

Ferry Boat Contra Dance

by David Means



Doug Plummer

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The ferry was an hour late, but it was a warm sunny afternoon, and we were surrounded by about a hundred and thirty contra dancers, so no one was out of sorts. The occasion was the (more or less) annual Ferry Boat Contra Dance. There is one Washington State ferry which has moveable chairs on its main passenger deck, and we take full advantage. As soon as we are allowed to board, we haul instruments and sound equipment onto the ferry and clear all the moveable chairs from the main deck. This creates a dance space with only a few obstacles (poles) in it. This year, the band was Toad Mountain Ramblers (Mike Schway, Dave Nerad, Clyde Curley), and the dancing was led by Lindsey Dono. Three lines of dancers filled the space, and as soon as the boat was underway, the dancing began.

Apparently, the crew have gotten used to this event, for the captain executed a series of slow left and right turns while we danced; the effect was that the contra lines drifted to starboard and port, perilously close to the abovementioned posts. Throughout, the normal (non-dancing) passengers came to see what was going on in the forward cabin, and some even stayed to dance a little bit. All were welcomed into the dance, and most left happy that they had joined in. The merriment went on for an hour, until the ferry completed its outward run; then we took a break and devoured a large number of snacks that dancers had brought to share. As soon as the ferry started its return run, we began to dance again, until about five minutes before the end of the journey. Then we had to put everything back in the same arrangement that we found it in, pack up the sound equipment and instruments, and depart as if nothing had happened.

The most impressive thing about this event is that it happens with so little effort on the part of most dancers. The planning is carefully done well beforehand, so that everyone can concentrate on having a good time while in attendance. Kudos to the Bellingham dance organizers, whose skill and energy made for a wonderful event.

David Means enjoys English country and contra dance in the Pacific Northwest, and participates in organizing dance events there. He is nearing the end of his second term on the CDSS Governing Board.