

Flicka Friends

Winter 2006



Vol. 11, No 4



Sacramento Delta Cruising



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Eye Splices



Sailing s/y DART in Bermuda.
Photo: Gill Outerbridge © 2006



Flicka s/y TRITON at a mooring in Christmas Cove, Maine.
Photo: Louis Anon © 2006

The Next Issue...

The files are empty again. If you have a winter project to share, please let me know.

Spending the winter sailing? It would make great reading for the high latitude Flicka sailors.

Front Cover

Flicka # 295 s/y SERENITY
On San Francisco Bay.
Photo: Sam Yoshimura © 2006

Back Cover

Family sailing aboard Flicka # 49
s/y SEAHORSE on Angostura
Reservoir, South Dakota,
Photo: Scot Dannedbring © 2006

By Tom Davison

While I've been braiding three-strand dock lines for years, I always wondered about splicing double-braid line. The idea of getting the rope to fit back into the sheath a second time sounded difficult.

In early November I ordered a Samson splicing kit from Defender and picked up some line from Boater's World. My first project was replacing the fender lines and four 1/4 inch diameter, six foot long pieces of double braid were purchased. Blue rope with a white core was selected, something that would help me visualize the process.

After sitting down at a desk, the instructions were unfolded and followed carefully. The various measurements

were marked on the rope and then the core was extracted. After a few more marks, the fid took the sheath through the core and it was thinned.

Next, I moved to the core. It was run into the sheath at a certain point, exiting just beyond the splice. From this point, the sheath was pulled back from the anchor knot and with a bit of force. After trimming, the braided core disappeared into the area above the splice.

This was easier than expected and actually took less time than a three-strand braided eye. I was surprised and the next three eye-splices were done quickly. Custom dock lines will also be spliced for the next season. This will eliminate adjusting lines at the home port. Just loop the cleats and docking will be complete.





Sailing In The Snow?



The local farmers reported that winter weather arrived about ten days ahead of schedule this year.

Photo: Tom Davison © 2006

By Tom Davison

The end of the season is always in question. An attempt was made to sail into the fall, but ultimately, the cold and snow will force you to pull your Flicka. If things could have been changed, the months of October and November would have been switched. The temperatures would have allowed sailing for another two weeks or more.

The decision to pull the Flicka, pressure wash the bottom, winterize, and tow to the barn was easy to make. Looking around the marina, **BEN MAIN, Jr.** was in good company, including a Bristol Channel Cutter. Five more months and the sailboats on the North Coast will be preparing for another season. For the southern latitude sailors, enjoy the winter aboard your Flickas.

About Flicka Friends

Flicka Friends is a newsletter that is written specifically for the people who own, crew aboard, or are interested in the Flicka, a twenty foot sailing vessel designed by Bruce P. Bingham.

Based on the Newport Boats of Block Island Sound, this little ship has been built from various materials from the 1970's until 2002. This includes Flickas constructed from plans obtained directly from Bruce's California office. About 400 sets of plans were sold. According to Bruce Bingham, many Flickas can be found in New Zealand, Australia, and Sweden.

A number of hulls were built by Nor'Star and some were completed by Westerly Marine. The manufacturer of the bulk of the class is Pacific Seacraft who built 434 hulls in California.

Flicka Friends is published on a quarterly, with issues being posted to the internet in March, June, September and December. Articles and photographs are welcome and encouraged.

You can download the current issue as well as back issues of Flicka Friends from the Flicka Home Page:

www.flicka20.com

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Exploring the

By Bert Felton and Scott Grometer
s/y DREAMCATCHER

On July 9, 2006, Flicka owners Bert Felton and Scott Grometer departed Alameda, CA for an eight day mini-cruise of the California Delta on Bert's Flicka **DREAM CATCHER**.

The Delta, a labyrinth of waterways comprised largely of the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers and reaching deep into California's expansive central valley, is often advertised as having over 1000 miles of navigable waterways. Several smaller rivers and tributaries with their attendant sloughs and backwaters provide ample opportunity for exploration and discovery. For the sailor, perhaps something more like several hundred miles is available, as there are many fixed, low-span bridges and too-shallow sloughs for complete access.

