



## Four-year adventure takes N40 from Alaska to Maine and nearly back

BY ERIC BESCOBY

**S**prezzatura is a word from 15<sup>th</sup> century Italy that among many connotations can mean: “Doing something extremely well without showing that it took any effort at all.” That seems to be at the core of the Nordhavn brand and a particularly good name for a small-but-mighty Nordhavn 40. It also characterizes my two-year journey from Alaska to Maine, sometimes called The Big U. As a fellow Nordhavn owner commented, I quietly accomplished it without a lot of fanfare, a blog, or a YouTube channel.

My family spent every summer on Lake Havasu, Arizona, where we learned to water ski, fish, and drive the family boat. We eventually got a 14-foot Hobie Cat and learned to sail. After college, I raced Hobie’s for about 15 years and dreamed of cruising on a sail boat. A forty-year career in manufacturing companies, a 30-year marriage and three children delayed the dream. Then I found out about Nordhavns in 2015, which led to the purchase N4029 in 2016 in Seattle. I took it to Vancouver Island for a winter of learning and boat projects.

How did I decide to do The Big U? I didn’t really have a plan. Alaska was in the neighborhood so I decided to head north. The rest of the trip, all the way to Maine, followed one segment at a time.

Alaska-Mexico-Panama-Bahamas-Intercoastal Waterway-Maine.

### Alaska and a Bear Sighting

With my limited cruising experience — as in, none — and limited time learning to operate the rechristened Sprezzatura, I thought it best to get some help. I met Captain Mike in Anacortes and we agreed on him joining me and we set a date. We departed Anacortes fully fueled and provisioned for the cruise to Ketchikan where Mike was to fly home.

It was an easy cruise to Bedwell Harbor to clear Canadian Customs/Immigration and then on to Silva Bay. We only cruised during the day to avoid logs, kelp, and traps. Captain Mike was a great teacher.

### The Big U Learning Curves

1. Navigation — Plan a safe route, keep your head up, look around and pay attention!
2. Radar operation — Learn to love your radar. Nothing else is nearly as accurate.
3. Anchoring — It’s a 3D puzzle every time.
4. Fishing — To catch fish you have to go fishing. Experience matters.

*Continued*



# Sprezzatura and the Big





The author with passport and paperwork in Jamaica



Towing Brown Eyed Girl 110 nautical miles to San Jose del Cabo



Hadley's Harbor, near Woods Hole, Mass, with N46 Hanuman, September 2019

After Ketchikan, my first stop was Wrangell, then on to Petersburg, separated by Wrangell Narrows, a tricky channel where understanding tides and currents is important but not as difficult as guide books warn.

I had many great times in Warm Springs Cove on Baranof Island. There is a state dock to moor at and part-year residents have piped cold and hot spring water into three nice bath houses with great views of the bay and cascading water.

Continuing my journey, I headed to Juneau, then Skagway, Hoonah, Gustavus, Glacier Bay, Elfin Cove, Hoonah, Juneau again, Tracy Arm glacier, Warm Springs Cove, Sitka, Angoon, and Juneau again. All in about three weeks. Whew!

I had my children on the boat for a few weeks, then friends for most of the rest. The highlight was my son and I witnessing 11 humpback whales 'bubble feeding' in the inlet to Angoon for 20 minutes.

I headed south in Alaska and it was still raining. Then I got to Canada. A few days later the sun came out and I was dressed in shorts and t-shirts.

### **Mexico is Always Sunny**

The passage out the Strait of Juan de Fuca and south along the Pacific Coast to San Diego was a bit of a worry. Like a lot of trawler cruising, where I'm looking for zero wind, the weather window is the key. I had become comfortable using PredictWind Offshore but I hired a "weather router" for the Pacific. For the most part the weather was okay and it was an easy cruise down-wind, down-swell with both active hydraulic and paravane stabilizers.

A storm threatened to catch us near Monterey, California, so we stopped to wait it out. A new crew traveled to Monterey and we had two days and nights of easy cruising to get to Los Angeles. I traveled solo to San Diego for October where I prepped and stocked for the journey to Mexico with San Diego Yacht Club Organized Cruising Under-power Baja Rally (CUBAR).

