

## 2022 Texas 200

Eric Dahlkamp

I started with an old foam Snark hull. Four years to scab *Squirt* together off-and-on between other boat projects. No plans, she evolved and slowly morphed into a fine little 2-person daysailer. Built with Texas 200 solo in mind.



After one season testing in local northern Utah lakes, I knew she was ready for the big(ger) leagues. She's built tough - read that heavier than most micro multihulls her size. Wide vaka, plenty seating and storage room. Lots of over built components. Still, she carries momentum for going through chop. Believe me, there is CHOP on this journey! The Texas 200 eats foils for lunch, snaps masts and rips rudders off. Overbuilt is OK.

Got her from Utah to Port Mansfield in one piece. This time no flat tires! Moored her at The Pelican Pub. Overnight the blowing dirt off the parking lot was awful. Gave her a full wash Monday morning before starting.



Left at 8 am. Great sail out to The Jetties. Got to use my two foresails for the first time in 15+ knot winds. And what a wonderful camp! My first time visiting there. Couldn't make it up the channel in 2018 on account of the heavy wind on the nose for *Crosswins*, a Cross 18 trimaran. That time winds were 30+ knots!

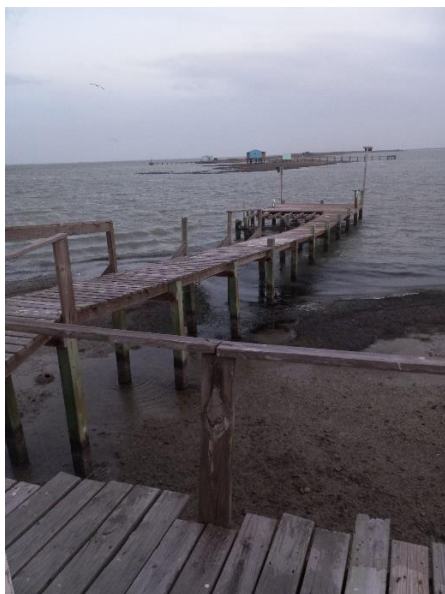
The drop-out rate in this event is quite high; 10%-50% and above some years. Boats and bodies collapse in the heat, run aground on mud flats and oyster reefs, capsize in the wind and waves, or simply fail in the rather tough expedition conditions for any number of reasons. It can be very fatiguing, particularly going solo.

However, happy to report this was the best Texas 200 for me thus far. My third effort, my third completion. My one mishap was losing my glorious shade umbrella overboard. Just blew away in slow motion. I couldn't get to it in time...but no mind. It was far cooler this year than on my previous two trips; no blazing sun. Eighties versus high nineties. Wonderful. Being overcast almost the whole way was a huge bonus.

First and foremost, *Squirt* did amazingly well. Second, I got to explore sail this year. For instance, on day two I bypassed the Land-cut Mud Hole camp and searched for a hard pack beach. Found one 16 miles farther on near the entrance to Baffin Bay. Awesome downwind sail. At the end I was on third reef, no jib. Winds hit 30+ knots!



Have to confess. I was becoming concerned. Real estate was running out. I did not have the energy to keep going much farther. Evening was fast approaching. Did not want to head off at that hour to cross a rough bay. Fortunately found a spot at the Yarborough Pass Cut and spent an excellent night on the deck of a fishing shack. Felt well rested the next day. Watched the fleet sail past as I took my time getting up and packed. Chuck Leinweber and grandson Harper headed east into the back bay through the cut where I camped. Apparently, they ran out of water. Strong wind and super low tide had drained the bay down to inches! They hauled their boats when they could no longer sail. Finally, they couldn't haul them anymore. Too shallow. The normal 10-12 inches was down to practically nothing. Sat grounded all day and night. Slept in their boats! An "adventure" they'll never forget.





My day was very pleasant. Sailed on third reef just because I didn't have far to go. Followed the ICW then cut NE to stop briefly at The Dunes before continuing four more miles.



Other some days I hugged shores slowly, standing in the cockpit and on the bow, skimming the shallows searching for camps, versus sailing far out point-to-point on a time-scheduled run. Sailed under-canvased to a camp of my own choosing on Day 3 "Texas Coastal Explorer Day". We were encouraged to explore the shore and pick our own site. I camped a mile south of Bird Island Basin Campground.

