



***THIS DOCUMENT IS THE ENGLISH VERSION OF THE ORIGINS OF THE GBSC. PRODUCED TO CELEBRATE THE 25<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE CENTRE, IT WILL EXPLAIN THE BASIS, OBJECTIVES AND VISION OF THE GBSC.***

***HAPPY READING!***

***NOTE: Gala which took place on November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2005***



# **The Origins of the Georgian Bay Sailing Centre – GBSC**

## **From Yesterday to Today**



## NOTES ON THE ORIGINS OF THE GEORGIAN BAY SAILING CENTRE

By Jacquelin Robin, founding Secretary, October 31<sup>st</sup>, 2005

### **Introduction**

As with all new organizations, the creation of the GBSC, headquartered in the Ottawa-Gatineau region, has experienced several distinct periods of development and change since its creation 25 years ago.

It is fair to say, right from the beginning, that its birth was the result of collusion between Aeolus and Poseidon. In practice, in 1974-75, a convergence of interests began between sailing and scuba diving within the University of Ottawa Scuba Diving Club.

It so happened that with the formation of the Scuba Diving Club, some members already had a fair experience in cruising on sailboats. This core of keen sailors harboured enough resources to organize winter cruises between Florida and the Bahamas.

A mutual interest gradually developed among the instructors responsible for the Club and the leaders in the group of those who had a love for cruising. While the Club leaders and a good number of the divers became more and more open to sailing, others learned to dive and sometimes became instructors.

At first, theoretical classroom courses were organized on an informal basis and offered to those interested. This provided the motivation to go further and organize sailing activities alongside those of diving. From the spring of 1976, training sessions on a 420 dinghy were held at the University of Ottawa's outdoor activity base at lake Heney (lac du Petit Poisson). The game was on. Approximately 20 participants attended each training session and that continued off and on until October 1980. Organizers and instructors were all volunteers.

It was during diving trips to explore wrecks that an extraordinary body of water was discovered: Georgian Bay in the northern part of lake Huron (the North Channel, Manitoulin Island). It had exceptional qualities for the teaching and practice of sailing in all its aspects, from introduction to a dinghy to cruising and navigation on the high seas.

At the same time, organized cruises on Georgian Bay as well as in the Mediterranean in chartered boats were introducing participants to coastal cruising. Then came the opportunity, in the autumn of 1979, to participate in an Atlantic crossing between Toulon in France and the West Indies.

1980 was a pivotal year in the genesis of the Centre. It was in January that a decision was taken to go forward with the establishment of a sailing school in Georgian Bay. After consulting a meeting of those who had expressed an interest in the idea, a planning group of three – who, incidentally, became the three founding members – was formed.

\* The author wishes to thank Dominique Champeau, Jean-Pierre Dion et Jocelyne Bouchard for their help in drafting these notes. *Translated by Grant Reader, November 2005*

## Foundation

In June of 1980, after advice and encouragement from the *Centre Nautique des Glénans* (CNG) and the *Centre Marin des Blanchons* (CMB), the planning group issued a document entitled: *Georgian Bay Sailing Centre: A Development Project*, which laid out in its major themes the structure of the Centre and the reasons supporting its creation. At that time, boating and the associated need for on-the-water training were growing rapidly in Canada. The goal was to find a way to open access to something that had until then been limited to an elite, not just by providing an off-the-shelf product but rather, to be able to offer an opportunity for personal development for all, in the context of a learning experience for adults based on direct participation and practice.

The organization, goals and programs proposed for the Centre were modelled, essentially, on those of the *Centre nautique des Glénans* in Brittany. Participants would live in a semi-self-sufficient way on a base out in the islands from where the learn-to-sail experience would take place. Sailing in a flotilla, apart from the evident learning that would ensure, would provide an assurance of safety for everyone. Level I (initiation, the development of manoeuvring and helming skills) and Level II (initiation to short route cruising) would take place on a ballasted dinghy or on a small, unsinkable keelboat constructed specifically for the needs of the school.

Coastal cruising and high seas (at times) cruising would draw on heavier craft (one instructor with 5-6 learning participants) that would at first be chartered, but eventually acquired outright by the Centre. Acting as volunteers, instructors would be trained by the Centre and evaluated by their peers. To get off the ground, it would be necessary to count on existing current public financial support programs; but over the longer term the contributions of members would have to ensure the financial self-sufficiency of the school. Finally, the start of activities in Georgian Bay was fixed for the beginning of July, 1981 with several level I courses and one level II course for the training of instructors.

Nevertheless, the issue of a planning document, while essential, was only a first step. There remained host of concrete tasks to complete between June 1980 and the end of June 1981. First the Centre had to be formally constituted. General articles that made provision for a general assembly, an interim Board of Directors composed of three founding members, and an Honour Committee (with the responsibility of ensuring the charter of the Centre was respected), were drafted and adopted. The Centre was legally incorporated in October, 1980. In the Spring of 1980, Revenue Canada formally granted the Centre the status of a charitable organization dedicated to public education through the teaching of sailing.

