

The Essential Cruiser's Library

When we began our cruising life, we had precious little experience. We had taken a few classes on sailing and had bare boat chartered several times in Florida and the Caribbean. We did, however, have a number of very experienced friends to rely upon as we gained experience. These good friends, the Dashews, Pardeys, Calders, and Cornells to mention a few, also helped us out of more than a few ticklish situations.

In reality, we have never met these fine people, but we have read their books cover to cover. Over the years, we have put together an extensive nautical library on board *Nine of Cups* and hardly a day goes by that we don't refer to at least one of them. What we would like to do is share with you what we have found to be the most useful, if not essential, books to have aboard.

Realizing the Dream

When 'sailing off into the sunset' was still just a dream for us, we read every book we could find that talked about the cruising life and how to realize that dream. Once we bought *Nine of Cups* and moved aboard, we parted with most of these books. We only mention them because they did make it seem possible to "sell up and sail". We can recommend these two books:

- "Sensible Cruising – the Thoreau Approach" by Casey and Hackler. A good book selling the "simpler is better" approach, especially if that means you can start sooner
- "Sell Up and Sail", by Bill and Laurel Cooper.

General Boat/Cruising Reference Books

- "Offshore Cruising Encyclopedia" by Steve and Linda Dashew. As the title suggests, this book is a compendium of information on boats and how to live aboard. We refer to it less now than in our first years of cruising, but still often enough that we wouldn't part with it.
- "World Cruising Routes" by Jimmy Cornell. This is a great book for planning passages – everything from a trip to the Bahamas to a circumnavigation. It gives winds and currents throughout the world, as well as best times and routes for passages.
- "Cruising Handbook" by Nigel Calder. A great reference book that covers everything from selecting the right boat to detailed descriptions of most of the onboard systems of a modern cruising sailboat.

Maintenance and Repair

In addition to the specific repair manuals for the equipment aboard, we recommend the following:

- "Boatowners Mechanical and Electrical Manual" and "Marine Diesel Engines", both by Nigel Calder. If you plan to leave the marina, you need to know the basics about repairing the mechanical and electrical systems aboard. These books are probably the two most used books aboard *Nine of Cups*. (You can tell by all the

greasy fingerprints all over them.) They not only describe how most of these systems work, but how to repair them.

- “This Old Boat” by Don Casey. While it is basically intended as a book for restoring an older boat, it is also a great collection of tutorials on a variety of boat projects such as upgrading, repair and maintenance of fiberglass, paint, varnish, canvas, electrical, refrigeration and much more. In addition, his writing style makes it an enjoyable read.
- “The Complete Canvasworkers Guide” by Jim Grant. A collection of tutorials on boat canvas projects such as biminis, dodgers, sail covers, and canvas repair, etc.
- “Sail and Rig Tuning” by Ivar Dedekam. A short concise book that does exactly what its title says.

Seamanship

- “The Annapolis Book of Seamanship” by John Rousmaniere. This book, a classic, covers the basics of sailing, navigation, boat handling and seamanship.

Navigation

There are two important points we would like to make on the subject of navigation. First, while we do have electronic charts aboard, we use them primarily for route planning and setting waypoints. When we are sailing, our preference is to use paper charts for navigation. Part of the reason for this is that our electronic charts are on our laptop, and it rarely leaves the safety of the nav station when we are underway. The last thing I want to do when we are approaching a new harbor or landfall is leave the helm and go below to figure out where we are. This is our preference, and certainly many other very experienced sailors depend primarily on electronic charts for navigation and use the paper charts for backup. One thing that we do find disturbing however, is that more and more, we meet cruisers who have opted to go entirely electronic and have no paper charts aboard. This, we feel is a mistake. It’s like throwing out the compass because you have a GPS aboard.

The second point concerns coastal navigation skills. With the reliance on electronic charts and the GPS, many sailors have forgotten, or worse, never learned the basics of coastal navigation. This is a serious mistake for two reasons. One reason is the small but real possibility of losing all onboard electronics due to a lightening strike. A much more important reason is that once you leave the U.S. or Europe, many if not most charts, have never been updated since the advent of satellite navigation. Your GPS will give you your exact location within a few feet, but since the chart was made before this accuracy was possible, it may be as much as a mile or more off. There have been numerous times when the GPS position as plotted on either the paper or electronic chart put us high and dry on an island when we were most certainly afloat. What is worse is when the GPS shows us in safety, well offshore, while it is obvious we are approaching a shoal or rock. Because of this, it is important to at least be able to find your position using the classic coastal navigational skills. The following books do a good job on the subject:

- “American Practical Navigator” by Nathaniel Bowditch. This is the classic book on the subject, now made available by the National Imagery and Mapping Agency.
- “Practical Navigation for the Yachtsman”, by Frederick Devereux.