Crew Sam Landsman arrived on November 6. We departed first thing on November 7, and checked into Mexico in Ensenada later that day.

The CUBAR does a great job of coordinating fuel stops for the boats that need it — not the Nordhavn's — and then there's the safety in numbers aspect to like.

The coast line from Magdalena Bay to Cabo San Lucas has no place to anchor for a night so it's a one-night, non-stop voyage. We left at sunrise and started the journey, planning to arrive in San Jose Del Cabo around noon the next day.

Mid-afternoon the radio came alive with news that the smallest boat in the group — Brown Eyed Girl, a Skipjack 28 — had a broken stern drive and was limping along on a 20 hp trolling motor. There was a lot of discussion about how much gasoline they needed for their outboard and how to get it transferred to them.

About 7 p.m., while Sam was trying to get some sleep, I was stewing at the helm so I radioed Brown Eyed Girl and told them we were turning around, coming back to tow them, and they agreed it was best. Sam plotted the course back to their position and we started on the 2-hour run back.

I had 100 feet of one-inch braided line as a "just in case" tow line for my boat and also had four freight lifting straps. We connected the one-inch rope to the lifting straps, and tied on a white fender ball.

We slogged along in the dark until we got a radar signal on Brown Eyed Girl. Once we reached them, we slowed and Sam tossed the ball off the stern and I made a circle around the boat like I was getting the ski rope handle to a skier at Lake Havasu. They easily picked up the line and away we went.

We got underway about 10 p.m. and cruised at five to six knots for 110 nautical miles, arriving in San Jose del Cabo marina at 4:45 p.m. the next day. The 30 plus boats in the CUBAR greeted us with a horn blowing salute. We were treated to

dinner, then we were dragged to Los Cabos for a fun night. (I think).

I needed to make a decision about a location for the hurricane season, which extends from June 1 to November 1, so I explored the Mexico Pacific Coast as far south as Barra de Navidad. I concluded that Barra and Puerto Vallarta areas were too hot, too humid, and too buggy for me, so I headed back to La Paz for the Summer.

During the many hours of solo living in La Paz I made the Big Decision: I'm going down to the Panama Canal.

A new crew member flew to Barra de Navidad and we started working our way down the coast, staying at a different cove each night.

### The Stops Along the Way

1. Manzanillo: It's a busy city with cruise ship terminal and a Walmart.
2. Ixtapa/Zihuantanejo: Combination of Cabo San Lucas and a cute old town.
3. Acapulco: The cliff divers are still performing a great lunch-time show.
4. Huatulco: My favorite coastal town in Mexico.
5. Chiapas: The exit port. Just okay place.

The Tehuantepec is the BIG weather consideration heading south from Mexico. It's kind of a "red light, green light" situation. Everyone watches the forecasts and when it's not blowing, green light! It was like crossing a smooth lake to Costa Rica.

### Slipping Through the Panama Canal

Eventually we got to Playas Coco, where the Costa Rica check-in process takes place for most of two days.

We kept moving to Quepos, Costa Rica, a sport fishing Mecca and home to Manuel Antonio National Park, a beautiful jungle on a beautiful beach lined coast.

The crew flew to Colombia to meet family and I enjoyed easy solo cruising to Panama with no overnight passages.

After a few weeks in the US and 10 days hauled out at a ship yard, I was ready to make the trip through the Panama Canal. There are many articles and YouTube videos about the process of getting ready and transiting the Canal. My advice: hire an agent and get friends and family as line handlers.

Our required advisor came aboard at 6:30 a.m. and then it was a pleasant 12-hour cruise from the Pacific Ocean to the Atlantic Ocean.

### Some Observations About the Passage

1. The line handling is best done by experienced boaters with good strength.
2. The quantity and variety of commercial ship traffic is astounding.
3. Besides the up and down locks, which are pretty easy really, it's a scenic all-day lake cruise.
4. It was a long day. We docked at Shelter Bay Marina on the Atlantic side at 6:30 p.m.
5. Lowering down to the Atlantic Ocean is both visually fun and also kind of a spine-tingling experience of passing from one ocean to another.

