

# *Latitude 38*

PACIFIC PUDDLE JUMP 2008

— MEET THE FLEET PART I

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# MEET THE FLEET, PT I

**F**or most sailors, logging thousands of miles of coastal cruising is a pretty substantial accomplishment. But crossing oceans puts you in a whole other league — what we'd call 'varsity-level cruising'. It's an endeavor that's not for the timid nor the ill-prepared.

It's with this in mind that we give our annual salute to those hardy sailors who are about to jump off from the Americas to French Polynesia, tackling roughly 3,000 miles of open ocean along the way.

Since *Latitude* started reporting on this annual springtime migration 11 years ago — and coined the phrase Pacific Puddle Jump in the process — hundreds of sailors have successfully made the leap. Upon arrival, they've been rewarded by dramatic landfalls, dream-like anchorages and friendly islanders who still embrace aspects of their cultural heritage that stretches back thousands of years.

Unlike in years past, when almost all passage-makers jumped off from Puerto Vallarta, Zihuatanejo or Panama, some members of this year's fleet will also be setting out from Cabo, La Paz, Mazatlan, the Galapagos and elsewhere. It's impossible to track down all of them, but we've done our best to include as many as possible here, and in a second installment this month.

Again this year we had a chance to

meet many fleet members face to face at our two annual Puddle Jump Kickoff Parties. Both were co-sponsored by Tahiti Tourisme, which sent out a 'special emissary', Stephanie Betz, to welcome the fleet to her spectacularly beautiful islands. The first little fête was hosted by Rick's Bar in Zihua, February 5, and the second was hosted three days later by the Vallarta YC and Paradise

Village Resort in Nuevo Vallarta.

Tahiti Tourisme will host a (free) follow-up event June 27-28, called the Tahiti-Moorea Sailing Rendezvous, which is specifically designed to celebrate the arrival of this year's fleet, and introduce them to traditional Polynesian dance, music, sport

and cuisine. The best part may well be the six-person outrigger canoe races, where cruisers team up with locals to test their paddling prowess.

If all this leaves you wishing that you too were heading out this year, fret not. As you'll read here, where there's a will, there's a way. When bluewater cruising becomes your top priority, as it is for these folks, you'll probably find a way to make it happen. With that hopeful thought, we'll introduce you now to the Pacific Puddle Jump Class of 2008.

## ***Elusive* — J/44 Stephen & Wendy Bott Seattle**

Although Steve and Wendy have lived in Seattle for 25 years — he's a retired Alaska Airlines pilot — they've always kept their boat in Ventura as a base for SoCal cruising.

They say the promise of adventure and the challenge of being self-sufficient were



**Steve and Wendy bought 'Elusive' five years ago, intent on taking her cruising.**



ALL PHOTOS LATITUDE / ANDY

what drew them most strongly toward the cruising life. Five years ago they upgraded to this sweet J/boat with the specific intention of doing some serious ocean traveling. And luckily for Steve, Wendy is equally excited about jumping offshore: "I'm rarin' to go," she says, "as

**Jeanine hung up her spurs to explore the world with Gordon aboard 'Vari'.**





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**"Yeah! We're going to Tahiti!" The PV Puddle Jumpers strike a pose at the Vallarta YC. In front, far right, is Stephanie, 'our gal in Tahiti'.**

long as he doesn't scare me!"

Thanks to the recommendations of several veteran cruisers, the 'friendly Kingdom' of Tonga is high on their list of 'must linger' destinations.

## **Vari — Simpson 40 steel cutter Gordon & Jeanine Wunder, Seattle, WA**

"Funny, they don't look Indonesian," we thought to ourselves as we dined past *Vari*. Turns out Gordon and Jeanine simply chose to have their boat 'flagged' in Kosrae, Indonesia — as its nameplate implies — as a precaution against anti-American sentiment. They are, after all, planning to circumnavigate. Interestingly enough, the reflagging can be done without ever setting foot in that far-distant land.