*Chuck Pierce sailed in at dusk in his trusty Mayfly, "Gamaray"; seen here setting up his tent.*



I did the back bay cuts after Dunham Island for the first time which was awesome - Carlos, Cedar, Beldon and Ayers. Had always cut back into the ICW at Dunham Island until Rattlesnake Island. But this time I was ready. Made it through without major incident. Took a lot of winter route planning. Found my GPS preset routing to be spot on. Used a combination of Google Earth, Hook-N-Line fishing charts and my Garmin 78SC GPS preloaded maps for routing and waypoints. Pleased with my achievement. Expect to do much more "off-roading" in the future now that I have *Squirt*.

Day 5 video records my first time through the back bays to Hidden Pass. Perhaps useful for those contemplating their first passage. Surprisingly there was a lot of tight upwind sailing - <https://youtu.be/V4k4w3MfHX8>





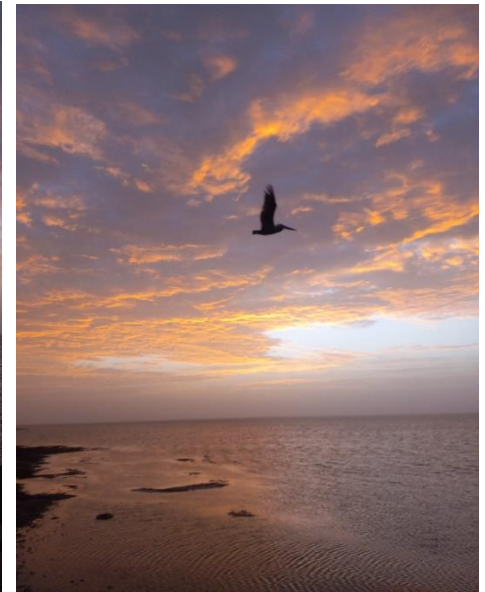
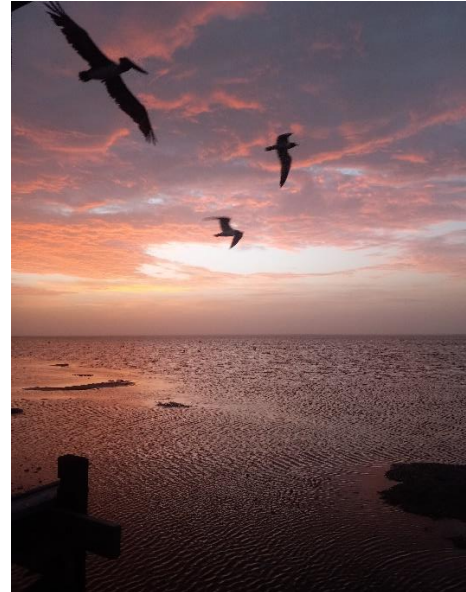
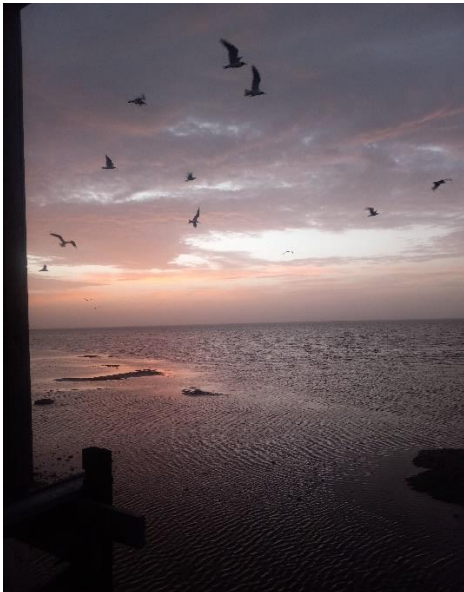
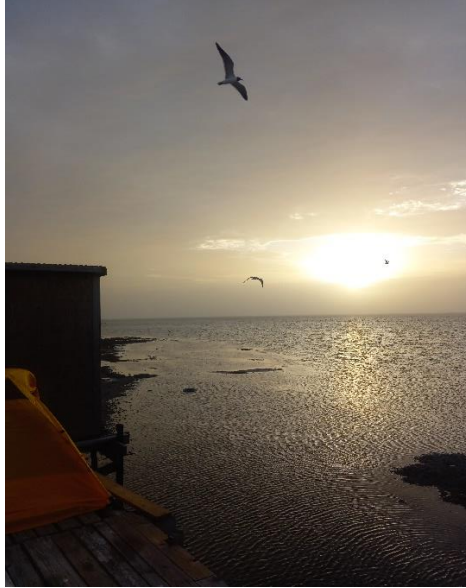


I camped alone both by choice (as in NOT wanting to stay in the mud of the Land Cut), or by default (couldn't make Army Hole before nightfall). At these camps another sailor found refuge and stopped for the night nearby. We shared a few words then went about our separate business. Many want to just crash after a 10 to 14-hour day.

