

Glamping the Texas 200

I stopped in front of my "adopted son" Ryan Esworth's house at 9 am Saturday morning and we began loading his gear into the back of the truck before starting our 2.5 hour drive south to Magnolia Beach. Ryan had accompanied me to possibly purchase a South Coast 21 at Lake Travis 3 years earlier and discovered a free Chrysler 22 at the same marina which we brought home instead. He is also a photographer and agreed to help me put together a documentary of the Texas 200 this year.



Ryan is eager to get on the road to Maggie Beach

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We stopped at a convenience store for ice before leaving Brenham and I hit a curb with the trailer while pulling back onto Hwy 36 but thought nothing of it as the rig was still rolling along just fine. Sometime after we turned onto the meandering FM 109 on our way to Columbus I noticed something odd in my rearview mirror; the trailer appeared to be crabbing down the road hugging the shoulder while the truck was in the middle of the lane. We pulled over at an empty parking lot at Industry and used the come-along to winch the right axle assembly forward after its u-bolts slipped back on the trailer frame when I hit the curb. Unfortunately, this would not be the only accident we would encounter that day...

We made several stops on our way to the way Maggie Beach including one to pick up our burgees. We finally got to the ramp around 1:30 and began rigging and loading the boat. Cay Osmon's beautiful Welsford Pathfinder *Dreadnaught* was already afloat at the dock and she was undecided whether or not to head out in the steep chop after the wind had shifted earlier in the day which would make landfall in Port O'Conner before dark a difficult proposition.

Brant Bedford showed up and asked where to pick up his burgee, as did Calvin Holt while we were getting ready to launch. It was good to see familiar faces after months of social distancing. Ryan took our rig to JT's One Stop while I bent on sails and stowed gear at the dock. When he got back we said goodbye to Cay, wished her well, and set off under power. While I was on the foredeck hoisting sail I heard the British Seagull slow imperceptibly and wondered if it was getting ready to cough up a hairball when only moments later the engine raced in neutral before Ryan shut it off. When I returned to the cockpit later I lifted the motor to discover a huge rats nest of black fishing line trailing the propeller - accident number 2.

True to form, the wind was blowing straight down the channel necessitating long tacks across the bay to reach Port O'Connor Our GPS tracking showed we traveled more than 30 miles that afternoon/evening to make the 10 miles to port. The winds increased from 10-15 to 15-20 during that time resulting in whitecaps and chop that made it a memorable passage. With her high freeboard *Chloe Alyssa* is not normally a wet boat but we actually encountered green water on the deck when plunging through some of the swells. We sailed into our slip with running lights on just before 9 and checked into our room at The Inn at Clark's.

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At The Inn at Clark's where each room comes with its own boat slip

Okay, so right now you are probably thinking to yourself, "I thought the Texas 200 was all about 'embracing the suck' and not about glamping!" to which Ryan and I respond: Since the Texas 200 is an individual experience (especially this year!) it's whatever you make of it. We just chose to make the best of it utilizing indoor plumbing, air-conditioning, and king-size beds where available...

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The next morning I went downstairs and had breakfast on the boat before pulling the British Seagull into the cockpit for a fishing line-ectomy. Since we were just headed over to Army Hole for our Sunday night stopover we weren't in a big hurry to leave our comfortable digs in Port O'Conner. With checkout time looming ever closer we finally pried ourselves away from the dock and had a leisurely sail down the ICW to the channel leading to Espiritu Santo Bay. My experience from sailing on this body of water has always been in absolute contrast to all the blustery and bumpy passages I've experienced on Matagorda Bay, and this Sunday morning was no different - the water was almost placid with 5-10 mph wind.

We arrived to an empty harbor, tying up at 1:25 pm in Army Hole. We walked a bit and sat under shade of the bimini awaiting boats we instinctively knew were coming. First to arrive was Jerry Veglia aboard his Windrider 17 *Fishtales*.



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Next to arrive was Pat Hollabaugh aboard his *Mayfly 14* named after his granddaughter, Kerri Dawn. He arrived at Army Hole on his 40th wedding anniversary and once his boat was secured did the right thing and called his better half to wish her happiness on their special day.



Pat Hollabaugh's 100 hour build *Mayfly 14 Kerri Dawn*

After setting up camp Pat came aboard while I was eating dinner and offered me some of his impressive imported rum which I dutifully poured into my Dr. Pepper. I felt much, much better after my meal...

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Pat's friends Doug and Darla Miles pulled into the harbor next in their Hunter 260 *Play Time* and invited everyone aboard.



The party begins aboard *Play Time*

We spent a great evening enjoying new friends and swapping stories. All too soon the sun was ready to set on another day of the Texas 200.

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The next morning I shoved *Chloe Alyssa* soundlessly out of the slip and we ghosted out of the harbor under bare poles in 5-10 mph wind. Shortly afterwards I hoisted the mainsail and spinnaker which pulled us like a 20 mule team through Espiritu Santo Bay crossing South Pass at 9:13.

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Shortly after that Nick Sirianni tacked in front of us in his MacGregor 26 *Chicken Parts*. We had our VHF radio tuned to channel 16 and missed his attempt to hail us on channel 68. We traversed Panther Pass at 11:03 and entered the ICW at 11:15. Winds had increased to 10-15 mph and the boat was making 6-6.5 knots in "the ditch." The chop was starting to build when we entered Aransas Bay while the accompanying winds provided our timely arrival at Rockport Harbor by 3 pm. We covered 46 miles on that leg.

