

# Bluewater Gear



Dave & Sherry McCampbell photos

A 10-year circumnavigation gets stretched

**D**ave and Sherry McCampbell voyage aboard their St. Francis 44 catamaran, Soggy Paws. They planned on a 10-year circumnavigation, but it has already stretched to 13 years and they admit it might be 20 before they're done.

Dave is a Naval Academy graduate and spent most of his time in the Navy as a diving and salvage officer. He commanded the rescue salvage

station (Dad was on a carrier, no families allowed), but I was always keen to travel and see new places. After Dad retired and I graduated from high school (in the Florida Keys), we took off on a one-year circuit of the Caribbean in 1974 aboard my Dad's 41-foot trimaran. I was hooked on cruising then. On return, I went off to college with plans to figure out a way to do it again on my own one day.

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**DM:** As a young ensign in the Navy, on my first ship I went all the way to East Africa and back from California, crossing the Pacific twice. I was the ship's navigator, so I had the opportunity to scrutinize many charts for interesting places to stop. We stopped at many large ports on the way, never staying more than four to five days. But we were never able to go to some of the remote places I had seen on the charts. I decided then that I wanted a chance to see those places in the future, and have more time to explore and enjoy. My second Navy cruise, we went all the way to Greece and back from the U.S. East Coast and then a repeat of my first cruise to



Sherry and Dave McCampbell at Tetepare in the Solomon Islands.

ship Bolster. He has owned eight sailboats, including the 1929 Alden yawl Cynara, a Catalina 36, Tartan 30, Ranger 26, Piver 35 trimaran and a Hobie 16. He previously cruised with Sherry aboard a CSY 44. Dave holds a USCG 100-ton master's license and spent six years in the charter industry with the Florida Sea Base sailing program in the Keys. He is a retired PADI and YMCA

scuba instructor. He holds an extra amateur radio license (KE4BKF). He has been a member of SSCA since 1994 and a Commodore since 2000.

**OV:** What prompted you to go voyaging?

**D&SM:** We are from fairly different backgrounds, and came together after both of us had been cruising a while with different spouses. For this question, it might be best to answer separately.

**SM:** My dad was in the Navy, and we moved every other year while I was growing up. We never had an overseas duty

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- Satcom coming on strong
- Evaluating voyaging anchors



East Africa. Sure enough, Navy port visits hadn't changed in duration. When I bought my first sailboat in 1975, a 1929 Alden yawl in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, I was hooked on someday go around the world on my own schedule. And as avid divers, we are always looking for that remote divers' paradise.

Sherry and I are now 13 years into a planned 10-year circumnavigation and are only halfway around. You might say we are slow cruisers, as most of our American friends have long ago passed us by.

**OV:** How much preparation did you do prior to setting off?

**DM:** I retired from the Navy in 1992, built a house in the Florida Keys and then bought the CSY 44 in 1996. Two years later, my then-wife and I spent four years cruising around the Caribbean (two years planned, four years to complete). The CSY was bought out of charter and was in very rough shape, but the purchase price was right. It only took me 10 years, including the Caribbean cruise and six seasons of Boy Scout chartering — and an unknown amount of money — to get the boat really ready for long-term cruising. I did almost a complete refurbish on the boat, including engine and transmission overhaul, rigging replacement, all

ports and hatches maintenance, blister repair, rewiring, replumbing, DIY watermaker project, major refrigeration overhaul, new sails, upgraded electronics, stern arch, solar system, new ground tackle and anchors, and much more. It was very painful and involved a steep learning curve. But I ended up with a strong bluewater boat that I knew inside and out, and had all the skills, tools and spares to care for it myself anywhere in the world.

**SM:** In 1993, my then-husband was offered a nice early retirement package. We had already purchased a Prout Snowgoose 37 catamaran, and were working on a “five-year plan” to go cruising. The early retirement

expedited that, and we turned it into a six-month plan to sell the house, finish the urgent boat projects and take off for four years with a 6-year-old daughter, a cat and a dog. After a shakedown cruise from Florida to Maine and back, we did a clockwise circumnavigation of the Caribbean. We had fun, but after four years of cruising, we needed to pause to put our daughter in “real” school.