At my day-two fish-shack camp, I had the marvelous experience of observing hundreds, perhaps a thousand or more, birds of all types fly by. All traveling upwind. Some singly, others in their species style of flight in flocks or small groups, some all alone. Each displaying patterns and persona peculiar to their kind - furious wing flapping



or drift gliding; flying at wave top height or far higher; silent determination or casual chattering flitting - as they travelled into the wind, hour after hour, intent on reaching some secret spot of their choosing for the night. I figure they do this late in the day to position themselves for the morrow when they'll effortlessly feed by simply lifting and gliding or flitting downwind in short hops all day long. Many roosted all about me all night. They chatted, squabbled and crooned long after nightfall, late into the night! It took them hours to unwind from their busy hectic bird-life day. I had earplugs thankfully.



I was largely off on my own. I'm good with that and enjoy bringing up the rear. I had anticipated and wanted to group sail, but it just didn't happen. I usually sail several hours behind the group, often experiencing remarkably different conditions. I'm not a pre-dawn riser. It turns out the solitude I experienced was rejuvenating. It brought back yesteryear West African memories for me of exploring the lagoons and islands of my youth with our 12' flat bottom sailing skiff, *The Bloodvessel*. Name described the red bottom paint that trickled down (up) her sides when upside down for painting. Looked cool! We left it like that.

I had all but forgotten that slow leisurely feeling. Wonderful to relive it. Truly a memorable Texas 200.



All that nostalgia aside, it really just takes me too long to get going in the morning. I'm the last to leave at every group camp. I'm not a morning person. Because of that, I tend to miss out on a lot of the social stuff. I leave late and arrive late at the next stop. Often, I simply have to stop short and camp alone. On the plus side though, I get to linger behind on my own, or camp in romantic isolation.

It's a real joy to simply savor the feel and fullness of the places by oneself...the sights and sounds and interactions of birds, bees, bugs, fish, vegetation...seeing raccoon and wild boar tracks, coyotes lopping along the beach or hearing them call out in their wistful wailing way...feeling the wind, humidity, sun, crunch of shells and sand underfoot, gazing at distant vistas and wavelet patterns lapping the shore...all coexisting in their unique way.

I particularly enjoy watching birds feeding. Some dive bomb, there are lots of styles here too. Others stealth wade fish in the shallows. Their total concentration standing stock still while the world is in constant movement around them always fascinates me. Marvelous to get just a mere glimpse of their everyday activities as I sail on by silently. They see me, they don't miss a thing. I hate it when my passing disturbs them so they fly off.

All the dolphin I saw were either actively intent on feeding or traveling. They ignored me. Not like my last two trips when many swam close to visit and chat, or raced my boat. This time only one interacted with me. She, I only surmise it was a she, swam ahead of me up the Port Mansfield Channel stopping on several occasions to slap her tail noisily multiple times on the surface in annoyance or anger at my intrusion. "These are *my* fish, this in *my* spot, *go away!*" I did. I sailed on leaving her alone in her cherished place. It's mesmerizing. Each morning I have to tear myself away to load the boat and cast off. Just "being there", totally present, a lone human, observing, calls for a certain reverence.



*Sail by at Ayers Dugout and my Hidden Pass camp pictured below.*



I came to sail. And sail we did! My peculiar self-built trimaran performed fabulously. We had all wind conditions and some pretty gnarly sea states. I was hit with everything from hours of being becalmed, to over 30 knot wind gusts. *Squirt* held up to severe pounding chop given she's really quite small in reality despite appearing bigger in pictures. She is amazingly dry! Her spray skirts worked! I must say, she is very comfortable too. A huge plus.