Many of the waterways comprising the Delta as seen today are the product of swampland "reclamation" projects dating back to the 1850's. The often deep and navigable channels and sloughs are the result of extensive dredging/mining of material to create the adjacent levees. The region is now a patchwork of below-sea-level farms and ranches separated by narrow waterways and connected by levee-top roads and draw, lift or swing bridges. Small towns and/or marinas punctuate these meandering waterways at more or less regular intervals.

Perhaps the most surreal aspect of Delta cruising, aside from looking down at the surrounding landscape, is the occasional sighting of full-size grain or tanker ships moving across what appears to be open farmland. There are deepwater ports in both Sacramento and Stockton, and full-sized oceangoing ships ply these serpentine waterways on their long journey from the beyond the Golden Gate to these landlocked agricultural ports.



Anchored out of the way in the Sacramento Delta.

Photo: Scott Grometer © 2006

The prime Delta cruising season is summer. Delta weather is usually hot (often 100° F. or more) during the mid-summer months, which, perhaps paradoxically, is the prime attraction for San Francisco Bay sailors tired of cold, fog, and daily 25-30 knot winds (recall Mark Twain's famous quotation regarding his summer in San Francisco being the coldest winter he had ever

spent!). Ironically, the hot summer weather of California's central valley and Delta region is the direct cause of the cold, moist, and windy summer conditions in San Francisco Bay. As this interior land mass and air heats in the summer sun, the heat rises and results in inland low pressure. This 'vacuum' literally sucks the cool, moist coastal air through the natural gap at



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Scott at the helm of s/y DREAM CATCHER.
Photo: Bert Felton © 2006

the Golden gate, and up through the string of bays and river drainage on its way to the Delta.

The Delta cruising region hits its population apex around the Fourth of July, when literally tens of thousands of boats converge on select locations for huge, alcohol-soaked floating parties and fireworks displays.

We opted to bypass this mass debauchery in favor of a somewhat quieter Delta experience. We figured that by departing shortly after the masses returned home to nurse their hangovers, we would stand a better chance of some solitude and perhaps the occasional view of some wildlife.

We enjoyed a sunny and fog-free early departure from **DREAM CATCHER's** home port on the Oakland Estuary. A fresh breeze built to the usual 20 knot northwesterly by the time we slipped under the Bay Bridge on our way North. A short, steep chop often develops in the shallow waters off the Berkeley shore given the long fetch to and beyond the Golden Gate Bridge. In our haste to get under way, we forgot to open the automatic bailing valve in the transom of our towed inflatable dinghy. Before long, to remedy this oversight, we were forced to heave-to in the boisterous waves rolling in between Treasure and Angel Islands as the steep breaking waves conspired to convert our dinghy to a sea anchor.

Before long, we had jumped on to the express-train combination of favorable tide and following winds that would characterize our entire trip to Delta waters. Even with the help of tide, wind, and a long summer day, we knew that the journey to our Delta destination would need to be broken into two or more days.

We had often discussed a trip to the historic bayside encampment of China Camp, now a state park located on the



China Camp thrived in the 1880's with a population over 500 people.
Photo: Bert Felton © 2006



Exploring the

west side of shallow San Pablo Bay, and the camp's location en-route made it a perfect first night's anchorage. (http://www.sfgate.com/getoutside/1997/may/cc_history.html)

Chinese immigrants constructed this and other shrimping camps in shallow, remote locations around the San Francisco Bay. During the 1800's, the fishermen used nets deployed from sailing junks, switching to powered boats during the 1900's. China Camp is perhaps the most complete and well-preserved example and is surrounded by extensive parkland. Here, it doesn't require much imagination to picture the bay as it was 150 years ago.

We dropped anchor well offshore in about two fathoms and in clear view of the historic buildings. A row ashore with beach landing proved very worthwhile, as many of the original buildings and houses are intact and filled with period equipment and effects.

The interpretive center/museum offered early video and photographs and should not be missed. The park dock (no private vessel access) is complete with a faithful replica of an early junk-rigged shrimp boat as well as a later powered wood vessel.

The China Camp anchorage can, at times, be very roly. We set an alarm for midnight for the turn of the tide to confirm that our anchor reset properly when the surprisingly fast current reversed. We were spared being startled by the alarm's piercing note when the wake from a distant tanker nearly threw us onto the cabin sole.