Ten years later, I found myself divorced and working a job I had grown to hate. I had given up searching for a “cruising mate,” and was prepping myself to go solo if I had to. That included buying and racing my own 28-foot monohull (learning to really sail), getting my USCG captain's license,

*Above, Sherry and Dave's St. Francis 44 catamaran, Soggy Paws. Below, Soggy Paws sailing off Cape Campbell, New Zealand.*



OCEAN ALMANAC  
**PILOTING & NAV**

## Offshore safety checklist

The following lists contain items that most well-found cruising boats have on board for extended voyages. Items not considered essential are included in the Optional list.

### NAVIGATION

sextant  
Nautical Almanac for current year  
sight reduction tables  
chronometer  
plotting sheets  
charts for intended route  
ship's log  
tide tables  
*Light List*  
*Coast Pilots* and cruising guides  
pilot charts  
radio receiver for time and weather  
radio frequency lists  
binoculars  
adjusted compass  
hand-bearing compass  
dividers  
course plotters and parallel rules  
calculator  
speed and distance log  
depth sounder  
GPS and/or loran  
spotlight

signal mirrors  
EPIRB  
fire extinguishers  
first-aid kit  
backup prescription medications  
spare eyeglasses  
safety harnesses  
life jackets  
flashlights  
knives for each crew  
bungs for seacocks  
life ring and/or life sling  
storm sails  
storm anchor and rode  
parachute sea anchor and/or drogue  
extra chafing gear for lines  
emergency tiller or steering system  
backup autopilot or wind vane parts  
tools and repair materials  
jumper cables  
abandon-ship bag  
emergency food and water  
life raft

hand-held VHF radio  
waterproof case for handheld  
emergency antenna for VHF  
horn  
bell  
whistles for crew  
radio  
frequency lists  
AIS receiver/transponder

### OPTIONAL

sight reduction calculator  
Radio Direction Finder  
electronic chartplotter or computer  
electronic charts  
radar  
radar detector  
SSB radio  
ham radio  
satellite communication  
weatherfax  
Navtex  
signal flags  
personal strobes and/or EPIRBs  
survival suits  
wet suits or dry suits  
solar panel for emergency charging  
emergency generator  
watermaker for life raft

### COMMUNICATIONS

VHF radio  
emergency procedures card near radio  
emergency contact information

### EMERGENCY & SAFETY

flares  
spotlight  
horn  
smoke flares  
radar reflector

and getting an instructor ticker from US Sailing. I was working on becoming a dive instructor to support myself in exotic locations, when Dave came along and offered to take me around the world on his ready-to-go cruising boat.

**OV:** You are cruising in a catamaran. Why a multihull rather than a monohull?

**D&SM:** First, we sailed halfway around the world in a well-prepared 1980 CSY 44, a solid blue-water monohull. It was a great cruising boat but required a lot of maintenance and had all the typical monohull traits.

As to why we switched in mid-circumnavigation, it was for all the normally hyped differences between the two, plus a few of our own:

- Our modern St. Francis 44 is 25 years newer than the CSY 44, requiring much less maintenance.
- The catamaran won't sink.
- Much more interior and deck space.
- Improved stability at sea and at anchor.
- Faster in all wind conditions, but especially a huge improvement in light-air sailing.
- More comfort, including better use of cockpit and main cabin space.
- Two small engines instead of one larger one, giving redundancy and much better range on one engine.
- Much improved maneuverability in tight spaces.
- Better sail and rig arrangement, especially downwind.
- The 3.5-foot draft allows us to get into tight places we would never attempt with the CSY's 5.5-foot draft.
- We finally had enough money so we could afford another \$100,000-plus investment in our "retirement home."

There are a couple of things that we particularly like that weren't obvious until we actually had owned and cruised our cat for a while. First, because the boat sails flat, we are much less fatigued at the end of a long voyage than we were on the mono. Securing for sea in normal weather conditions is much less time-consuming, as we don't have to worry about heeling. We can eat meals at the cockpit table most days without the drinks and plates sliding around.

Second, Dave still gets nauseous in rough weather, even after 20 years in the Navy. On the cat, he experiences much less of this, and can often read and work on a computer while at sea. Third, we are able to motorsail at about the same speed on the catamaran but use only half the fuel. This is partly because of the weight difference between the two boats, but also because of the improved efficiency of the single 27-hp Yanmar versus the much heavier (and older) 60-hp Perkins on the CSY. If we need to crank the speed up, we can fire up the second engine. Finally, no pole is required going downwind with the jib, Code 0 or spinnaker.