Obtaining a base of operations that corresponded to the requirements laid out in the planning document proved to be difficult. Many contacts were made with the Ontario government, the federal government, the Ojibway aboriginal peoples of the Parry Island Indian Reserve and the Georgian Bay Cottagers Association, in an attempt to set the conditions for establishing a presence in Georgian Bay.

At the same time, the Centre had to establish its credibility. Guarantees of technical support were obtained in the form of instructors and skippers from the *Centre nautique des*

*Glénans* and the *Centre marin des Blanchons*. The French Embassy in Canada helped finance the trips made by instructors from *Les Glénans*. In the same vein, relations were established with the Canadian Yachting Association (CYA) and the Ontario Sailing Association (OSA) to obtain their support. Meanwhile within the Centre, the development of instructors continued with a course in May 1981.

The search for boat builders able to construct custom designed craft that matched the Centre's needs proved to be problematic. It is mainly the large boat building companies that present at boat shows, rather than small custom-design builders. In any event, the latter are few and far between.

On the other hand, research into opportunities for financial support gave better results. Consequently, in the spring of 1981 Wintario, which regarded the CNBC as an innovative pilot project, responded favourably to a request for financial support and granted a contribution of \$22,140.75. Among other uses, it provided for the purchase of equipment (boat purchase was excluded), which allowed the boats to be properly equipped before the sailing programs began.

The first information letter was issued to keep all the volunteers up-to-date on progress and accomplishments.

## **Start Up – 1981**

Dawn rose on July 11, 1981. The die was cast. Two CS27 keelboats (**Espresso** and **Capucino**) were chartered for six weeks. Sailing programs were to be two weeks long and would leave from Parry Sound. It is regrettable that the original idea of establishing a base in the islands had to be put aside: neither the islands nor the modified boats would be available in time. The program design suited all and the take up enthusiastic. Soon 71 members were signed up and the boats filled to 75% capacity of the number of spaces available. This enthusiasm carried through to the corn roast, the first of many that were to follow, that finished the training season at the beginning of September, 1981.

The 1982 season saw the growth of the Centre accelerate. With the encouragement of a new subsidy \$7,500 from Wintario, this time for purchasing boats, on an act of faith the Centre borrowed \$45,000 at an interest rate of 19.5% to buy three new Edels 665. Eight weeks of courses were offered at level I on **Shieship** (Duck\*), **Iniship** (Mallard\*), and **Mank** (Loon\*\*). It became clear then that the idea of a remote base of operations and the use of dinghies for the level I course were not feasible and would have to be abandoned. **Heet**, a 38ft. Hughes sloop was found for level II training. Again, instructors came from *Les Glénans* and from *Les Blanchons*.

In addition to the on-water programs, which took most of the effort, other activities continued apace: training in theory and practice for those aiming to become instructors: theory courses at the University of Ottawa in collaboration with Sports Services; various promotional activities; and the issue of three information letters.

---

\*English translation of the Ojibway names for the Edels

However, there were certain important strategic goals still to meet. The membership of 100 was below the hoped for number of 150. There was a desperate need for a single location for equipment that was spread out in the homes of various people (happily, someone in Parry Sound was generous enough to store GBSC gear in their shed). The need for instructors was not satisfied and the problem of financing the purchase of a large sailboat still remained. This was the work waited the Board of Directors that followed the interim administrators, elected at the Annual General meeting of November 20, 1982.

Between 1982 and 1985 the Centre continued on its planned course. For better or worse, the volunteers attended to a range of activities: on-going administration, internal communications, marketing, financial management, programs, development and to social events.

On an on-going basis, correspondence had to be dealt with, books kept, bills paid, equipment bought and sold to help financing, information provided, telephone calls answered, documentation translated to be able to communicate in both French and English, registrations recorded, membership lists created (longest at 176 in 1985), inventory recorded, and so on.

*L'Encre à l'ancre* was published periodically from February 1984 to keep both active and non-active members informed.

For promotion and publicity, boat shows are very important, especial those in Montreal and Toronto. An information booth was set up and staffed with volunteers. Up-to-date promotional material had to be available. Information sessions were also offered to more limited groups of interested people.

On the financial side, management and informed decision-making were facilitated by the preparation of a provisional budget at the beginning of each fiscal year as well as by the establishment of an accounting methodology that ensured continuity and standard comparisons from year to year.