I walked over to the Aransas Navigation District office to check in while Ryan walked across the street to Harbor Inn to do the same. I can't say enough good things about the hospitality we experienced at Rockport, I feel this really an outstanding port to visit.

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Rockport Harbor as seen from the lighthouse of Texas Maritime Museum

I took a walking tour of the town while Ryan stayed close to the head after something he ate on board failed to agree with him. Later that evening we walked over a few blocks for barbecue and a bag of ice. The next morning we took in the Texas Maritime Museum, at lunch at Apple Dumpling Café, and finally headed out for Quarantine Shore at 1:30 pm.

True to form, Aransas Bay was dishing up a good chop in 15-20 mph winds resulting vicious waves crashing on Quarantine Shore. We met a few boats circling the shoreline looking for a suitable place to land in the maelstrom but everyone agreed that Mud Island was a better sheltered haven for the night. So, we turned and followed the first two boats to land there.

We experienced a strange irony while walking the shore by meeting a couple guys from *Waga* a MacGregor 26 with the same names as ours, Eric and Ryan. We were curious about what other similarities existed so I asked what their vocations were.

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They are both ER doctors from Oklahoma City but Ryan Fish's previous field had been the same as mine and Eric Angle had previously done the same work as Ryan Eisworth.



Capt. Eric Angles stands on the beach of Mud Island with *Waga* in background

More boats were landing on Mud Island and we decided to give the new arrivals prudent social distance to insure their safety because we always try to consider the needs of others. Well, maybe our real primary motivation was that the restaurant in Rockport that we wanted to eat at that night closed at 7...

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The assembled fleet on Mud Island at 5 pm, Tuesday

We departed Mud Island at 5:30 arriving in Rockport Harbor at 6:40 with just enough time to make our dinner order and have it delivered. So much for embracing the suck...

After another wonderful night's sleep in air conditioned comfort we found ourselves in that awkward position where we had to force ourselves to say goodbye to the amenities of shore bound life and once again venture forth on the water. With great sorrow, we checked out of the inn and headed over to The Apple Dumpling Café for a farewell meal.

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Our street-side slip just across from the Inn at Rockport Harbor

We departed the harbor for the final time at 1:36 headed for Quarantine Shore in hopes of meeting up with friends, including Calvin Holt in his Sea Pearl *Blu Spart*. There were no boats there and Calvin never made it that far, unfortunately. So, we headed over to Mud Island at 2:58 where a few boats still remained, sailing along the shoreline until we grounded briefly which brought a query from the beach, "Do you need a shovel?" That's what I cherish most about the Texas 200 - everyone is so eager to help a fellow sailor.

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Then, we turned north heading for the ICW passing *Skipjack* at 3:10 and *Violet* at 3:35, both bound for Mud Island. At 8:20 pm we arrived at a breakwater just north of an island marked "levee under construction" adjacent to channel marker 25. Our logic being that we'd be sheltered from the waves of bay behind the low breakwater but we'd be able to enjoy the full force of the wind down our forward hatch all night without the presence on mosquitoes as we were several hundred yards from any land mass. The idea worked! The only downside was that we were still close enough to the channel to get spotlighted by passing towboats in the night.

Thursday morning I weighed anchor shortly after 6 while Ryan was still in the V-berth and hoisted the jib. The winds had been blowing around 15 mph all night so I decided not to hoist the main. In short order we were making 6 knots across San Antonio Bay bound for Port O'Conner. We weren't in any hurry because check-in at the Inn wasn't until 3 pm.

We arrived at our slip at 1:19 pm after a 26.8 mile passage and met the daughter of the Inn's owner who drove us to our lunch destination. After we each enjoyed a shower Ryan went for a walk and I tidied up and then lounged on the boat. The next morning we slipped our lines at 6:30 and made for Magnolia Beach, again under jib alone until the winds lightened and we hoisted the main.

We saw two homebuilt boats sailing out in the bay as we approached the Maggie Beach boat ramp - Steve Romeis in a Mayfly 14 and his friend in a caboose red Puddle Duck. Already at the dock was Kevin White with his three daughters, Frenna, Hope, and Isla in their Aquarius 21, *Violet*. They were down from Colorado and we got to talk for a bit while Ryan walked to JT's One Stop to retrieve our rig.

After we got hauled out *Chloe Alyssa* Steve showed up again with his rig and I gave him a hand loading his boat. It turns out the Mayfly was gifted to him in a dark-stained color but it was too hot to touch in the sun, so he painted it white. We hit the road at 11:15 and talked about our adventures while planning for next year's Texas 200 all the way home.

Epilog

Because of the glamping nature of our voyage, the crew of *Chloe Alyssa* probably didn't achieve the minimum daily requirement of "embracing the suck" generally associated with the Texas 200. We also didn't crash repeatedly as in 2018 or find the need to tow any disabled boats back in to safe harbor as in the two previous years. We're really grateful for both of these events and look forward to next year. Until then we wish you fair winds, clear skies, and smooth seas.