### Now Onward to the Bahamas

I had heard a lot about the Panamanian San Blas Islands, so explored there for a few weeks, then decided against going to Columbia and the ABC Islands for various reasons. Instead, I decided to explore the Caribbean.

I departed Bocas del Toro, Panama, with a new crew and a good weather window supposedly. Compared to what? It was a four-day, three-night beat-down across the notorious Western Caribbean to Jamaica, where we arrived exhausted.



Panama Canal, last lock to Caribbean, March 2019. From left, Carey Bescoby Anderson, Jon Cristy, Dylan Vipond, and Sam Landsman



Eric in New York Harbor



Houses in Cape May, New Jersey, July 4, 2019

We rested and toured a few days. It was not one of my favorite stops and we had another weather window 2 days later so we took off for the Bahamas.

The Bahamas was wonderful! Easy check-in and out, friendly people, the most beautiful water, great weather, great anchorages, and beautiful beaches. But the food is almost all shipped in so don't count on good fruits and vegetables, and the prices are jaw dropping. It's very shallow. Even with my five-foot draft there were many nervous moments. I once anchored with one foot under keel for a few days. At least there was zero tide change!

My main take-away from the Bahamas? Very nice but not as good as Mexico and the Sea of Cortez.

**Now Onward to Maine**

Did a crew change in Nassau and then had a calm overnight passage to Florida. Crossing the Gulf Stream could not have been easier. We entered Port Canaveral with four cruise ships in the early morning and docked for a few days. And, of course, made a Costco run.

I departed solo and headed for a rendezvous with N68 Floating Stones in Savannah. We then cruised to Charleston and toured land for a few days. This is a city I could live in!

I traveled mostly in the Intercoastal Waterway and that's a whole 'nother experience. Like a narrow, shallow river. Very active driving and each day left me physically exhausted as I was standing, steering and trying to avoid grounding.

The US east coast presented an easy rhythm; a day of cruising, a day or two of city exploration and then moving on. At some point I realized I could get to Maine by August and then decide what to do from there.

So, I cruised up the coasts of Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, District of Columbia, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts and reached Maine on August 16, 2019, just more than two years from when I left Anacortes, Washington for Alaska.

I realized there were areas I could explore for years but it was really interesting to see the differences in history, geology, architecture, food, people and cruising grounds back-to-back-to back. I generally went to history museums in most cities and was struck by how much The American Revolution, Slavery and The Civil War shaped — in different ways — the states from Florida to Maine.

And, how distant, literally and figuratively, are the ends of The Big U.

I contemplated the "Reverse Viking Route" to the Mediterranean, but ultimately decided against it. My heart was still in the Sea of Cortez, lured by the warm weather and water, so I headed back to Florida then cruised to Bimini with N68 Floating Stones in March.

And then, COVID hit, which I "might" have contracted in Ft. Lauderdale.

My goal became getting back through the Panama Canal and then deal with the Covid situations up the coast of the Pacific. I fueled and stocked for a possible non-stop run to La Paz, Mexico.

A Covid-related crew delay in Grand Cayman and a 2-month quarantine/ cruising shut-down in Bocas Del Toro, Panama, put the kibosh on the plan to get through the Canal so I hauled out at Shelter Bay Marina, shrink wrapped the boat and journeyed to the US for the Covid summer. I got back to Panama in October 2020 and then to Mexico by January of 2021. It was three-quarters of The Big U in reverse. **N**

**SPREZZATURA**  
*Adventure*  
**BY THE NUMBERS**



**DESTINATIONS**

**Anacortes — Alaska —  
Sea of Cortez — Panama  
— Jamaica — Bahamas —  
Florida — Maine**



**DATES**

**May 2017 to August 2019**



**DISTANCE**

**8,950 nautical miles**



**DIESEL CONSUMED**

**5,890 gallons**



**NUMBER OF FAMILY AND  
CREW MEMBERS**

**19**



**STATES VISITED**

**15**



**COUNTRIES VISITED**

**10**