

A Guide for a Fun Cruise to the Delta

Whether you have a 27 or 50 footer, are cruising by yourself or with a family including children; the following guide will give you the basics for a successful cruise to Fig Island on Potato Slough off the San Joaquin River, 1 mile East of Green buoy "51". Why Fig Island? This location, also known as Bedroom One, is the site for the RYC July 4th Cruisers Celebration.

Navigation: Use Suisun Bay Chart 18656 and Sacramento and San Joaquin Rivers Chart 18661. If you have a chart plotter, create a route with waypoints to Potato Slough and let the autopilot do the work. The Delta does have a lot of shallow areas, but the bottom is soft mud, i.e., you may suffer some embarrassment but no hull damage when running aground. Go slow, 4 knots, in the shallows. If you run aground and have a fin keel, do a quick 180 turn and go out. If you have a full keel, try to back out. Watch your wake when nearing other boats.

Route Plan (RYC start point): If you leave on an incoming flood tide, you can cover the approximately 48 tide shortened miles in one day. If you average 6 knots, you will arrive with plenty of time to anchor and relax. If you want to take two days to get to the Delta, overnight at the Pittsburg Marina and enjoy a great Mexican dinner at the Mecca restaurant. Follow the San Joaquin River towards Venice Island. If you're adventurous, take False River around Franks Tract.

Refrigeration and Ice Box: The air temperature will be in the 90's. Just because your boat has refrigeration doesn't mean that you can have it on for more than a couple of days before it drains your batteries. Unless you have at least 200 watts in solar panels and batteries with 400 amp hours, you may need to charge your batteries. If you plan to charge your batteries via your engine's alternator, it must supply at least 50 amps continuously via a smart or multi-stepped voltage regulator; and charge for 1 hour in the morning and 1 hour before dinner. BUT sailors (like me) have cruised the Delta using just our ice boxes and a cooler. Deep freeze your meat beforehand. Place blocks of ice at the bottom of your ice box and store your meat with the items that will thaw first on top. Use a cooler to store packs of ice and the beverages you will consume in a couple of days. You can buy block and cube ice at Korth's Pirates Lair. If you are in a 27 footer, pull up anchor and motor there, it's only a couple of miles away. If you have an inflatable with at least a 6 hp outboard, you can go there with your cooler.

Power: Pay attention to your batteries state of charge. In a 12 volt system 12.7 v. is 100%, 12.42 v. is 80%, 12.2 v. is 60%, and 12.06 is 50%. After running your engine your system may show 13.2 volts. This is a surface charge. Check your voltmeter again after 30 minutes for an accurate reading. NEVER let your batteries go below 50% as damage to the cells may occur. Be careful of your usage of lights, etc., as they use more power than you think.

Food and Beverages: You will likely eat less food and drink more beverages. If refrigeration or space is an issue, use more canned or boxed food that requires no refrigeration. Have spaghetti, rice, cereal, salami, use powdered milk. Food such as bread, fruit and vegetables may be affected by the heat. Bring canned or boxed beverages and store them low in the boat. If you BBQ, use one that's designed for marine use and can be mounted to your stern rail. If you anchor out or tie up with the bow facing west, the wind will carry smoke away from your cockpit.

Cleaning Up: Take your bath in the Delta and hang your towel on your lifeline to dry (bring clothespins). Though the Delta water has algae and is not crystal clear, it is very clean. You can use Delta water to wash and rinse your dinnerware; let them dry in the sunlight and the UV will sterilize them. You will save a lot of water.

Delta Environment: Not only will you need to bring a good sunscreen lotion, you absolutely have to have an awning to create shade over your cockpit. This could be something as simple as a tarp suspended over your boom by bamboo poles and line. Mosquitos may come out at dusk. It is a good plan to be inside your boat at sundown. Obtain inexpensive netting at a fabric store and tape it over open hatches. Bring insect repellent that contains DEET. There have been a few cases of West Nile in the Delta. You will only need warm clothes during your ride home. Though it can get into the 100's during the day, the Delta breeze usually brings the temperature into the 70's at night.

Water and Waste: You can obtain potable water and use the pump out at Korth's Pirates Lair or Willow Berm Marina. The Septic Brothers will come to your boat and pump it out for a fee, call 209-329-0728.

Marinas - Facilities: Willow Berm Marina has gas and diesel. Korth's Pirates Lair only sells gas but has a restaurant, free Wi-Fi, gift shop, launch ramp, public parking, showers and ice. Delta Shores Resort & Marina sells propane and has a small store. All are located on the Mokelumne River between 2 to 3 miles from Fig Island. If you plan to pick up guests, have them meet you at Korth's.

Anchoring and Ground Tackle: You can either anchor out or drop a stern anchor then tie your bow line to a tree. The latter technique is for the more experienced who plan on staying awhile. The Delta has a mud bottom that is occasionally covered by dead weeds or Egeria Densa, aquarium grass. Anchoring can be tricky. Take your time when setting your anchor so it can penetrate through any grass. Use a good quality anchor, e.g., Fortress (my preference), Bruce, etc. Use the recommended length of chain or more with your rope rode. You will be anchoring in 20 feet or less, i.e., 150 feet of rode is safe.

Fun on the Water: Have an easy way to board your boat from the water. A walk-thru transom is best. If you get a portable boat ladder, be sure to have everyone try it before you leave. Bring water toys, e.g., floats, super soakers, etc. Bring paperback books and music.

Dinghy: You will need an inflatable to get around and visit other cruisers. I highly recommend an outboard; even a small one is better than rowing. Get the biggest inflatable with the most powerful outboard that you can transport and afford. An inflatable that can plane with 4 people and luggage will make you VERY happy. A good dinghy setup will quickly take you and crew to nearby restaurants, stores, hot showers, and marinas.

Pets: If this is your first trip, I do not recommend bringing your pet. Wait until you get a feel for what Delta living is like.

This guide is about a cruise to Potato Slough's Fig Island, aka "Bedroom One," because it has all the attributes of a good anchorage. Because of this picturesque area's layout and location, ski boats seldom speed thru, a reliable Delta breeze from the west blows away BBQ smoke and cools down the boat in the late afternoon, the island has trees from which to bow tie to, it is close to marinas and restaurants, and close to the San Joaquin River.

Harley Gee

Cruising the Delta since 1979