**OV:** How do you generate electricity on board? What type and capacity batteries do you have?

**D&SM:** Generating electricity on board in the tropics is really easy. We think that the “experts” and equipment salesmen make it way too hard — and expensive. We have an 8-cubic-foot refrigerator, a 4-cubic-foot freezer and an engine-driven 40-gph watermaker, but no air conditioning, installed generator or wind generator. We

almost never plug the boat in when at a marina because of the danger from lightning strikes to the grid, as well as the risk of galvanic corrosion from nearby boats and Third-World wiring. We have ample solar to manage our electrical budget, so we don't need to plug in.

We have four modern 200-watt rigid solar panels on the cockpit hardtop, clear of the boom and any other shadow producers. These were new four years ago, so they are somewhat more efficient than the older solar panels we had on our monohull. We paired the solar array up with a Morningstar TriStar-60 MPPT solar controller. Though we have been in a marina or yard for months at a time in the last few years, we have never used our brand-new Sterling shore power charger. We have a Honda 2000 portable gas generator for emergencies and those very rare days when we are without sun for more than three days in a row. We cruised for eight months in 2018 without even any alternators while we upgraded our alternator charging system.

My experience with a wind generator on my CSY for the Caribbean cruise proved to me that they are often useless

in the tropics due to light winds and the desire to anchor in protected anchorages. They usually shaded my solar panels and were noisy and unpleasant when the wind was up. They also cost almost as much as a big, much more useful solar system.

Our normal electrical usage is about 150 amp-hours (Ah) per day, and our solar setup can generate more than 200 Ah during a normal tropics day or more than 40 amps an hour midday. Our charging system has normally completed the “accept” charging by midday and the rest is just “topping up.”

My last set of batteries on the CSY were four 6-volt Rolls L16 (flooded lead-acid) batteries, for a total capacity of about 660 Ah. With careful management and maintenance, these batteries lasted about eight years. Our catamaran came with six Sonnenschein Solar Block 6-volt, 200-Ah gel cells, purchased by the previous owner in 2007. These batteries are amazing. After 13 years on the boat, they are still “resting” in the early evening at 12.95 volts. We usually get a 100 percent charge daily on them with our solar arrangement, and with 600-Ah capacity, usually only about a 15 percent

Soggy Paws anchored at Tete-  
pare in the Solo-  
mon Islands.

Sherry & Dave McCampbell



discharge. They require careful charge limiting and temperature sensing, especially in the tropics. Despite what some experts and dealers say, we now believe them to be far superior to any standard flooded lead-acid batteries in many ways, including service life. And they require no maintenance. We are expecting at least several more years of life before they may need replacement.

Our next batteries will probably be LiFePO4, but it may be a difficult cost/efficiency decision. We are watching the technology develop and have made sure any new charging equipment we add to the boat can handle lithium battery charging requirements.

**OV:** What's the most important maintenance task you perform on the boat?

**D&SM:** It's difficult to name one "most important" maintenance task. Obviously, engine maintenance is critical, but also keeping the

ocean out, the rig up and the self-steering working, and making sure we have solid refrigeration, water and electricity production equipment are high-priority maintenance items. We feel that good maintenance/repair skills, adequate tools and complete spare parts (or multiple backups, in the case of some electronic equipment) are keys to a successful and happy cruise.

**OV:** What gear do you plan to add next to *Soggy Paws*?

**D&SM:** At this point, we don't think we need much more gear. After all, we are on a catamaran, and load-carrying capacity suffers with every new piece of gear we add. We would be better offloading a couple of things like two of the four heads and half a dozen doors. We bought a pretty well-equipped quality boat and have spent half of the past three years doing important upgrades, like the new sail drive legs, efficient upright refrigerator, watermaker,

helm seat and hull extensions. The last big item on the maintenance list is to complete the new rigging installation, which we will do this year.

**OV:** What are your future voyaging plans?

**D&SM:** In March 2020, we will leave Davao, Philippines, after four years of using it as a base to explore Southeast Asia as far south as Guadalcanal, north to Luzon in the Philippines, east to Palau and west to Singapore. This year, we will cruise southwestward back to Raja Ampat and the west coast of Papua and New Guinea, and then westward along the more traditional Indonesia-to-Singapore route. After that, it will be time to prepare for a northern Indian Ocean/Red Sea crossing, heading for the Mediterranean, probably in early 2022. It looks like our planned 10-year circumnavigation will take us 20 years. There is no time to do it again to see the places we might have missed. ■

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