



Photo by Molly Mulhern

Molly's Tanzer 22 *Ripple* lies at her mooring in Rockland, Maine, with some 40 anchorages within a day's sail.

Join a 'gateway' club

Why do you belong to the yacht or sailing club that you do? Proximity? Prestige? Choice of race venues? Many of us don't really choose: The club chooses us, usually because it is near where we live, and where we want our boat.

But a new trend is emerging, one that upsets the wisdom of choosing the closest club, and this is mostly due to rapid rises in mooring and dockage fees at some of the most prestigious – and crowded – sailing harbors. It is also has because we want to craft a more pleasant cruising or racing experience, one that is less crowded, puts less strain on the budget, with perhaps a lower-key yacht-club experience. In short, the way we join together to sail or power cruise may be changing.

An increasing number of recreational mariners simply look at charts of not-so-distant shorelines and harbors and consider what places appear to offer dream cruising and racing grounds. They then park their boats at a chosen harbor for the season, or, if it proves to be a fine choice, year-round. And while that means they might miss the late-afternoon, after-work casual runs on their own boats, choosing a sailing or yacht club far away expands your horizons in many other ways. As an added benefit it could also greatly reduce your annual boat operating costs.

Hard to believe? The experiences of several new (and some veteran) members of the Rockland (Maine) Yacht Club are as interesting as their backgrounds, yet they all share the counterintuitive discovery that parking the boat far away greatly expands one's sailing and boating experience.

One couple – Don and Jody Abbot, from Freeport, Maine – spent years belonging to a nearby yacht club (Portland Yacht Club), yet found themselves leaving their club's area and heading east to cruise every summer. They realized they were spending precious vacation days just *getting to* Penobscot Bay, their intended cruising grounds. It usually took a full two to three days just getting the boat there – and another two to three getting home, usually a windward trip.

Now, as members of the Rockland Yacht Club, they keep *Snowy Owl*, their 40-foot Sabre, on a mooring in Rockland Harbor, and can be at their boat, at the gateway to their favorite cruising grounds, in just under two hours. That frees up at least four additional days for cruising instead of moving the boat. Don and Jody calculate they now spend as many as 50 nights a season on *Snowy Owl*.

Paul and Mary White lived and sailed out of the Bid-

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Photos by Molly Mulhern

Left: The Buckle Island anchorage is a favored destination. Right: The author, at right, participates in a Rockland Yacht Club race-award ceremony.

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deford Pool (Maine) Yacht Club for 25 years, each summer making the easterly passage to Penobscot Bay aboard their C&C 30 *Snowbird*. One season their venerable Atomic 4 gave up the ghost in Rockland. They decided to let the boat winter in Rockland for the installation of a new diesel, and that spring they decided to stay in Penobscot Bay for the season, letting their car gain the mileage along the coast. A chance encounter with a Rockland Yacht Club couple had introduced them to the club, which led them to years of lobster picnics, leisurely cruising and new friendships.

Another way to think about your yacht or sailing club choice is that it's not just the folks you will meet, but also the entire sailing and cruising experience the club's geography offers. Joining a club in a place far away is like joining a whole new neighborhood. Chris Mansfield, from North Carolina, had heard of the glory of sailing Penobscot Bay, and, in the summer of 2015, sailed east with some buddies in *Elysium*, his Sabre 34. Since that introduction to the cruising ground, and the camaraderie of the Rockland Yacht Club, he has never looked

back.

Instead of returning the boat to North Carolina that year (he had been a member of the Washington (N.C.) Yacht Club) he purchased a Rockland mooring, and now stores *Elysium* at a boatyard in Rockland for the winter. This new arrangement allows Chris and his wife four to five weeks of cruising on Penobscot Bay together; another four to five weeks for Chris and his sailing buddies, and Chris even fits in a week sailing with his son. That's a jam-packed 11 weeks of sailing.

Look for a club in an area that has a number of reasonable anchorages within a day's sail. A group from the Rockland Yacht Club counted such spots near them, and came up with no less than 40; that's a lot of exploring right from your home berth. Local favorites here are Pulpit Harbor, Castine, Winter Harbor and Long Cove (on Vinalhaven), Cradle Cove on Islesboro, and Warren Island, opposite the Lincolnville shore. Within a day's sail of Rockland, you'll find Jericho Bay, Blue Hill Bay, Isle au Haut and Frenchman Bay.

Some of the favored harbors in those cruising grounds are Buckle Island (off York Narrows between Jericho Bay

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and Blue Hill Bay), Frenchboro on Long Island, and Southwest Harbor on Mount Desert. Sailors willing to splice together a longer cruise will find Sorrento, on the far side of the Cadillac mountains, and Roque Island, within a day's sail from Southwest Harbor.

Powerboaters also have made Rockland and the Rockland Yacht Club their new home. Bruce and Eleanor Krause, long-time members of the Eastport Yacht Club, in Annapolis, Md., joined the Rockland club in 2011, and spent their first summer cruising the bay on two-to-four-day trips aboard their Grand Banks 36. One of their favorite cruising spots is Bucks Harbor at the western end of Eggemoggin Reach.

Randy and Cindy Picklemann had been members of the Clearwater Yacht Club, in Florida, but now are cruising uncrowded Penobscot Bay in the summer, in their 25-foot Parker *Cool Change*. The Picklemanns split their time – six months in St. George, Maine, with their boat in Rockland, and six months back in Florida, where they live aboard and cruise on their large trawler. They have made two marvelous cruising grounds available to them.

Racers as well as cruisers espouse this distant-club scheme for the same reasons. Dave Hoy, for example, who previously belonged to the Chicago Yacht Club and the Old Greenwich (Conn.) Yacht Club, raced his Catalina 27 for 15 years in Rockland on the Tuesday night series, lured by the reasonable membership fee and the regular racing venue. Old age had him retire his boat, but he remains a valued and loved club member.

Joan Wright and Howard Robbins joined the Rockland club after having retired from Connecticut, where they were members of the Halloween Yacht Club, and the Breakwater Irregulars, a “paper club” with a terrific racing schedule. Racers in the past, they now mostly cruise on their Pearson 35 *Sage*.

Look for a gateway club like the

Rockland Yacht Club, where there is no such thing as “being sponsored” at the club, and members of all stripes are welcomed. My choice of clubs was traditional: proximity. Rockland is nearby my home, so it made sense. But, as I dug into the issues, it became the easiest choice, too. The harbormaster told me it would be no problem to lay in a new mooring for my boat. I was a single mom, working hard to afford the boat, and the membership was affordable. New to racing, the Tuesday night series was welcoming, and the club began a cruising-only class so newbies like me – intimidated by the thought of flying a spinnaker on my Tanzer – could race and still get some race swag. I made that choice of clubs back in 2007, and while the membership fee is slightly higher now, due to expanded services, my racing and cruising experience has been greatly enhanced by my club membership.

So why do you belong to the yacht club you do? While Don and Jody Abbott first joined the club for access to

Penobscot Bay, it has been the people connections that have been rewarding. As Don says, “We have met many tremendous people and sailors through the club. It has afforded Jody and me the opportunities to sail offshore to the BVI, and sail from the Dominican Republic to Florida on RYC friends’ boats. We’re chartering in the BVI this winter with other friends met through RYC.” So what about you, is it time to expand your cruising horizons and join a gateway club? If it is, then consider joining a yacht club near the cruising grounds that excite you – the ones you wish to explore in the years to come.

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