



**All in a Day's Work.** Golden Gate Ferry deckhand Derrick O'Keefe helps keep seagulls off the endangered species list during a recent voyage.

# Ferry Tale

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By Rosemary Regello

**A**t the turn of the-century, a literary critic for the *Atlantic Monthly* left Sausalito one day on a ferry bound for San Francisco. Fog enveloped the bay that morning, which meant visibility was zip. Most vessels back then relied on the captain's keen eyesight and a very loud horn to avoid a deadly collision.

On this occasion, those rudimentary methods failed.

"The fog seemed to break away as though split by a wedge, and the bow of a steamboat

emerged, trailing fog wreaths on each side like seaweed on the snout of Leviathan. I could see the pilothouse and a white-bearded man leaning partly out of it, on his elbows... As he leaned there, he ran a calm and speculative eye over us, as though to determine the precise point of collision, and took no notice whatever when our pilot, white with rage, shouted "Now, you've done it."

And so began *The Sea Wolf*, one of Jack London's great novels.

Although ferries face little danger nowadays of the scenario just described, sea rescues are not as uncommon as one might think.

The Golden Gate Ferry, which runs between San Francisco and Marin County, has plucked two people out of the drink in just the past couple years, including a naked female swimmer in the water off Tiburon on May 7th.

The passenger who spotted her is said to have yelled "Man, overboard," causing the captain to spin the vessel around and the deckhands to commence a rescue operation. The woman was taken by ambulance to S.F. General Hospital (under a veil of mystery as to how she got stranded), and treated for hypothermia.

My recent trip to Sausalito and back wasn't quite so lively. Sometimes it's just nice to get offshore for awhile, and the municipally operated Golden Gate Transit agency offers city dwellers the chance to escape the entire North American continent for about \$7 one way. You might think of it as the mariner's equivalent of finally seeing the forest for the trees.

As I stared out from the rail of the old *Sonoma*, the day was bright

*continued*

and clear, not nearly as breezy as I expected. On deck were some European tourists posing for photos and a deckhand named Derrick splitting a chocolate donut with the gulls. Below deck, a tour group was eating up a guide's fascinating lore about the bay and its landmarks. A bartender named Fred stood by at the ready with liquor and snacks, while upstairs Vessel Master Greg Paxton navigated the 30-minute trip without incident.

Ferry travel on the Bay dates back to 1850, when car and passenger vessels shuttled between San Francisco and Oakland. In 1868, some local businessmen formed the Sausalito Land and Ferry Company and created a northern passage to Marin County. Ferry service flourished therein until 1937, when the Golden Gate Bridge opened. At that point, the bay's nautical fortunes took a nosedive and the ferries retired to drydock in 1941.

Fortunately for commuters, a member of the Golden Gate Transit District Board, Stephan C. Leonoudakis, lobbied in the late 1960's to resurrect the service. He prevailed, and on August 15, 1970, the first twin-engine, diesel-powered vessel plied the waters again, with a capacity to transport 575 passengers



at a speed of 15 knots (17 miles per hour.) It was a sterling example of the axiom "If you build it, they will come." The wildly popular *Golden Gate* made the roundtrip from Marin County for the next 35 years, ferrying more than 20 million passengers before being replaced by a newer vessel.

Golden Gate Transit established service at its second hub in Larkspur in 1976. Because it entailed a much longer trip from the city, the district got practical in 1998 and invested in a two-deck, lightweight catamaran that moved across the water in the manner of a space age hover craft. With its two "skis" and four diesel engines, the *Del Norte* cut travel time from 45 minutes to 30 minutes.

On August 24, 2001, the San Francisco Ferry Terminal was rededicated in honor of



**Vessel Master Enid Marcus.** The Golden Gate Ferry service employs women in the nontraditional occupations of boat pilot and deckhand. The current payroll includes three in each category, according to public information officer Mary Currie, who also notes that the Inland Boatmen's Union is headed by a woman.

Stephan Leonoudakis, who championed ferry service throughout his 40-year tenure on the transit district board.

The roundtrip from either Sausalito or Larkspur takes about an hour, with a 5-minute stop in port. For a more genuine sailing experience, you might opt for the slower vessel, the *Sonoma*, as I did.

In Sausalito, the ferry puts you off right in the center of the historic port town. The Larkspur excursion on the catamaran takes you past San

Quentin Prison, however, which is worth a peak. The vessel docks near a set of retail outlets and restaurants.

In San Francisco, the Golden Gate Ferry terminal is located behind the newly renovated Ferry Building - an excursion in itself. For info about departures and rates, visit [goldengate.org](http://goldengate.org).

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