As for the sailing programs, one had to: inspect and maintain the equipment; organize the charter of a larger keelboat (the ketch **Brandytyme** in 1983 and junk-rigged schooner **Oviri** in 1984); transfer and winterize the boats in autumn and put them back in the water in spring; coordinate the schedule of instructors and course times; ensure the training of trainers and skippers; organize theory courses which were given both in French and in English, as needed, at the University of Ottawa as well as in several colleges. Incidentally, from 1984 on, the Centre was affiliated with the Royal Lifesaving Society of Canada and became able to accredit instructors on their lifesaving skills (Aquatic Emergency Care-AEC).

In addition to the on-going activities, several developments of note characterized this period. In 1983, the Centre took the initiative of forming a team made up of members of the International Cruising Group of *Les Glénans* (GIC-G), from *Les Blanchons* and from the GBSC to participate in the first Transat Québec-St Malo in August 1984. In the spring of 1984, members from the Centre took part in the transatlantic transport of **Katsou**, a 42 foot racing boat loaned by the GIC-G for the race. The boat was sponsored mainly by Air France, and in a secondary capacity, by the Canadian Secretary of State. Between the arrival of Katsou in St-

Pierre and Miquelon and the end of July, an international cruising program took place on the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

It was also in the fall of 1984 that the Skippers Committee became a permanent feature of the Centre and its role and responsibilities were documented in the bylaws.

In June 1985, a crew from the Centre went to Guadeloupe to the West Indies to take delivery of **Etoc**, a 38 foot Gibsea, and sailed it to Georgian Bay. The arrival of the large keelboat allocated to levels II and III training gave rise to a great deal of enthusiasm among the members, despite the Centre having had to borrow the sum of \$39,000 at an interest rate of 13%.

## **Slowing Down**

But, from 1986 on, the wind changed. It was no longer carrying us forward. The membership reached a ceiling of 140 subscriptions. The coastal cruising programs regularly experienced difficulty in attracting participants, activities had to be cancelled. The Centre was obliged to offer courses of one week, and mixed activity programs (family sailing, sailing-scuba diving), and charters (sailing vacations). The scarcity of instructors made itself increasingly felt and the training fell to a core of veterans who did a great deal of it. The Skippers Committee itself was overloaded by program logistics to the detriment of training. The peripheral activities of teaching theory ended up stopping altogether.

In 1987-88 the Centre was faced for the first time with a significant deficit on operations, at a moment when the fleet had a crying need for reinvestment. The recurring loan servicing costs of more than \$3,000 per year for Etoc contributed to the situation.

In the final analysis, the geographic dispersion of the membership and their considerable distance from the base of program operations, as well as the turnover weighed more and more heavily on the volunteers whose own availability was not as great as in the first years of the Centre. Information systems, which might have lightened the burden significantly, were slow to be adopted.

## **Decline and Renewal**

This situation described above led, through the nineties, to a long period of contraction continued to a critical point, almost to the non-existence of a membership. During this period the Centre was, regrettably, obliged to sell Mank, then Shieship and finally Etoc, the large keelboat, to be able to adapt to the new environment for sailing.

In the meantime, the Centre continued to operate at a slower but constant level. Activities were organized in the South as well as in Georgian Bay; CYA certification courses were started up.

The survival of the Centre remained very uncertain until 1999-2000 when an energetic movement of renewal – coinciding with the acquisition of **Namastar**, a 29 foot Tanzer - breathed life back into it. This regeneration is continuing still and will ensure that the Centre can celebrate its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in the fall of 2005.

### **The First Decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

The relocation of GBSC activities and resources to the Ottawa-Gatineau region has enabled the membership to grow again through this decade while still being able to make sailing within the reach of everyone. Based in the Aylmer Marina, in cooperation with *Le Club de voile Grande-Rivière (CVGR)*, a range of programs for both adults and youth are available, including day sailing, evening and weekend outings, introduction to cruising, courses leading to CYA certification, and the participation in regattas. In addition, cruising and sailing vacations still take place on Georgian Bay.

The location of the boats in Aylmer helps enormously in their maintenance and winterization. If more challenging repairs are required, distance is no longer a problem. As well, contacts with different sailing organizations in the region help us find out about and enjoy new experiences.

As for teaching and training, it is still carried out on a volunteer basis; those aspiring to become skippers continue to be evaluated by their peers and to receive training in First Aid (accredited by the Canadian Red Cross). What is new however, in comparison with the origins of the Centre, is that even the instructors have to pay for their participation in the programs that they teach. Concerning this point, as well as the training of instructors, there is a certain need for review and amendment.

A range of social events, both in summer and other seasons continue to take place: *méchoui* in September, winter sports in January, St Valentine's in February and sugaring off in Spring, to name a few.

Not least, the Centre is again more and more open to the world's oceans and provides to its members the possibility of sailing in different countries and on various seas. The sailing program in Vancouver illustrates this trend well.

Finally, what vision can we possibly have for the next twenty-five years, other than to continue to put sailing within reach of everyone - with a passionate commitment that is shared and always renewed?