She is responsive, yet very forgiving - a little marvel really. I had water over the foredeck in sizeable following seas as I surfed down faces and punched nose-first into the next swell. I had water over her gunnels as amas buried in strong gusts. They're too short and need extending. I'll do that for next year. She always recovered easily though from each incident reinforcing my confident in her. She is seaworthy within the range of seas and blows we generally get on this event.

And, she sails fabulously well indeed on all points in all winds. Her rig is very versatile. She carries considerable canvas for her size, able to be deeply reefed. She's not fast loaded down with a week's worth of gear and water, but she's not a slouch either. Sustained 10-12 knots even more off-wind on several occasions. Got up on extended planes surfing a lot of waves. Upwind sustained 5-7 knots, and some of that through pounding chop. Very respectful. Did some real sailing. Next year she'll sport a little screecher too! It's all on my YouTube channel for me to watch through winter.

Here's my Texas 200 Playlist: [https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLHP\\_hRAMY7vKkiIDjLPkiPf\\_wurDQu\\_fD](https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLHP_hRAMY7vKkiIDjLPkiPf_wurDQu_fD)

Nothing broke. She's built tough. The few issues she did have were easily put right. The most significant of which was the leeboard that wouldn't drop farther than halfway the day I needed to pinch up a busy Corpus Christi ship channel. The wooden leeboard "case" had swollen with Texas humidity. All it took at Quarantine Shore to repair



was half an hour with the rasp file Dana Hardy just happened have aboard his 26' sharpie Remedy. Who else would carry a wood rasp, right?

The fact Squirt made the ship channel on just two tacks, with a half-down leeboard at 45-degree angle set aft of CE like that, is a real testament to her pointing ability. Quite surprising.



I'll probably catch hell for this next bit, but it's worth the telling...

Because I couldn't point as high as I needed to, I came too-close-for-comfort to a push tug bearing down on me in the Corpus Christi ship channel. She was deadheading (no barge) and I was passing on her windward side with a good breeze so I was well under control...until I wasn't. I calculated it would be a quick passing. I knew I had a clear line to get by easily. And I did. I cleared her stern with room to spare off her port side, only to be slowly sucked into her wake and rotated by her prop wash. This all happened between 30 and 70 yards or so behind her stern. The water boiled and welled around me. *Squirt* was completely helpless despite a good wind. She rotated 360 degrees in slow motion - twice.

While interesting and "fun" to experience, a "near" miss with any large moving vessel isn't to be taken lightly. Very dire consequences will most certainly come if wind dies, or inattention leads to belated action. The catamaran sailing behind me received four prolonged horn blasts from a huge ocean tanker moving at speed before she turned at right angles and motored hastily out of the tanker's path to safety. Scary.

Day 6, the last day, was glorious in its own unique way. Left at 7 am. Sat becalmed off Hidden Pass for three plus hours. When the wind did finally come it was just a breeze. It never did fill in like on the other days. Sailed the last of it wing-on-wing on a three-hour meditative downwind run to Maggy Beach from Port O'Connor. Sat that entire leg in the shade of the mainsail. Pure bliss! Unfortunately, being becalmed for three hours didn't help my ETA any. I arrived too late for the BBQ put on by the Magnolia Beach Fire Department. No worries, the mere prospect of that delicious BBQ kept my spirits up all day long. Oh well, wouldn't have had it any other way. A real joy.



Last observation. I found I was surprisingly able to endure it physically. After the first day and night it got easier actually. I was just over Covid despite having all my boosters. Oh well. The first night at The Jetties I was exhausted. A week on the road from Utah, the boat setup, loading-unloading-washing-loading again, then the sail out to The Jetties...it was brutal. I was sick with stiffness, pain, cramps and utter fatigue. But I got through it and every day after that I felt stronger and stronger. No cramps or utter fatigue after that first night. Wonderful. In summary, I think I had more fun this trip than my other two times. Perhaps it was because I sailed solo.

Having the right boat, prepping thoroughly, a little experience under my belt, feeling healthy and strong, it all added up to a fabulous adventure.

Of course, I was the last to collect my vehicle from JT One Stop in Maggie Beach.



None of this would have been possible, or have been as pleasant, without the huge help and support of so many of you. Thank you. I treasure your friendships near and far. Look forward to hanging out together next time.

Julie, my dear wife, what can I say. Thank you so much for holding down the fort and all your encouragement. I love you sweetheart.





I'll be back next year, se Deus quiser.

**Squirt out**