Gordon has had a thirst for voyaging since he was a youngster. At age 12 he found an abandoned liferaft in a shipyard, rigged it with a makeshift sail and

tried to sail away. Sadly, or perhaps luckily, he only got about 100 feet offshore on that first attempt, but he's made up for it later in life, including a six-year circumnavigation beginning in the late '80s.

Before meeting Gordon, Jeanine appeased her sense of adventure through horseback riding, but she quickly took to sailing. She recalls that when Gordon asked her if she'd like to sail around the world, "It took me about five minutes to decide. This will be my first extensive cruise, so I'm up for anything!"

## **Solace — Hylas 44 Paul & Gina Rae Lyttleton, NZ**

Paul and Gina's story is unique within this year's fleet. Unlike most, they've already seen New Zealand. In fact, they were born and

raised there. Thanks to the weak U.S. dollar, they got a sweet deal on this 1985 cutter, and now plan to bring her home to the land of the kiwi bird in one season.

After completing some upgrades on their home turf, they expect to head out again next season, perhaps up to Japan, and eventually all the way around the planet.

## **Baraka — Slocum 43 Dave Pryde & Jan Eckmann Richmond Beach, WA**

When asked about the couple's recent travels, Dave reminded us of the oft-heard definition of cruising: "Doing boat maintenance in exotic places."

*"Shed your fears  
and just do it! It's  
great out there!"*

But we know he and Jan have been loving it.

In fact, they've been preparing and planning for this trip ever since they returned home from their last offshore foray in '92. Back then they took a Hans Christian 33 from Seattle to Panama and across to Turkey.

This time, though, they're heading in the other direction. "So tell me," asked Jan, "when we reach Turkey this time, can we say we've circumnavigated?" Ahh. . . what the heck, sounds good to us.

Wherever the winds blow them this time, they expect to be out for four years

**Jan and Dave of 'Baraka' have been vagabonding together for decades.**





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**Now that Cindy's caught John's cruising bug, they're ready to head out aboard 'Airwego'.**

or more. Crewing, at least as far as French Polynesia, will be their 29-year-old son Joel — as well as Opal, their salty boat cat, who already has an Atlantic crossing under her, ah, collar.

## **Airwego — McIntosh 47 Mike & Cindy Miller Tacoma, WA**

"You have to do something crazy before you die," says Cindy. Although world cruising has been a longtime dream of

*"You might say we've been planning this trip since 1959!"*

John's, Cindy wasn't always so gung-ho about the idea of heading out across thousands of miles of open water. But a few years ago she warmed up to the notion, so they bought this stout cruiser in '06 and headed down the coast last

**Mike and Liz are sailing one of the fleet's only tiller boats, the formerly famous racer 'Argonaut'.**



summer.

The current game plan is to do a South Pacific circuit, then head north to Hawaii and on to Seattle. But as every sailor knows, plans change. We wouldn't be surprised if they got distracted out there and ended up exploring places that they never even considered!

## **Pacific Star — IP 35 Horst & Julia Wolff San Francisco**

A native of Germany, Horst moved to the U.S. 30 years ago. In between raising two kids and careers in medicine, he and his American wife, Julia, bought a boat to pursue the joys of sailing. Then about three years ago Julia decided it was high time they did some serious cruising together. Horst was game and suggested the Caribbean. But Julia convinced him to think bigger, suggesting they see the South Pacific, then go on around via the Med.

A footnote to this plan is that Julia will skip the big 'Jump' — John Shyrow will crew in her place — and rejoin *Pacific Star* in Tahiti. Horst loves the cruising life and urges others with wanderlust to follow suit: "Shed your fears and just do it! It's great out there!"

## **Argonaut — Cal 40 Mike Scott & Liz Strash Seattle**

Mike's sailing career began when, at age 9, he rigged an old tarp on a rowboat and attempted to head off over the horizon. "When I opened an atlas and saw all those islands out in the Pacific, well, that's all I ever wanted to do." After five decades of anticipation, he's finally giving it a shot.

