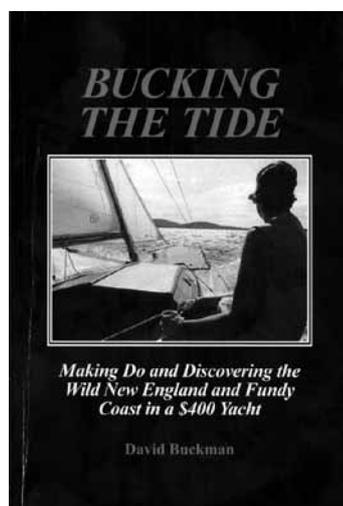


By Keith Muscott:

Bucking The Tide, by David Buckman



Paperback: 212 pages. \$19 (US) plus shipping.

Publisher: Eastworks Publications, Gilford, New Hampshire (2010)

www.eastworkspublications.com

ISBN 978-1-892168-15-3

On Kimball Island, Penobscot Bay, the backfiring engine of a lobster fisherman's 1950-something truck drew the author into a closer inspection: no doors, no exhaust muffler, no fenders, one headlight, big holes in the floor – it was used for short trips between home and the dockside and was totally outside the law, like most of the island's vehicles. 'You'd be surprised by how many car parts you can do without,' the driver called out cheerily, as he drove away in a cloud of smoke.

This anecdote could stand as a motif for the author's six-season cruise up the Atlantic coast of North America, from Narragansett Bay to the Canadian border and the notorious Bay of Fundy, location of the world's biggest tides. The book's subtitle includes the words, 'making do in a \$400 yacht' and David Buckman eschews inessential equipment as much as he does redundant yachty attitudes. This may have been a matter of necessity, but he sees it as being in the pioneering American tradition, and he's probably right. Of course this approach is not confined to one sailor or one nation, and we in the DCA know it brings its own special satisfaction ...

The 'yacht' is a 19ft Lightning wooden sloop that became the sole 18ft 10ins Lightning when the transom and the quarters suffered amputation and replacement to cure rot. Buckman added a plywood cabin after the first season when the discomfort of openboating in these latitudes became clear. His crew includes his wife, Leigh Taylor, after whom

the boat *Leight* is named, and newspaper editor Scott Cleveland Smith, 'Cleve'; but 'crew' is a fluid concept and it varies in number between one and three according to different legs of the cruise.

All of them cut their sailing teeth on their local New Hampshire Lake Winnepesaukee, which is also surprisingly the location of the author's closest call, when, late in the year, the boat is caught in a gust and the single-handed skipper is hurled overboard to watch his vessel sail on under cleated jib. He has to divest himself of all but his underwear to swim ashore, then finds that the boat has beaten him to it. He wraps himself, shivering, in the canvas boom tent to recover. Safety harnesses become required equipment hereafter, and the book charts their learning curve like this as much as it celebrates their rediscovery of this coastline: 'we can go to great lengths close to home ...' is a worthy motto.

The Lightning is a centreboarder, so 'gunkholing' is the order of the day, which her crew take further, developing the art of 'contact cruising' as they feel their way through fog, mistake rock ledges for whales and generally leave flakes of paint here and there to mark their passing.

The ship's library includes 'Huckleberry Finn', Henry Thoreau, Maurice Griffiths, 'The Wind in the Willows' and James Joyce's 'Ulysses'. The effect of this eclectic mix on the author's own attitudes and his writing style is clear to see. He is a spendthrift with words, painting vivid descriptions of these momentous northern waters and indulging in ironical humour alternately – sometimes it is hard to know which intention is uppermost: 'The promise of a beautiful summer morning played its pale pastels along the shore.'

In fact, his style proves to be the perfect tool to invoke the damp misery of the small cabin in 'a dungeon of fog', or the towering cliffs and maelstrom tides of the Bay of Fundy; also the egregious behaviour of many of the people he meets, whether the Unitarian Christians of Star Island, who refuse to let them land and rest in their spacious harbour, or the island fishermen who sink the boat of an outsider who comes into their community to court a local girl. To be fair, they meet with kindly and generous folk as well, just as there are idyllic sailing days to celebrate – it is simply that this is no rose-tinted nostalgic look at small-boat cruising, but a balanced record of its glories and miseries. The author, for whom the expression 'larger than life' may have been especially coined, is as much a central feature of the narrative as Cape Cod or the Isle of Shoals. Finally, it is the glory not the misery that prevails.

This book came to us through the good offices of Nim Marsh, editor and friend of David Buckman – and also a member of the DCA. **KM**