Weather

- “Weather Predicting Simplified” by Michael Carr. A good tutorial on weather prediction using weather faxes and satellite photos.
- “Annapolis Book of Seamanship” by John Rousmaniere. This book, already mentioned under “Seamanship”, has a good chapter on weather forecasting using clouds, winds and barometer.
- “Heavy Weather Sailing” by Adlar Cole. A portion of this classic is devoted to real storm condition situations and how they were handled. The remainder of the book contains expert advice on coping with heavy weather.

Medical

When we began looking for a good medical reference, we found a lot of first aid type books that teach how to best handle an emergency situation until the ambulance arrives. We also found several medical books that seemed aimed at a trained medical professional in an isolated environment, i.e. a rural family physician or ship’s doctor. Neither type of book fit the bill for our needs. The following two books, however, have been of considerable use over the years:

- “The Onboard Medical Handbook” by Paul Gill, Jr., M.D. This book was written for non-medical professionals, and covers most of the health related issues you are likely to encounter aboard. It also includes a section on stocking the medicine chest.
- “The Merck Manual of Medical Information – Home Edition”. A large compendium of medical information. The original version of this book was written for health care professionals, but the home edition has been rewritten for non-professionals. Also has a section on over-the-counter and prescription drugs, including generic names, uses and interactions.

General Reference Books

The following are books we use frequently:

- A good dictionary
- “The World Book Encyclopedia” on CD. This is too large to have in book form, but great for reference on the computer.
- “Hoyle’s Rules of Games”, edited by Morehead and Mott-Smith. The rules and strategies for most card games and games of chance. We frequently play a quick game of gin, cribbage or canasta to start or end the day. Current score: David: 1190 games, Marcie: 1165 games. Hoyle settles all arguments!
- “The Pocket Reference”, edited by Thomas Glover. David’s little black book that contains hundreds of pages of facts and formulae on all sorts of things. Want to know how large a spool you need to hold 300 feet of $\frac{3}{4}$ ” line, how to calculate the area of a polygon or how to convert from cables to feet? It’s in there.

- Astronomy – a good reference to the skies. We have one for both the northern and southern hemispheres
- Flags. A book with the flags of all the world's countries so you can identify all the boats in your anchorage.
- World Atlas. We have one but won't mention the name because we want a better one.
- National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency listing of charts. A mouthful, but this is the listing by region of all the world's charts printed by the U.S. There is a catalog for each of nine regions and the catalogs are free (shipping is not). They are available from any chart dealer in the U.S. or on-line at <http://bookstore.gpo.gov> .

The following are several general reference books on birds, mammals and shells of the world. In addition, we often buy books for specific areas, such as the birds of Patagonia.

- “Compendium of Seashells” by Abbott and Dance.
- “Birds of the World” by Harrison and Greensmith.
- “Guide to Marine Mammals of the World”, National Audubon Society.

We also have language dictionaries aboard if we are heading for a non-English speaking country. In addition to general purpose language dictionaries, the following were very useful:

- “Spanish for Cruisers” by Kathy Parsons
- “Yachtsman's Ten Language Dictionary” by Webb and Manton

Marlinspike Seamanship

While most of us probably won't ever learn how to caulk the seams of a wooden boat or to tar a hemp lanyard, ropes still require knots, splices and hitches, and a sailmaker's needle and palm are still necessary gear aboard a modern cruising sailboat. Beyond the basic essentials, however, it is quite satisfying to learn some of the traditional sailors' arts. A fine canvas bucket or rope mat are far superior to the modern plastic or “astroturf” equivalents. We recommend and frequently refer to the following books:

- “The Ashley Book of Knots” by Clifford Ashley. A compendium of almost 4000 knots of every type imaginable, from occupational to decorative, along with a lot of interesting nautical lore and history.
- “The Marlinspike Sailor” by Hervey Garrett Smith. A great book on the traditional arts of the sailor, from basic knots to decorative ropework and canvaswork.
- “Riggers Apprentice” by Brion Toss. A good source of information on repair and maintenance of your rigging, plus a good section on the basic knots and splices needed aboard.
- “Scrimshaw, A Complete Illustrated Manual” by Paszkiewicz and Schroeder. You probably won't be using elephant ivory or whale teeth, but there are a lot of alternatives that work well for scrimshaw, and it isn't as difficult as you might think.

Cookbooks

We have a couple of good general cookbooks we brought with us from our lives before cruising. In addition, when we enjoy the cuisine of a particular region or country, we often purchase a local cookbook so we have several on Caribbean and South American cooking at present. The two books we use most frequently aboard, however, are aimed at the live-aboard lifestyle:

- “The Cruising K.I.S.S. Cookbook” by Corinne Kanter. A lot of recipes, tips and shortcuts to make cooking aboard and underway easier as well as several “scratch” recipes.
- “The Cruising Chef Cookbook” by Michael Greenwald. A very extensive cruising cookbook sprinkled with a number of funny vignettes and nautical tips.

