

Double Bells On The Rocks

Sub: ICW Travelers Be Aware!

By: *Barbara of Catamaran Double Bells*

We left Barefoot Landing 11.35am to go through a narrow channel of the ICW, called The Rockpile, our chart books show just a narrow channel, and they say in the handbook that there are various rocks along the sides of the canal and to travel with caution, which we did. We were motoring along after going through the swing bridge at Barefoot Landing in the centre of the channel our when we hit a huge rock under water, on the port side. The sound was sickening and we slewed completely round in an anticlockwise direction and wham another rock hit the starboard side, the mast was shuddering unbelievably. I had gone forward to see what the hell was going on and when the second one hit, I almost got thrown overboard, it felt like hitting a brick wall at 100k's an hour. Gerard was furiously trying to back us off them but we had travelled up with the impact. There was not one marker for these rocks, nothing, nada. We couldn't believe it!

Gerard quickly jumped in with his snorkel, and this is alligator infested waters, so I was not too thrilled, The water is so dark brown that Gerard couldn't see anything. He tried to heave the boat off the rocks, but to no avail. He pulled his hamstring in the process. Then he got his finger mashed between the hull and the rock. He assessed that we definitely were in no danger of sinking, and not taking in water which was a bit of good news. We called the US Coast Guard at and told them what had happened and that we were sitting in the channel and could not move, but were not in any immediate danger. These guys called us every hour on the hour to see if we were O-K - they were amazing.

There were lots of good Samaritans who only wanted to help us, especially one little jet-ski rider, who spent his "rental time" going up and down warning the other larger boats that we were stuck so they could creep past us very slowly and avoid the rocks on the other side. Other small boats screamed past and we were at the mercy of their wake and I sent them on their way with lots of curses.

Gerard decided that we had to empty the water tanks, (as they were almost full) to make us lighter so we would float off easier. I did all the washing to make use of the water and hung everything all over the boat - we must've been a sight to behold. Gerry cleaned the portside hull, then got back in with the alligators and managed to find what the damage was - both hulls got big holes in them right at the bottom, thank God that he filled the both hulls, fore and aft, with polyurethane closed cell foam, this is what was keeping the water out.

Gerard was waiting for the Coastguards call at 7.00pm. Gerard had almost finished his shower, when I was looking out through the cockpit door and thought I saw us turning, then I realized we were, and shouted Gerard out of the shower with the news. He dashed out pulling his pants on, covered in soap, and started up the engines, as by now we "heard" the scraping on the rocks. He moved us back very slowly and Hallelujah we came off. This was now exactly 7.30pm and daylight. We slow motored to a marina up ahead, about three quarters of a mile, called Doc Holiday's and we tied up at the fuel dock. We found out later that this is a common occurrence here for boats to smack into this rock.

We now have to travel to Wrightsville which is another seventy five miles,

where there are chandlers and more places where we can get stuff. We will get some under-water epoxy and try and patch up the holes to get us to the Chesapeake, although this will be quite a job as its right at the bottom of the hull and hopefully we can get in the City Marina there and get Double Bells out on the hard. We just hope that it all holds out that long.