And luckily he found himself a woman (14 years ago) who is equally enthusiastic about the adventure. In fact, according to Mike, it was Liz who got them to this point in the process. He'd always been a racer, but she'd always had the travel bug. So when they began discussing the possibility of cruising she said, "Sure, we can do this!"

They bought *Argonaut* — an old warhorse which won overall honors in the '69 TransPac (see *Sight-*

*ings*) — in 2000, and spent three years updating her. During their two years spent cruising Mexico they've fallen in love with the place and its people. "The best of Mexico can't be seen from the deck or the beach," they advise. "You have to look beyond the beach."

## **Tracen J — Crealock 44 Jack & Marcia Spiess Seattle, WA**

Some folks stumble into the cruising lifestyle by accident, but others, such as Jack, can precisely pinpoint the inspiration which led them to a life of offshore sailing.

"I was 7 years old in 1959 when I turned on ABC TV and there was Gardner McKay living an exotic life (aboard his schooner *Tiki*) in the show *Adventures in Paradise*." Apparently he got the cruising bug right then and there: "Every week I was glued to the TV watching that show."

Marcia, who also remembers the three-year run of that legendary show, explains that it's been an inspiration throughout their lives together — they've been married for 35 years. "So, you might say we've been planning this trip since 1959!"

Marcia makes it clear that she

is not a reluctant partner, but is 100% committed. "Besides," she says, "there are too many beautiful native girls out there! I'm not letting him go alone."

## **Don Pedro, Beneteau 475 John & Patrick Boggs, Sidney, BC**

John has got to be one of the coolest uncles we've ever met. Thirty years ago he did a major cruise from western Canada south, through the Canal into the Caribbean. While he was there, his nephew Patrick came to visit and loved the sailing life — although he was then only about 7 years old. When the trip was over, Patrick swore that if his uncle John if ever did another big cruise, he would definitely make himself available to crew. Today he's making good on that promise, having committed to crewing, and paying his own way, all the way around the world.

Linda is taking a pass on the Puddle



**For Jack and Marcia of 'Tracen J', this trip's been a long time coming.**

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**Uncle John and nephew Patrick will have 'Don Pedro' waiting when Linda flies in.**

Jump crossing, but will rejoin the boys (including second mate Rob McFee) out in the islands. They expect to be 'out there' circumnavigating for at least five years.

## **Meridian — Tayana 48**

### **The Powers Family, Napa, CA**

If the marine industry needed poster children to advocate family cruising, this family could fill the bill. Cheerful, good looking and hungry for adventure, John, Nancy and their daughters Maddie, 8, and Sophie, 6, are living a dream that most sailing parents can never quite

**After crossing the Pacific on 'Meridian', the Powers clan will have a boatload of memories.**



realize.

"For us," says John, "the timing was right: our ages, the ages of the girls, my career, the boat. . ." They bought this big center-cockpit cutter two years ago and put themselves on the fast track to Pacific cruising, heading south with the Baja Ha-Ha last fall.

"I like the idea of being someone who does different and exciting things," says Nancy. John

agrees: "We don't want to be the kind of parents who just raise kids that hang out at the mall and play video games." Indeed, video games will probably seem a bit boring if and when these two sailor girls return home. For now, the family has set their sights on New Zealand, where they'll regroup and reassess.

## **Rolling Thunder — Horizon 42**

### **Bruce & Jan, Portland, OR**

"I always wanted a life less ordinary," explains Jan, "but I wasn't really focused on exploring the world by sailboat until I got together with Bruce." They first met in Europe while she was traveling and he was doing a stint in the military. Later, after their cruising fantasies took shape, they decided to cash out — sell the house

— and transform the dream into reality.

Plan A is to continue south through Central America and on to Ecuador, then out to the Galapagos before reaching French Polynesia. Crewing along the way will be their 17-year-old son, who's hoping they can make it to Indonesia before he has to return to school next summer. He's got his heart set on seeing the legendary Komodo dragons there.

## **Andiamo — Alden 64 cutter**

### **Jerry Marsden, San Diego**

"Live while you can live," is Jerry's mantra as

he sets off to his newly adopted home, Thailand. His parents both died young, and, because he's now approaching that time frame, he figures it's high time to make the move.