Nautical Fiction and Non-Fiction

- “Sailing Alone Around the World” by Joshua Slocum. A fun read by the first solo circumnavigator.
- “The Bounty Trilogy” by Nordhoff and Hall. Part factual, part speculation about the mutiny on the HMS Bounty.

We have listed these by author rather than title since we enjoyed several if not all of their books:

- Herman Melville. We especially enjoyed the annotated version of “Moby Dick” along with his many lesser known novels
- Patrick O’Brian novels
- C.S. Forrester novels following the career of Horatio Hornblower.
- Tristan Jones. We know that he “re-invented” himself and that he never let the truth get in the way of a good story, but we still enjoy his yarns.
- Bernard Moitessier. One of the great singlehandlers of all time, his books are always wonderful reads.
- Lin and Larry Pardey, Hal and Margaret Roth. We enjoy reading books by experienced sailors who have spent most of their lives sailing. We learn something new every time we re-read these books.

We also try to find a good non-fiction about the culture and history of whatever new country or region we are heading to. Some recommendations:

- “Path Between the Seas” by David McCullough. The story of the building of the Panama Canal.
- “Conquest of the Incas” by John Hemming.
- “The Fatal Shore” by Robert Hughes. The story of the founding of Australia.

Many of these books may be available on CD and make good listening while you’re on night watch.

Fishing

Thanks to the tutoring by some good friends and the book listed below, we have learned enough about fishing to at least make our investment in the basic equipment pay off. We don’t fish for the sport as much as to augment our provisions, and on a long passage, Marcie only provisions enough fresh/frozen meats for about 2/3 of our needs. We do

have a lot of tinned meats as well, just in case, but we have always managed to catch as much tuna, dorado and wahoo as we want. We recommend the following book:

- “The Cruiser’s Handbook of Fishing” by Scott and Wendy Bannerot. This book provides information on just about any type of fishing you can imagine, as well as what to do with the fish once you catch it.

Catalogs

The obvious reason for having a few catalogs aboard is to order parts. There are a few other reasons why we have devoted valuable shelf space to catalogs, however. One reason is when we are in some remote place, we can get an idea of what a part should cost to see whether we are getting a bargain or getting gouged. Another is for project planning and budgeting. One last reason, I am embarrassed to admit, is to make sure we get the terminology correct, i.e. “Did you want that snatch block with or without trunion?” Many of these catalogs may also be available electronically.

- “West Marine Master Catalog”
- “Defender Marine Buyers’ Guide”
- “Jamestown Distributors Boatbuilding and Woodworking Supplies”
- “Digikey Electronics Catalog”. A source for electrical and electronic supplies
- “Sailrite Catalog”, Sailrite Enterprises. A source for sailmaking, canvas and general boat sewing needs.

Travel/Cruising Guides

We have rarely been to an area that did not have at least one cruising guide or cruising pilot of some form or another, and often there are several to choose from. These have ranged from marvelous works of art with hundreds of anchorages, GPS waypoints and color photos to a few pages of handwritten notes compiled by other cruisers as they traveled through an area. Try to find other cruisers who have been to the area you are going and find out what they recommend, as well as cruising club bulletins such as Seven Seas Cruising Association (SSCA) or Ocean Cruising Club (OCC). If a printed cruising guide is available, buy a new copy – it was written by a fellow cruiser who spent a lot of time and energy putting it together and who is trying to make enough money to continue the cruising life.

When we set sail for a new area, we also like to have a tourist travel guidebook like the Lonely Planet™ series on board. It provides a lot of historical and cultural information and since we like to do inland travel when we can, we can do some planning (and dreaming) prior to our arrival.

General paperbacks

We are book-aholics on long passages. We purchase as many used paperbacks as we can at thrift shops. After we read them, we trade them at book exchanges and with other cruisers. We keep these in hammocks so no locker or shelf space is needed and they are always available. Everybody has different tastes in their choice of page burners so we won’t make recommendations in this area.

We have about 12 linear feet of shelf space aboard *Nine of Cups*, and we have almost all of the recommended books aboard, plus a few other favorites we keep around. Out of necessity, our rule is that we have to part with an older book before we can add a new one and sometimes the choice is difficult. More of the reference books are now available on CD, which makes storage aboard much easier, but we prefer the hardcopy whenever possible.

We have no doubt that your library will be somewhat different than ours. Your experience and interests will be different, and you will find alternate books that serve your needs as well or perhaps better. We suspect that the general categories will be the same, however, and that this will be of use to you as you build your own library.