

# WEEKLY

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## Islands in the Sun LOOKING FOR LIGHT ON THE SALISH SEA

Story and photo by John D'Onofrio · Wednesday, December 21, 2011



With the Solstice approaching, I found myself counting the days until the darkness was once again in retreat.

A little quality time with what daylight remained seemed to be just the ticket—an opportunity to get out from under roofs and trees, a chance to surround myself with open space, to contemplate the sky.

Luckily, my old friend Lance Ekhart, an Anacortes-based photographer and all-around *bon vivant*, was of a like mind. And Lance had a boat.

So it was that we found ourselves motoring out of the Skyview Marina in Anacortes on *Elenoa*, a 36-foot sailboat, in the pale light of sunrise toward the northern San Juans, where the sky is all over the place.

The early morning hustle and bustle of Anacortes receded behind us, lights moving frenetically across the still-darkened hills—everybody but us going to work. We were going to sea.

As we slid past Cypress Island, the overcast began to thin and the sun fingered its way through the clouds, illuminating the madrones along the shore. Dolphins danced around *Elenoa*, their sleek backs catching the sun. After a solid week of wind and rain, we'd hit the jackpot. A sea arch graced a rocky islet off Cypress and we circled it to have a better look. Buffleheads, those marvelous free spirits of the bird world, played Mahjong in the shadows. The sweet light was ebullient on aquamarine water and orange madrones covered in crimson berries. The water sparkled like Elizabeth Taylor's jewelry. Just what the doctor ordered.

We nosed into Rolfe Cove on Matia Island and set off in the dinghy toward shore. Once there, we headed up the trail through the woods, turning off the main path and passing through what Lance calls the "portal"—a dense gateway of trees—and out onto a grassy headland fully exposed to the early afternoon sun.

Ah, bliss! I flopped out in the grass on my back and slipped into a sun-pixilated dream, waking to a moment of *satori*, not knowing where I was, delicious amnesia. Without question, I need to spend more time lying in the sun.

We climbed down to the water's edge to examine the sculpted sandstone at the tide line, but already the sun was excusing itself on the western horizon. We hiked back in the gathering gloom to the dinghy and aimed it towards the light on *Elenoa*'s mast.

In the morning, we set sail for Sucia Island. The coast range was magnificent, covered in new snow, rising like a dream on the blue horizon. Mt. Baker looked close enough to touch. On a rocky point, an ancient-looking sea lion gave us the evil eye, then yawned and returned to the important work of basking in the sun.

We tied up to the dock at Fossil Cove and headed up the trail through glittering madrone forest. Birdsong filled the air. After climbing up Wiggins Head, a rocky finger extending into the sea, we maneuvered our way down the sandstone cliffs to the water's edge and watched the sun retreat toward the western horizon, the Cascades burnished in purple and magenta.

Bathed in the sweet light, we lingered for a while, until the moon rose over the indigo Salish Sea.