Having sampled the day charter business recently while based in Ensenada, he plans to set up a small charter outfit



**Carl and Jerry of 'Andiamo' have their sights set on Thailand.**

after arriving in Thailand. A previous month-long sail through those waters convinced him that it's an ideal leisure destination. "When I came back, I sold the house and bought the biggest boat I could.

A retired contractor, Jerry's a pretty handy guy, but his crew, retired engineer Carl Sjoberg, can reportedly fix anything — and he can cook!

## **Blue Plains Drifter — Tayana 48**

### **Jim & Tiffany Tindle, Santa Cruz**

"I can't say that this has been a lifelong dream," admits Jim, "since we only started sailing about four years ago!" And they've been out cruising for the past year and a half.

Regarding their motivation, Tiffany explains, "My husband says it was the opportunity to see out-of-the-way places and get to know people from different cultures. I say we were bored with the monotony of Silicon Valley life!"

In any case, these 30-something refugees are thrilled to be jumping off to the Marquesas and beyond with an open-ended itinerary. Is there any place they'll



**Jeff and Tiffany of 'Drifter' are on the cruising fast track.**



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avoid? "Any place where they eat cats." As to buddy-boating: "We plan to cruise with boaters who cook well and drink often." We should all be so carefree!

## 59th Street Bridge — Cal 2-46 The Leib Family San Francisco

"Yeah, I know," says Lisa, aka Mom, "the name doesn't exactly roll right off your tongue (especially during radio roll calls), but it's the name of Simon and Garfunkel's *Feelin' Groovy* song."

And this lovely family is indeed feelin' groovy, as they set out on a Pacific circuit through French Polynesia, then north to the Kiri-bati, Hawaii and home in time for daughters Marashel, 12, and Lily, 10, to start school next fall.

Offshore cruising has been a longtime dream for Lisa and especially her husband Peter, a Cal Maritime grad who's seen the mid-Pacific many times from the deck of a ship, but



Hopefully the Leib family will be 'feelin' groovy' all the way to the Marquesas.

never before from a sailboat.

"With the girls now 12 and 10, we thought this would be a good time to go, figuring that they could help out a bit," explains Lisa. "That part hasn't worked out so well — they're more like first class passengers lounging in the aft cabin!"

"The trick to doing this," adds Peter, "is you just go. A lot of people spend their whole lives getting the boat ready, but you just have to cut the cord and go. The only 'must haves' are a well-built boat and a sense of humor."

## Chinook — Saga 43 David & Candy Decker Evergreen, CO

David and Candy are proving once again that even landlocked states can produce accomplished sailors. Having sailed extensively

in the Caribbean, Mexico and Australia, they now intend to circumnavigate — but in a very unique way. "We're going to see if we can sail around the world in three- or four-month stints each year," says David. (Huh?)

The explanation is that David is still technically working full time as a geologist, but he's negotiated a deal where he can take a three- or four-month sabbatical annually. Pretty sweet, eh?

Both he and Candy

love the mountains too much to be on the water full time, but they're quick to clarify that they intend to keep sailing in spurts forever. "Actually," says Candy, "We kinda fell in love while sailing about 25 years ago, when I was invited to sail with David from Jamaica to Corpus Kristi. It was the first time I'd ever set foot on a sailboat and I've loved it ever since."

## Charisma — Amel Mango 53 Alan & Kristen Spence

About 10 years ago Alan seized an opportunity to help a friend bring a boat to Mexico — his first real offshore experience. "As we headed out the Golden Gate,"



David and Candy have a unique approach.

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(Undoubtedly, this list is far from complete, as many boats escape the 'Latitude radar'.)

