer in his garage, hoping to use that as crab bait one day. Then the process began of cleaning up his counter top, putting the vacuum sealer away, sponging the kitchen floor where fish blood and goo had dripped, and finally, washing up everything he had just used. The huge hog was dealt with and Doug was indeed happier!

Now, Doug was hungry, and he wanted to eat some fresh salmon. He cooked some up and stood eating until he was full. Then he headed outside to sit in the warm sun. Doug was feeling some exhaustion now. As he sat in the warm afternoon sun, he removed his still-wet shoes and socks and allowed his feet to warm in the sun. He drank a cold beer, smoked one of his small cigars, and, with a broad smile on his face, he reflected on his day's astonishing experience.

The End.

Written by Peter Skeels © May 2nd, 2022