CROSSING THE QUILLAYUTTE RIVER BAR

The bar is the area where the deep waters of the Pacific Ocean meet with the shallower waters near the mouth of the Quillayute River. Crossing the bar can be dangerous, and boaters must make sure the bar is safe prior to crossing. This pamphlet provides you with some common-sense knowledge about crossing the bar as well as resources you should check before you go.

Keep in mind, most accidents and deaths that occur on coastal bars are from capsizing, due mainly to improper loading and/or overloading a boat. When improperly loaded, boats are less stable and sit lower in the water, which can allow seas to break over and into the vessel.

Boats are more likely to capsize when crossing the bar from the ocean because the seas are on the stern side, and the boat may have less control over the vessel.

If you are caught on a rough bar running in from the ocean:

- Make sure everyone aboard is wearing a personal flotation device.
- Keep the boat square before the seas.
- Keep the boat on the back of the swell. Ride the swell, and stay clear of the following wave.
- Avoid sudden weight shifts from passengers or gear moving around in the boat. If possible, have passengers lie down as near the centerline of the boat as possible.
- Do not allow the waves to catch your boat on the side (beam). This condition is called broaching and can easily result in capsizing.

The U.S. Coast Guard may close coastal bars to recreational boats when conditions are hazardous. Failure to comply with the closure may result in voyage termination and civil and/or criminal penalties. Regulations are enforced by U.S. Coast Guard boarding teams.

TIDES & CURRENTS

Tides are the vertical rise and fall of the water, and tidal current is the horizontal flow of the water. Tidal changes occur roughly four times each day in the Pacific Northwest. Tidal movement toward the shore or upstream is the flood current. Movement away from the shore or downstream is the ebb current. The period between the two is known as slack water. Tidal currents may gain tremendous velocity, particularly when the ebb current is strengthened by river runoff.

The best time to cross the bar is during slack water or runoff.

REGULATED NAVIGATION AREA

The Coast Guard has established a regulated navigation area in the area surrounding and on the Grays Harbor bar. When the amber lights on this sign are flashing, the Coast Guard has placed a restriction on recreational and uninspected passenger vessels crossing the bar. The Coast Guard has the authority to restrict all recreational and uninspected passenger vessels from crossing the bar when hazardous conditions exist. Failing to comply with posted bar restrictions may result in a maximum civil penalty of $25,000. (43 U.S.C. 132, 133, 134)

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For small craft. Always know the stage of the tide before you cross the bar.

QUILLAYUTTE BAR HAZARDS

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A. **Navigable channel.** The navigable channel in the river is very narrow—approximately 60 yards wide at its widest point and follows closely along the south jetty. During the summer, the northern edge of the channel is marked by two seasonal aids to navigation—green numbers 5 and 7—due to a steep shelf of sand shoaling, covered by just a foot or two of water.

B. **Rock dike ruins.** These rocks are almost always covered by all but the lowest tides yet still provide the entrance with some shelter from north swells. However, winds and seas from the north, coupled with a high tide, may create a strong surge across the channel. In extreme conditions, this surge can produce rough water and even surf-like conditions inside the river.

C. **James Island.** With swells out of the west or north, James Island provides protection to the channel entrance. When the wind or seas are out of the south or southwest, the island’s sheer cliffs will reflect wave energy back into the oncoming swell, causing very confused and choppy seas.

D. **Wash rock.** A large wash rock is located next to James Island and immediately outside the north side of the entrance. This rock is nearly always covered by breaking waves and can provide a small lee (protected from the wind) area once inside the river. Use extreme caution when entering in calm conditions to maintain a safe distance from the rocks.

E. **First beach.** The area between the red buoy line and the beach, depending on swell size and direction, can break well into the navigable channel. Breaking waves become more prevalent as the depth decreases toward shore.

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**Warning:** As a vessel operator, you are responsible for the safe navigation of your vessel. The Coast Guard and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) provide information to assist mariners in safe navigation. The information is updated every four hours or when local bar conditions and/or restrictions change. This information reflects conditions at the time the bar was observed and may not reflect the most current conditions. Bar conditions can change without notice. The information in this publication should NOT be used as the sole source of information when making a decision to cross the bar. Mariners are advised to use all means available to safely evaluate bar conditions and risk before crossing the bar.

**Soundings in fathoms**

**Not for navigation**

**Warning:** For navigation conditions, listen to the local broadcast on 1610 AM.