Boat Name	Owners & Crew	Boat Type	Homeport
360	Joel & Mary Thornton	Passport 41	Seattle WA
Andiamo	Jerry Marsden and crew	Alden steel ketch 64	Phuket, Thailand
Airwego	Mike & Cindy Miller	McIntosh 47	Seattle, WA
Aquamarine II	Chris, Beth & Yvette	Passport 40	Gloucester, MA
Argonaut	Mike Scott & Liz Strash	Cal 40	Seattle, WA
Baraka	Dave Pryde & Jan Eckmann	Slocum 43	Seattle, WA
Blue Plains Drifter	Jim & Tiffany Tindle	Tayana 48 DS	Santa Cruz, CA
Camelot	Neil & Jackie Michell	Pan Oceanic 46	Preston UK
Charisma	Alan & Kristen Spence	Amel Mango 53	Napa, CA
Elusive	Stephen & Wendy Bott	J/44	Seattle, WA
Elusive	Josh Clark	custom Cal 32	Panama City, PA
Emily Grace	Tom, Kim & Emily	Nordhavn 46 trawler	Ludlow, MA
Freestyle	Jenna & Tim Smale	Cape Dory 36	Oceanside, CA
Gingi	John Bringetto & Amanda Berks	King's Legend 41	San Francisco
Grace	Geoff & Sally	Formosa Peterson 46	Bainbridge Is, WA
Hannah	Steve Wrye, Tracy Willett, Nolan Willett	Mason 44	Brinnon, WA
Horizons	John & Mary Hallinan	Southern Cross 39	Seward, Alaska
Island Time	Ron & Mary Ellen Leithiser	Norseman 447	San Diego CA
Linda	Steve & Linda Maggart	Rhodes Bounty II	Elephant Butte, NM
Liberty	The Nichols family	Peterson Formosa 46	Seattle, WA
Madeline	Jeremy & Meghan White	Gib Sea 106	Portland, OR
Malachi	Jay & Margaret Crandell	Tayana 48	Vancouver, BC
Monju	Carl & Mei King	Brewer 38	Seattle, WA
Moonduster	Wayne Meretsky	S&S 47	San Francisco
Morning Light	Jaime & Christine Tate; L & D Sutton	Hylas 46	San Diego
Our Country Home	Ralph & Glenda Johnson	Hans Christian 41	Corpus Christi, TX
Pacific Star	Horst Wolff & John Shryock	IP 35	San Francisco, CA
Pax Vobiscum	Sally & Brad Bagshaw	Fast Passage 39	Seattle, WA
Qayaq	Richard Spore & Betsy Plotkin	Valiant 32	Seattle, WA
Quetzalcoatl	Donald Bryden & Seishu Sono	Brewer 45 ketch	Green Bay, WI
Shilling of Hamble	Dennis & Janet Knight	Oyster 435	Southampton U.K.
Solace	Paul & Gina Rae	Hylas 44	New Zealand
Tender Spirit	Joan & Chuck Martin	Hans Christian	Sitka, Alaska
Tin Soldier	The Middleton family	Waterline 50	White Rock, B.C.
Tracen J.	J & M Spiess & J & D Kiesling	44 Crealock	Blaine, WA
Varl	Gordon & Jeanine Wunder	40-ft Simpson steel cutter	Kosrae, Micronesia
Warm Rain	Dawn & Tom Baker	Hylas 44	Blaine WA
Wind Dancer	The Burns family	Catalina 36	Juneau, Alaska



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he recalls, "it was like a light went on inside my head: 'Wow,' I thought, 'there's



**It's thumb's up for Alan and Kristen of 'Charisma'.**

no end to the possibilities of this lifestyle!" He and Kristen began a battery of sailing courses at Tradewinds Sailing seven years ago, bought this sweet ride in 2005, and set off last fall with the Baja Ha-Ha. Turns out she's had dreams of ocean adventuring since she was a

kid, reading books like *Island of the Blue Dolphins*.

The plan is to island-hop to New Zealand and back. And their advice to would-be PPJers: "Don't wait until you have 'enough money' stashed away to embark on your adventure — or it will never happen."

