

## 2024 Texas 200

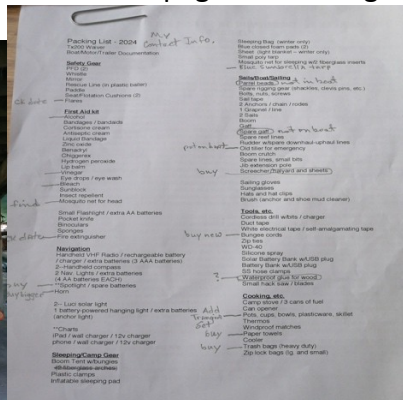
By Cay Smith Osmon with Johnnie Eichor

This was my fifth Tx200 (first two were solo attempts, half-way completed), and the last three were completed successfully with my friend and crew member, Johnnie.

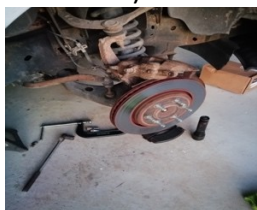
Packed and ready



First of two pages of Packing List



This year, we had a friend ride down with us from Houston to Port Mansfield, where we arrived Saturday afternoon. (We were lucky to have a brake caliper hang up the night before we left and not in the middle of nowhere!)



We rigged my 17-foot Welsford Pathfinder, Dreadnaught, and put in at the municipal ramp for me to motor to a slip I'd reserved at Harbor Bait back in January. They've upgraded the retaining wall and finger piers there, making the slips wider to accommodate BIG boats, so the slip price went up to \$45 (per boat).

I had arranged with Roger Seibert to pay for two beds in his room at David's Lodge for my crew and driver Saturday night; I would sleep on the boat, which I preferred. Johnnie had brought 10 pounds of beautiful Gulf shrimp, potatoes, corn, crackers, and Crab Boil to boil up for Roger, his other guest, us and anyone else (there was a LOT of shrimp!) Delicious!

Sunday morning was the Captains' meeting across the channel. After the brief meeting, our driver was off to Houston to return truck and trailer to Johnnie's house. Our plan was to make this year the Texas 300 by continuing from the end point at Magnolia Beach, on through the ICW past Matagorda and Freeport, back through West Galveston Bay, along the backside of Galveston Island, past Texas City Dike, then turning north and ending at Topwater Grill in San Leon, where we'd haul out. However, looking at the weather forecast for the week after the 200, thunderstorms were predicted, some severe. Turns out, those cells wouldn't be waiting until after we'd finished.

Sunday after the meeting, captains were taking off in their vehicles to drive their trailers to the finish at Magnolia Beach, where they would be left. Then they boarded charter buses to make the trip back to Port

Mansfield, taking the better part of the day. Since we had brought our own driver, we were free to leave a day early, and we were so glad we did because Sunday was just about the most perfect sailing conditions that one could ask for on the 200.

When we returned from the captains' meeting, we packed up a few last-minute drinks and snacks from Harbor Bait and we were off, clearing the Port Mansfield channel at 9:20 a.m. Winds were light until we made a wide turn to port to pick up the ICW, when we started surfing with moderate waves and winds off our starboard quarter.

For the next 12 hours, we sailed at speeds of 5 to 7 knots and a bit over sometimes, nonstop, until we turned off into the channel at Bird Island Basin at 9:15 p.m. An amazing, exhilarating, and unbelievable ride of about 70 miles! Starting off with full main and jib, we did put in one reef before Baffin Bay, and my perfectly-balanced Pathfinder never let up—smooth, sea-kindly, and fast!

We had a breathtaking experience in the Baffin Bay area: sailing through two very large pods of VERY large dolphins, one just as we entered the Bay, and the other about half-way through. As usual, they were very close to the boat, but seemingly oblivious to our presence, focusing instead on aggressively feeding, Tearing through the water doing high jumps and splashing about. Largest dolphins I've ever seen anywhere; guess there's plenty to eat. There was probably two dozen or more in each pod. I suppose it could have been the same pod, but I couldn't say for sure. Sun low in the sky, wind screaming, and so close to the feeding frenzy we could feel the energy from them!

