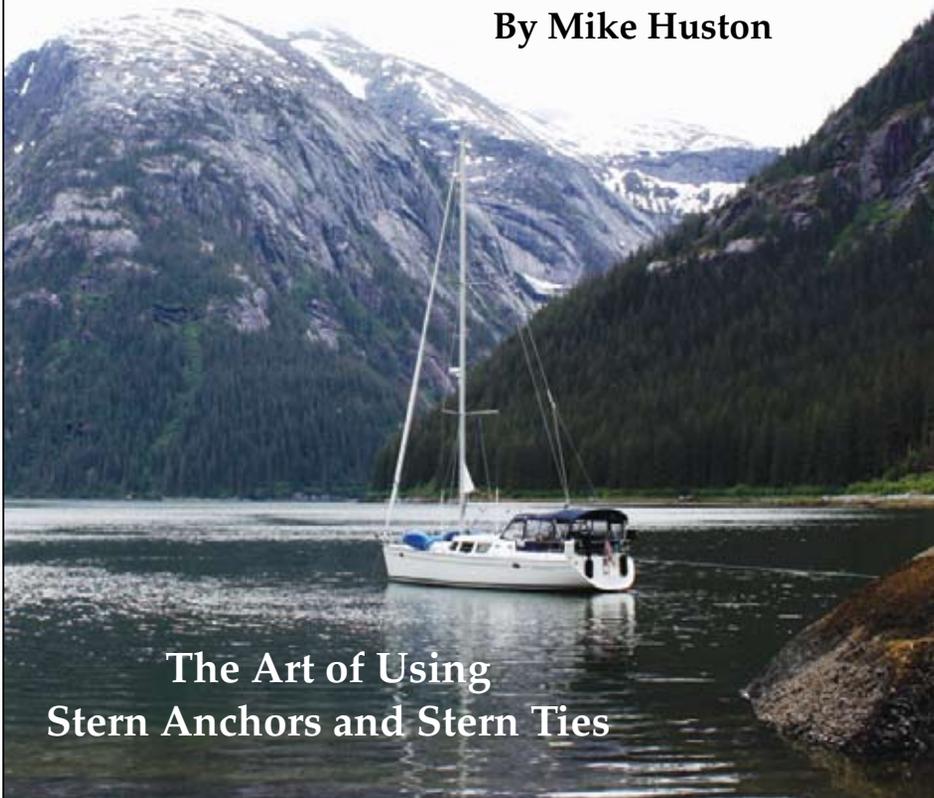


Enhanced Anchoring

By Mike Huston



The Art of Using Stern Anchors and Stern Ties

It's a beautiful summer day and you are heading into one of your favorite anchorages. This anchorage is a popular, but small cove at one of this area's many state parks. However, you're concerned because this harbor has only a few buoys, a small dock and room for only one or two other boats to swing on the hook. As you turn the corner your heart sinks; everything is taken. What do you do?

Most people turn around and leave. But with a little creative thinking there is usually another option - anchoring with a stern tie. Most harbors have places where a boat can safely anchor if it does not swing. This is where stern

ties or stern anchors come into play.

Figure 1 shows why a stern tie (or anchor) allows us to fit our boats into a small space. Most boats at anchor need a circle with a diameter of around 300 feet to swing. But a boat secured at the stern needs much less space. Because it is secured between two points it can move 10 to 15 feet fore and aft (as the tide goes in and out) and about one boat length to either side when pushed by wind or current. As you can see the difference is quite noticeable.

Anchoring on a sloped bottom is another situation where securing with a stern tie helps. The issue here is not swing room, but holding power. If a

"Illuminé" with a stern tie in spectacular Ford's Terror, a very steep and narrow fjord, 60 miles southeast of Juneau in Alaska's Inside Passage.

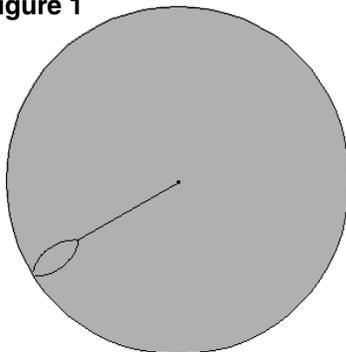
boat is allowed to swing around and pull the anchor away from shore the holding power is greatly diminished. Therefore, the stern tie is used to keep the boat in a position where it pulls the anchor up hill. This allows the anchor to dig in more (see Figure 2).

Stern Tying – The basic equipment needed is pretty simple – a few hundred feet of line. Having this line on a spool will make it easier to handle and stow. In fact, most serious cruisers have a spool mounted on their stern. On our boat we store the spool in a locker but it can easily be mounted in our transom walk-through with a piece of plastic pipe (see picture). It is a good idea to use colorful floating line as it helps other boaters see it. We also carry an orange float that we attach to the middle of the line if we are in a area where cross traffic might be an issue.