On our second day out, we jumped back on the express train of tide and wind and enjoyed a brisk passage through the Carquinez Straits on our way east. The cold, moist air of the San Francisco Bay gave way to rising temperatures and hot sun, and the layers of expedition-weight long underwear

were abandoned in favor of more Delta-appropriate attire of shorts, t-shirts, and lots of sunscreen.

In spite of careful planning and impressive speed over the bottom, we were astounded when late afternoon found us only at the town of Pittsburg. We tucked into the Pittsburg Marina to stock up on ice and use the shoreside facilities. We queried the harbormaster as to possible anchorages we might reach before sundown and then headed out quickly per his directions.

With the sun quickly fading, we found ourselves in the suggested narrow, reed-lined slough. We were told that we could just anchor anywhere out of traffic, but we were not feeling too confident about the traffic part. As we nosed into one bank to test the depth, a grossly overpowered bass boat blew past us at dizzying speed. We looked at each other with a knowing look about what we had to do next. We were immediately adjacent to a once large farm known as Franks Tract. Originally reclaimed in 1902, this parcel became a large lake when the False River levee failed in 1937. We had been warned to stay out of there and had heard all manner of rumors of lurking underwater hazards ranging from submerged telephone poles and farm implements to crashed airplanes. Still, we watched that speeding bass boat enter Franks through a fifteen foot wide break in some tules and continue across at better than 40 knots.

So, with a crude chart in hand, in we gingerly went. We searched for the deepest water out of the likely early morning traffic (fishermen) and finally set the 22 lb. Bruce with its 40 feet of chain in about eleven feet of water. We listened to the steady 25 knots of wind howl through the rigging most of the night. Rising early to ensure we had enough water to retrace our steps back out, we were awarded a stunningly beautiful sunrise in an equally beautiful setting.



DREAM CATCHER anchored in Franks Tract.

Photo: Bert Felton © 2006





Sacramento Delta

Day three found us in the heart of Delta landscape. Meandering channels bounded by tall levees, cows gazing as we ghosted by under sail, great blue herons wading less than a boat's length away--the stress and pace of everyday life was yielding to Delta time and priorities.

At one point, however, our newfound peace was abruptly shattered by a deafening roar and yellow streak overhead. We were left stunned, not quite sure what had just attacked us. Several minutes later, it returned--a crop dusting plane that must have only missed our masthead by mere inches (okay, probably several feet, but you get the point). We couldn't see or hear the plane until it cleared the levee, and it disappeared just as quickly. Not wanting to alter our genomes, we held our breaths for as long as possible.

We had received conflicting information as to the opening schedules and protocol for the numerous bridges we might encounter. We knew how to request openings on VHF channels 9 or 16 (9 preferred): "Mokulumne River Bridge, Mokulumne River Bridge, this is eastbound sailing vessel **DREAM CATCHER**, **DREAM CATCHER**, requesting opening."

In the case of our second bridge, we learned not to call too early. Thinking it would be polite to give some early warning, we called this bridge about five minutes before our arrival. By the time we rounded the final bend in front of the bridge, we were astounded to see the bridge already wide open, and with long lines of cars and trucks stopped on either side.

To further exacerbate the situation, we were under sail at the time. In true relaxed Delta fashion, the friendly bridge attendant suggested that we wait until we get a little closer to call and that we might want to consider not sailing through bridges, as that was not legal! We sheepishly apologized, and she laughed and countered with "no problem--don't

worry about it." We were liking these Delta people already. We were entertained by some of the crazy radio exchanges we heard while monitoring VHF channels 9 and 16 in the Delta region. One apparently clueless mariner made the call "Bridge, Bridge, requesting opening." The failure of the caller to identify which specific bridge--there are countless bridges in a small area all monitoring the same channels--resulted in a kind of quiz-show questioning that resulted in the caller having to describe his surroundings before the bridge operators could figure out where he was. Other boats would attempt to call fixed bridges for an opening, request a water taxi because they had run aground, or attempt to reach the distant coast guard because a sailboat had failed to yield right of way. More than once, we utterly collapsed in laughter upon hearing such calls. Throughout the trip, we would make jokes with each other such as "Golden Gate Bridge, Golden Gate Bridge, this is sailing vessel **DREAM CATCHER** requesting opening" or "Water Taxi, Water Taxi, our Porta-Potti is full." Needless to say, we were starting to relax. Abuses of these important calling channels, however, were less than humorous. Local fisherman use both channels 9 and 16



Replica of a Chinese Junk at China Camp
Photo: Bert Felton © 2006

liberally to discuss everything from their upcoming vacation plans to recent sexual exploits.