The next morning, though, the weather had changed: almost no wind and perfectly flat water. We left Bird Island Basin under motor. After we got back into the ICW, some wind came up so we were motorsailing, keeping an eye on a very dark cloud on the north-northwest horizon, coming toward us. We were about 4.5 miles from Marker 37 Marina when it hit us with rain and winds. We pulled in behind Marker 37's long pier running alongside the ICW to get out of the winds and waves hitting us broadside. Luckily, the tide was up, so we had no problem ducking behind the pier and tying up. By the time we sponged the water out of the boat and got things organized, the cloud had passed. After a nice lunch on the pier of hamburger and fries and fish sandwich, we were ready to continue.

Winds were light, so we motorsailed toward Corpus Christi Bay, where the winds picked up to about 15 or so, allowing us to have a pretty quick sail across the Bay, passing Shamrock Island, to Stingray Hole (which doesn't look anything like it used to), and then taking a starboard turn into the ship channel. We were going to Port Aransas Municipal Marina for the night.

#### Shamrock Island



Unfortunately, we got to the marina office after it had closed, so we were not able to pay and get access to the showers. But we had a rain shower earlier so it wasn't so terrible! The noise of the diesels on the

charter boats cranking up at 5:30 the next morning were pretty terrible. The marina is not that big and the charter boats are lined up along the private side of the channel, one after the other.

So we were up and off as soon as we could be. Once again, almost no wind so motorsailing out of the marina, across the ship channel, and straight into the Lydia Ann Channel. After an hour, we were able to sail until we merged into the ICW.

Lydia Ann Lighthouse



Beautiful Aransas Bay, flat and windless



Just after Pelican Reef, we cut out of the ICW and headed toward the first dugout, Cape Carlos. I was using a revised route from last year that I had updated on AcquaMap, which I was using on my phone and, as a backup, my iPad. I had tweaked the waypoints to try to line up our route more accurately with the channels and markers on AcquaMap. We glided through the dugouts without a hitch and stopped for lunch and bathroom break at Ayers Dugout.