## **Entropy — Hunter 456 Robert & Carol Forbes Newport Beach, CA**

First, a big cheer for Robert and Carol for stepping up to act as the de facto group leaders for this year's fleet. In addition to their high-powered careers, they've long shared the same avocation: flying amphibious planes to far-flung destinations. "It's a natural transition from flying to sailing," explains Carol. But we have a feeling their boat is a lot

**Who says cruising can't be comfortable? Certainly not Robert and Carol of 'Entropy'.**



more comfy than their planes were.

Seeing no need to leave the creature comforts behind, *Entropy* not only has an enormous master stateroom with a walk-around bed, but it also has a bath tub. Seriously.

Their game plan is unique within this fleet, as they plan to join up with the UK-based Blue Water Rally in French Polynesia, and continue on around the world with that 35-boat fleet.

## **Liberty — Peterson 46 The Nichols family, Seattle**

We've got to applaud folks like Carl and Yvette for having the guts to buck the norm by cashing in all their chips and taking off with their kids. Two years ago they sold their house plus all "stuff," quit their high-stress jobs and set out to give their sons, Joel, 15, and Kyle, 13, an education in the school of life (in addition to home schooling). We're happy to report that when we caught up with the family last month, they were all still smiling and were all eager to make the big jump.

As they work their way west toward New Zealand, one destination that's high on the 'must see' list is New Caledonia. Carl sailed there on a training cruise with Mahini Expeditions and is anxious to share its many charms with the family. Beyond that, the game plan is simply to explore and discover until they head home in 2010.

## **Our Country Home — HC 41**

### **Ralph & Glenda Johnson Corpus Christi, TX**

We're pretty sure Ralph knows every inch of this boat, as he's lived aboard her



**The 'Liberty' crew is off on a family adventure that makes life back home look b-o-r-i-n-g.**

for over 20 years. He befriended Glenda some years back when she was going through a very rough patch of life. They eventually fell in love, got married and merged their cruising dreams, making a pact three years ago to cruise the South Pacific together. They expect to reach



**Where to? Plan A is for Glenda and Ralph to reach Australia by the end of the season.**

Australia this year, then reassess their options.

"We have had many delays due to family and other issues," explains Glenda, "but we didn't give up!" She likes to remind the wannabes back home that in life, as in sailing, "We cannot control the wind, but we can adjust the sails."

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## Point Zero — Hanse 53

**Andrea & Gaby Sciutto, London, UK**

It's an irony of our times that the biggest and newest boat in the Zihua fleet this year belongs to one of the youngest couples — they're both in their mid-30s. But they undoubtedly earned it through plenty of hard work.

Andrea is originally from Italy, and Gaby is from Slovakia, but they met while both living in London 10 years ago, and were married in '02.

"A couple of years ago we decided we were tired of life in London," explains Andrea. "We wanted to do something completely different." So they sold everything, took a six month's sailing course at the Isle of Wight and bought this beautiful German-built cruiser, brand new, in June of '06. After several months shaking her down in the Med, they crossed the Atlantic and they've had all sorts of adventures ever since — including a lightning strike en route to Panama which fried all their electronics.

So far, they've been most impressed by "how little we need to be happy," says



LATITUDE / ANDY

**Who needs London? Andrea and Gaby are headed for the sunny isles of the South Pacific.**

Andrea. "We don't miss anything from our life before sailing." One awkward thing is that their families all think they're crazy. "But I told my parents, 'Don't worry, you are the point of contact if the EPIRB goes off. So if something

happens, you'll be the first to know!"

Since our typing fingers are cramping and we're reaching the end of the page, we'll take a breather here and pick up where we left off next month.

By then — April 1 — about half of the fleet will be at sea, either booming along with the easterly trade winds or anxious to reach them. Weather gurus tell us that it's a 'La Niña' year, which could bring stronger than normal wind conditions to the South Pacific. That's probably a good thing, as sailors in previous years have complained a lot more about not having enough wind, rather than having too much.

Whatever happens, you'll be able to read about it here. In addition to our second installment of Puddle Jumper profiles in April, in the coming months we'll bring you a recap report on the crossing, as well as coverage of the Tahiti-Moorea Sailing Rendezvous in June. Hmm. . . better rest these fingers while we have a chance.

— latitude/at

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