After our last bridge, we sailed into an ever narrowing river that looked like something more characteristic of a deep south bayou than California. We were shocked that we had not seen a single sailboat for more than five hours. The occasional small fishing boat or ski boat would pass now and then, but nothing like the midsummer madness we had expected.

When we finally reached our intended destination, our hearts sank. We rounded the bend into the final slough only to find several hundred houseboats stacked along the shoreline,





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We hailed this bridge before we turned the corner, They waited patiently for DREAM CATCHER.

Photo: Bert Felton © 2006

seemingly less than ten feet apart. Ski boats with giant booming speakers throbbed past, and one houseboat complete with a live heavy metal band completed the disappointing picture. According to the various guidebooks, this anchorage was supposed to be among the most intact examples of the early California oak swamplands. We were not impressed.

Fortunately, the Delta is large, and we did not have to go far to find what we were looking for. We motored away from the floating trailer park and within a short time found a quiet, solitary slough replete with huge overhanging trees, still water, and abundant wildlife.

Having finally found what we were looking for, we dropped a stern and bow anchor mid-slough and then nosed the bow close to shore with a line from the bow to a tree. This enabled us to keep the boat just off the bank and al-

lowed a breeze to flow down a wind scoop through the forward hatch.

For three days, we hiked, explored the seemingly endless small waterways by dinghy, picked blackberries for breakfast, and watched the varied wildlife. We spotted a bald eagle, a musk rat ferrying reeds for its nest, several kingfishers, and great blue herons too numerous to count.

One afternoon, we journeyed to Locke, a late 1800's/early 1900's settlement built and originally inhabited entirely by Chinese immigrants. This fascinating riverside town is largely intact and shows few signs of gentrification. A walk down the main street is truly a time-warp experience. (See <http://www.locketown.com/>).

On July 14, we reluctantly departed our anchorage to retrace our route home. Having sailed all but 1/2 hour of the

80+ nautical miles to the Delta, we were now to pay for that free ride with countless hours of motoring.

At first, we countered only the wind, as the sloughs lack the kind of fetch for much chop, but by the time we reached Pittsburgh, we were bucking a huge, steep chop that knocked our speed back to as little as two knots. Sailing against the wind in the narrow channel was out of the question and even motoring was not going to get us to our intended stop at Benecia before dark, so we retreated into Pittsburg Marina with the intent of an early morning start (the wind is *typically* much lighter in the morning).

That evening, we walked to downtown Pittsburg for dinner at a recommended Mexican restaurant. This little-known town is treasure of period buildings and has some of the best examples of high art-deco architecture around. We had a fitful night of sleep as the wind contin-



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The last night of the trip was spent anchored at Paradise Park on the north side of Tiburon.

Photo: Bert Felton © 2006

ued to howl through the rigging. At 0400, we departed the harbor, and to our astonishment, encountered conditions even more boisterous than the previous day. We had a constant 30+ knots on the bow for the next four hours. This, coupled with five to six foot seas with about a boat-length duration made for very wet, uncomfortable going.

At one point, the 8'-6" inflatable was completely airborne just prior to its flipping upside down. We looked back in astonishment as it suddenly became airborne again and righted itself. For the first time the prop on the Yanmar

inboard actually came out of the water in the steep chop.

At times we could only make 1.7 knots over the ground running at 3,000 rpm only because the current was running with us.

By the time we reached Benicia, the conditions had abated. We could have easily made it back to the slip that night, but perhaps because we were both exhausted by the conditions, or perhaps because we weren't quite yet ready to return to civilization, we decided to anchor off of Paradise Park on the north side of Tiburon for one last

night. At nightfall, all of the crew of the various anchored boats sat topside for an impromptu concert of acoustic guitar emanating from a lone musician sitting on the deck of his home shore-side. We slept like babies.

Our eight day little adventure enabled us to tune-out the goings-on of the world. Everything was in the now: setting sails, deciding where to anchor, cooking, washing dishes. It was difficult to return, to be bombarded by noise, news, phones, traffic. We could see the draw to the cruising life or certainly to taking mini cruises more often.