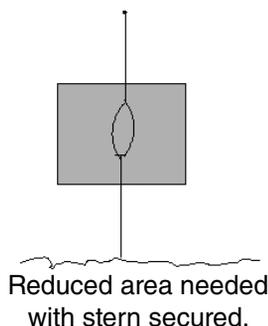
So now that we have the equipment in place let's look at the procedure. First, check the tide tables and see how much water you will lose during your stay. Let's say the tide is going out 8 feet and you draft 6 feet for a total of 14 feet. But remember most depth sounders are near the bow. So on a sloped bottom adding 6 to 10 feet is a good idea. This would have us to looking for a spot with 20 to 25 feet of water.

Next, look for something on shore that you can tie your line to, such as a tree, large rock or log. And you will want good holding ground for the anchor. If all these requirements have you too far from shore to reach with

Figure 1

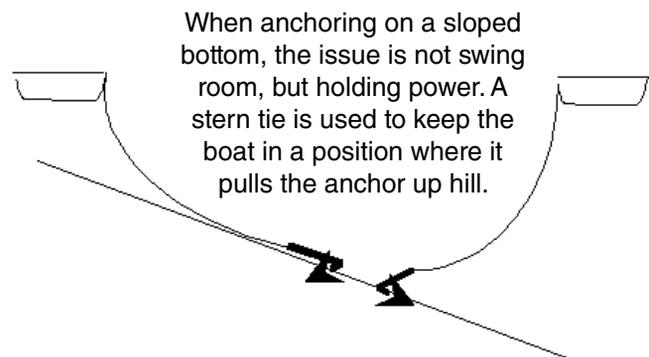


Swing area on anchor.



Reduced area needed with stern secured.

Figure 2



When anchoring on a sloped bottom, the issue is not swing room, but holding power. A stern tie is used to keep the boat in a position where it pulls the anchor up hill.



Most serious cruisers have a spool of colorful, floating line which can easily be mounted on the stern for stern tying. It is a good idea to use colorful floating line as it helps other boaters see it. We also carry an orange float that we attach to the middle of the line if we are in a area where cross traffic might be an issue.

a stern tie you might be able to use a stern anchor instead.

Finding a spot usually requires driving the boat up close to shore and this is risky as there might be hidden rocks. First, check the chart to see if it shows any rocks. If the chart is clear you can use the boat or the dinghy to explore. If you use the boat do so very slowly and cautiously.

Once you find your spot, head back out to a safe place to sit for few minutes. First, get the primary anchor ready to drop. Second, get the stern tie line ready along with a way to get it ashore. Therefore, a dinghy or the like (such as a kayak) needs to be ready to use.

Now return to your spot and turn offshore for about 3-4 boat lengths. I say this because 4 to 1 scope is usually good for this type of anchoring (unless conditions dictate otherwise). So in 25 feet of water you would have at least 100 feet of rode out. Given a choice, I like to add 50 feet, so in this case I would shoot for 150 feet. The reason for this extra line will become apparent shortly.

Now do a normal anchoring while backing towards shore. Once the anchor is set, have a crew member take one end of the stern tie line ashore. He or she can either secure that end ashore or loop it around something and bring it back to the boat. The advantage of looping it comes into play in the morning when you can untie without going ashore.

Once the line is secure ashore you can adjust the position of the boat by taking in some chain or letting more out while adjusting the stern line as needed. This ability to adjust is the reason I added the extra 50 feet. Once you are satisfied with your position, tighten up the stern tie line some as this limits side to side movement.

Stern Anchoring - There are times when a stern tie won't work. For example, you might be on a boat that does not have enough line or you might be too far off shore. However, most boats do have a secondary anchor, so dropping a hook off the stern should be an option. I prefer to stern tie, but only because I find dragging out the extra anchor and rode to be a bit of a pain — but it sure beats drifting into something.

The only equipment needed for stern anchoring is a basic secondary anchor setup. Because of their light weight, Fortress aluminum anchors are the most popular in this role. Add in at least one boat length of chain and then a couple hundred feet of line to complete the package.

The procedure is similar to stern tying in that it starts with a normal anchoring. This is then followed by placement of the stern anchor. This can be done one of two ways: take the second anchor out in a dinghy or back the boat up while letting out extra rode on the primary anchor. The latter option requires lots of spare rode up front so the dinghy option is more popular. Once the stern anchor is deployed engage the engine in forward at an idle to set it. And lastly, tighten up on the rode(s) as needed to position the boat and limit side movement.

These two enhanced anchoring procedures are commonly used when cruising in Canada and Alaska. But, as I mentioned earlier, these techniques can also open up possibilities in our local waters.

Mike Huston teaches sailing for San Juan Sailing in Bellingham, WA. He has been sailing for over 40 years, racing and cruising. He and his wife own a Jeanneau 43DS, "Illuminé." Thank you to Gary Wilde and Brian Altman for editing and previewing many of the articles.

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