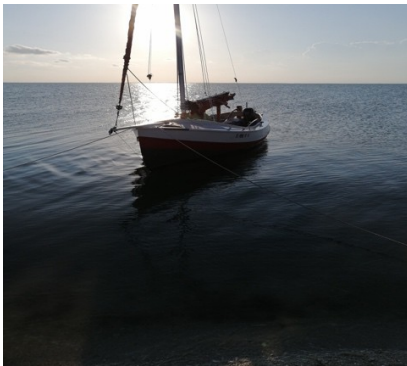
Ayers Dugout



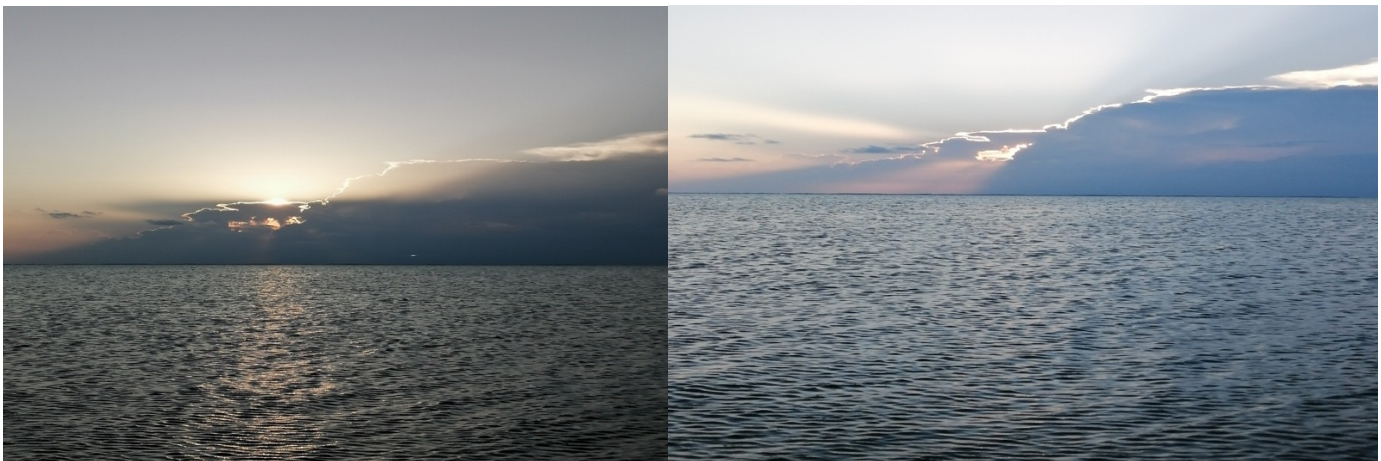


Winds were still light and fluky when we left Ayers. We attempted to sail, but when the winds started picking up and turning more southeast as the afternoon wore on, it was coming at us almost on the nose, causing a lot of bashing and a progressively wet ride. I had hoped we could get to Hidden Pass, but it was just too far. By that time, I was tired and just wanted to get to a quiet anchorage; the closest one turned out to be Panther Point, only about 10 miles from Ayers, but feeling farther away with every wave trying to push us in the opposite direction. Finally, we made it. We anchored in flat water but with plenty of breeze coming across the point from the Gulf. Line after line of pelicans were using the wind to glide from the beach-side, where they had been feeding all day, to a small roosting island just to the north of us. We hadn't seen another boat since leaving the ICW that morning. All was quiet except for the delicious breeze through the grasses.

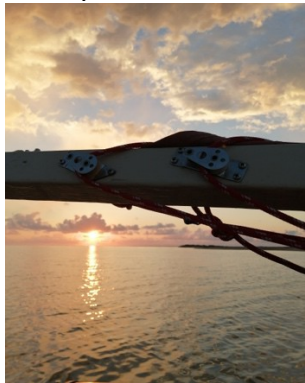
Panther Point



The only concern was a very dark cloud to the north, steadily moving our way. We put out the stern anchor and had some dinner. Then we put up the mosquito net (our usual activity), and put the tent fly over the boat, using all the clips we had. We left the front and back flaps open but at-the-ready so that we could quickly close up should the rains come. Then we were quickly asleep.



Luckily, the cloud never made it to us and we awoke to a beautiful morning.



Winds were light from the east/southeast, and we had an uneventful sail on through Hidden Pass, and on to Army Hole, with only one small rain cloud threatening in the late morning.



When we arrived at Army Hole mid-day, we were delighted to meet a lovely couple, Katie and Lee Martin, on a Dovekie—and no one else—heaven! The only activity going on was some contract work on a berm or land reclamation project farther down the island. The work crew would arrive every morning out of Port O'Connor, and get into trucks to take them to the site, leaving peace and quiet behind them, until returning to pick up their ride at the end of the day. Katie and Lee were such a nice couple and we really enjoyed meeting them and hearing all their stories of travels to the Erie Canal, the Chesapeake, and beyond.



We spent way more time than was necessary speculating on when the 200 boats would start arriving, and debating the movements and intensities of the various thunderclouds that would rise up and dissipate. In the end, the time we spent there with no one else around (and especially in the absence of air boats!) was some of my favorite moments of the 200 this year.

