

Boats 'N Bridges

Potter Yachters Sailing Bridges Tour

By Bud Kerner and Jan Vick Photos by Bud Kerner

There are many bridges crossing the rivers and sloughs of the Delta. Some cross major highways like Route 12 or 160; others span roads that are less frequently traveled. Some bridges raise their decks, while others swing to let boat traffic pass. And then there are the fixed bridges that



Rio Vista Bridge

can only be navigated with small boats.

Every fall the Potter Yachters, a loosely formed sailing club, spends two days sailing the Delta. Their sail always starts in Rio Vista and ventures either south down the Sacramento River to Three Mile Slough Bridge, or north under the Rio Vista Bridge to towns and bridges upriver. The boats are small, ranging in size from 14 feet to 21 feet. They



Isleton Bridge

are, however, sailboats with masts as high as 20 feet. This requires that all bridges on the route be able to open. If there is an object to the sailing trip, it is to go under as many bridges as possible in two days.



Georgiana Bridge

On the first day of the tour, Potter Yachters encounter several bridges following the northern route. The first bridge on the Delta and the first bridge to



Three Mile Slough Bridge

navigate is the Helen Madere lift bridge, known locally as the Rio Vista bridge, built in 1944.

Upriver on the Sacramento River from Rio Vista is the town of Isleton. North of Isleton is a bascule bridge built in 1923 and reconstructed in 1953. This interesting bridge has heavy concrete weights on either end that descend as the bridge deck goes up.

The next community on the Sacramento is Ryde. The Ryde Hotel, which is on the river, has a guest dock and on weekends offers a very nice buffet. During the week there is a full service bar to enjoy. Many years ago the hotel was very popular and had a somewhat scandalous reputation.

Continuing upriver, the next town encountered is Walnut Grove. This river town boasts two bridges within the town limits. The "Sailing Bridges Tour" turns right onto Georgiana Slough just prior to town. The Georgiana Slough Swing Bridge is very close to the junction with the river and opens sideways without raising to let river traffic through. Georgiana Slough winds back south through the Delta and like many of the sloughs there is abundant wildlife and vegetation. The next bridge, and the last for the first day, is the Tyler Island swing bridge, an old bridge built in 1942 that has very little traffic. The Oxbow Marina, a short distance from the Tyler Island Bridge, is a nice place to stay overnight.

On the morning of the second day, continue down Georgiana Slough to the Mokelumne River. Here, there is another bridge that crosses Highway 12, the Mokelumne River Bridge, built in 1942 and rehabilitated in 1978 and more recently in 2015. This swing bridge marks the line between Sacramento and San Joaquin Counties.

Follow the Mokelumne River as it empties into the San Joaquin River and then follow the San Joaquin towards the ocean. On the right is the Delta Loop, where many resorts and restaurants can be found. Past the Loop, where the river makes a turn to the left, leave the San Joaquin river and turn north onto Three Mile Slough heading towards the Sacramento River. Three Mile Slough Lift Bridge is the last bridge to navigate before the end of the sailing cruise. This bridge was built in 1949 and just recently painted and re-decked in 2015-16. Head north for just under three miles back to the Rio Vista Delta Marina and the city launch ramp.

This "Sailing Bridges Tour" includes six Delta bridges, but there are many more to explore. The bridges on the main shipping lanes are operational 24 hours a day year round. The slough bridges like Tyler Island or Steamboat Slough operate from May to October. To get under one of these bridges when they are not manned, call the Rio Vista Bridge and request an opening. Allow a three hour lead time. Cruising the Delta, whether in a sailboat or a power boat, offers a wide variety of vistas, wildlife, and of course bridges.

This year's sail reverses the route described above, so the first bridge encountered is the 3 Mile Slough Bridge. Come to the Rio Vista launch ramp on Saturday morning October 22 at 10:00 a.m. and watch the boats launch on this fun tour.