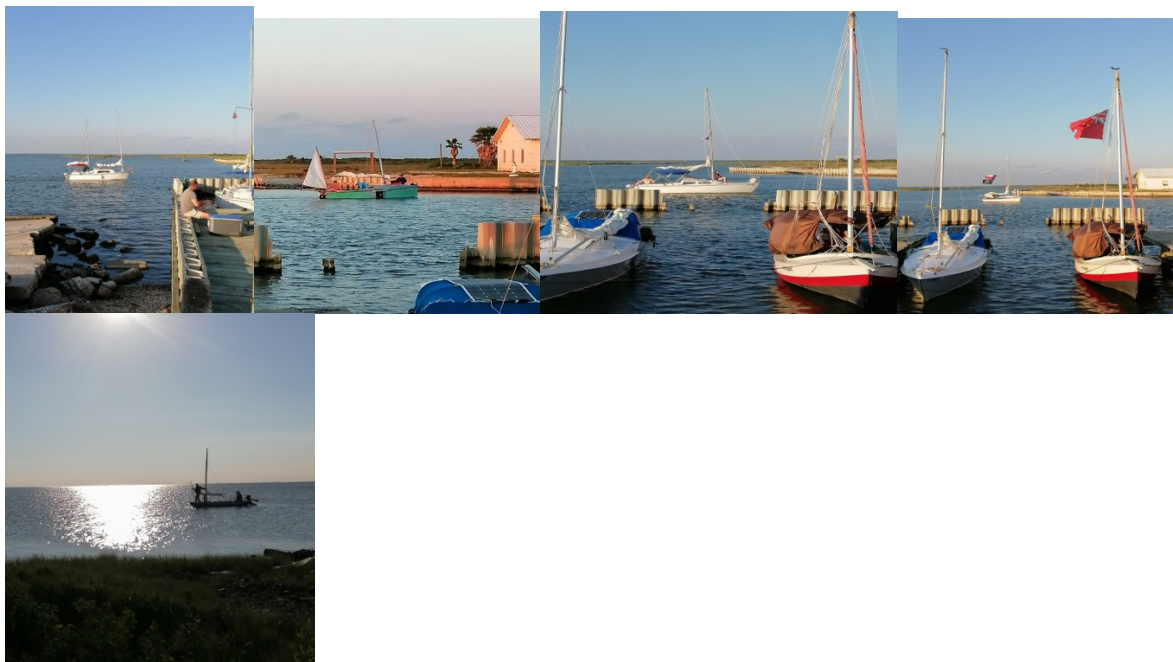
## Army Hole



Boats started arriving late afternoon Thursday. I counted about 21 boats that I saw come into AH.



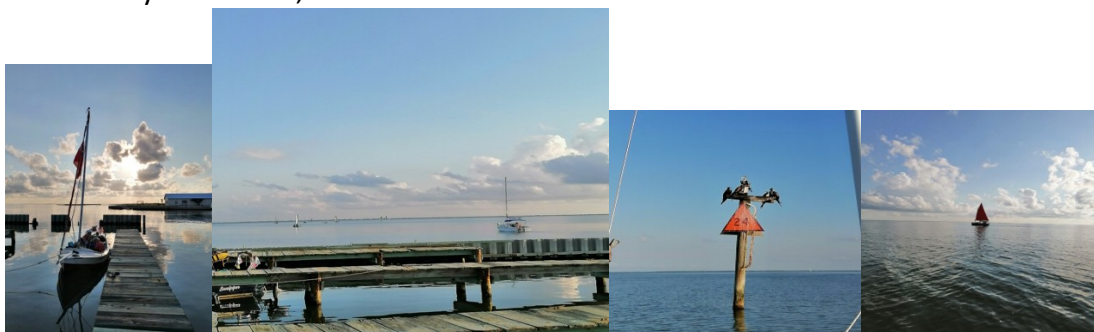




It was a big difference in noise and activity after all the boats were in and people were milling about, setting up tents, cooking, drinking, and just visiting with everyone. Katie and Lee turned in early since they would be leaving on a new adventure early the next morning. We settled down relatively early as well. Despite the activity, after a long day on the water, a quietness descended very quickly as everyone was ready for rest.



Friday morning, people started shoving off for Magnolia Beach and, as has been my limited experience with the last day of the 200, winds were almost non-existent.



So, a motor-sail almost to the ICW, with a few boats choosing to flake off and head to Fisherman's Cut, closer to Port O'Connor. We followed the channel almost due north until we got to the ICW, then followed it to Port O'Connor, stopping there for a couple of packs of bottled water. Then sailing around the jetty turning north and a downwind sail all the way to Magnolia Beach. We made good time, but that's my least favorite point of sail since I have no bimini, and it feels especially hot with the wind from the stern.

Luckily, we made it without incident to enjoy delicious boiled shrimp. In hindsight, I'm very grateful that I was able to visit with Pat Hollabaugh, and I had the presence of mind to tell him how much his words of encouragement had meant to me my first year there.

Since the Texas 300 was not to be, Johnnie found someone to take him to pick up the truck and trailer. I spent the night on the boat in the boat ramp, which turned out to be a surprising very quiet place to stay, and I got everything organized and tied down in preparation for the return trip to San Leon. When he got back the next morning, we made quick work of unstepping the mast and tying everything down, and then we were off. Another successful, amazing, and satisfying trip up the Texas coast.

