

Andrew and Stephanie's Story

Stephanie and I did the 200 on the Hobie Adventure Island kayaks because we had them, and we thought they were just about the minimum amount of boat that would actually be fun. The boats are somewhat versatile, with a removable pedal "mirage" drive system, daggerboard and rudder, removable self-furling mast/sail system, a paddle, and can be folded to 42" beam for narrow spots or opened to 9'4" for optimum sailing. Weight capacity is 350 lbs, per Hobie, and we've had ours about a year. Stephanie had rigged hers with the all-new aka trampolines; since I outweigh her by well over 100 lbs, she elected to tote the majority of the camping gear to bring the boats' loaded weights closer together.



We rented one of the houses on South Harbor at Port Mansfield along with another team. This was definitely the way to go; these houses have their own boatslips, and balconies to view the boats leaving before one chooses to. We got up bright and early Monday morning and watched a lot of boats leave while leisurely rigging and loading the "tupperware trimarans". We ended up pulling out about noon; as some of you may remember, the breezes were pretty hearty by noon!

I snapped a rudder pin less than two minutes out of the harbor - no matter, think I - I have this nifty paddle and I'll just use it as a sweep and steer with it. Well, as it turns out, I might have been better going back and fixing it - we had spares,

and I ended up steering with that accursed paddle for 17.4 miles, to the mouth of the Land Cut. A quick repair and on to Hap's Cut; we raised our average speed for the day from 5.2 to 5.9, and our top burst to 10.9. Camping was pleasant enough, after dragging the yaks ashore thru the calf-deep alluvial ooze that the locals call by the mild term "mud".

Day 2 dawned fairly early, in time to see the Puddle Ducks leaving around 6:30 (this is a pattern with them, apparently). We cooked breakfast, struck camp, loaded the boats, and hit the water last of the fleet, about 9:30, immediately behind a red Trilar. We quickly caught it; I noted to the skipper that the sail seemed strapped and if he could ease about six feet of sheet, he might find better speeds - he seemed to ignore me for a moment, and I wondered if he'd heard. Then he allowed that he wasn't paying attention; I tipped my hat and forged on. Soon the Land Cut opened away leaving us traversing the 2' waves (4' crest to trough) of Baffin Bay. They weren't all that big, but some sure were! After leaping over a wave, the Als would sometimes stab into the back of the wave ahead; rather than stopping, they'd continue forward with an increasing forward tilt. Sometimes the other one, the one with the trampolines and 70% of the gear, would completely submerge. The only saving of it was to sheet out all the mainsheet, let the sail flag (flog? That too!) in front of the mast for 10 or 15 seconds, and let her pop back up and drain herself - then sheet in and do it again! Just clear of Baffin, I noticed Stephanie furling her sail hurriedly. I sailed near and inquired - sure enough, a broken rudder pin. As I drifted alongside, I retrieved one from the Al's middle twist-lock hatch, as she asked where we would do the repair. Since we were drifting out of the ICW channel, I said: "In about five seconds, we'll be in knee-deep water". Sure enough, we were, and ten seconds later we were on our way again. About ten miles out from the Padre Island Yacht Club, I noticed Stephanie's boat falling back, a lot. I turned back, sailing back thru the Puddle Ducks just passed a few minutes earlier, and arrived in time to see her roller furling fail just as she got to the transom of the boat to swap the pin. As she held onto the back of the boat, I sailed alongside and rounded it up bumper-car style. They're rotomolded plastic! What's to hurt? Anyway, another repair and on to the YC, where we enjoyed wonderful hospitality, hot showers, transportation to Snoopy's for a fried-fish dinner, hot showers, electricity for recharging electronics, etc. Thank you PIYC! Also stopped by a liquor store and replenished both ice and "octane". 7.2 mph average for the day, peak spurt 15.1!



Day 3 was a lot like Day 2; we ate, struck, loaded, and left; maybe by 10 am or so. The passage out the ICW into Corpus Christi Bay was uneventful, punctuated by chatter on the freshly-recharged VHF's and the occasional fishing boat. Corpus Bay was entertaining, with big waves - they were as tall as the ones in Baffin, but with a longer period and seemingly moving faster. A bit spooky, sure, but we made it to the lee of Shamrock Island, and I then navigated for what I felt sure was the gap between the Point of Mustang Island and Pelican Island. Instead, it turned out to be East Flats, on the west side of Port Aransas. We drifted a couple miles with boards and rudders up, but ended up having to walk the boats a quarter mile or so to Island Moorings Marina's new channel. This dropped us in the Corpus Christi Ship Channel, three or four miles from the intersection with the Lydia Ann Channel. This seemed a good route, since we could sail down the Ship Channel on starboard at a good pace without tacking. David on the Hobie 14 Turbo passed us here. We dodged a couple ferries and a workboat, and bore away onto a broad reach in the Lydia Ann. Kevin and Laurent passed us on the green proa; Laurent appeared to be taking video. Onward to Aransas Bay. We headed out a good way to avoid shoals near shore (and because my gps was dead) to enjoy the biggest waves of the trip. I'm sure there were a few sets of three-footers! We pulled up on shore to make a few adjustments, to eat a snack and get our bearings, and drain a bit of water out of the kayak hulls. On again! We were hailed by VHF as we approached Paul's

Mott around 5:30 - were we going to stop or forge on to the fishing cabin at Ayers Reef, as previously stated? The charts had showed the straight-line distance at about 10 miles, so we figured a bit over 12 by the meanders of the channels - and on we went. My daggerboard tickled a couple of reefs, as I intentionally had it set 8" deeper than my rudder, but we slipped on over each time. Yaks beached up at 7:30 to find the cabin unlocked and our cooler of goodies delivered as promised days earlier by my brother! 49.5 miles for the day, over about 10 hours, with a couple of stops - so moving average in the low to mid fives. Wonderful dinner, good night's sleep, and up with the dawn (ok, dawn thirty or so) to face the day. Little could we have imagined the circus we were in for!

Thursday dawned like most of the other days of the 200 - the south-southeasterly wind a bit farther south in angle than typical for the season, and blowing 10-12 or so, tho we could be sure it would fill in later. I went out to the pier in back, and watched the sunrise. We started cooking breakfast, and around 9, spotted the parade of sails entering Mesquite Bay. The boats were coming out of Belden Dugout and heading up hard on the wind on starboard tack - some seemed on a good course but others weren't nearly high enough, and a few seemed to be overstanding the pass. Kevin and Laurent in the proa were the first into the Dugout and pulled up on the shell beach in front of the cabin. Meanwhile, Yves left the pvc marker stake at the mouth of the Dugout to starboard, and ran a quarter mile or so up the muddy side - there was enough water over the thigh-deep mud laced with razor-sharp oyster shells to float in, but no way over the solid-oyster reef at the end, and not enough water to sail out. He cut his hand pretty badly on the shells, but ended up getting out and getting some first aid before forging on. Locals Charlie and Laura Jones seemed to be making for the exit of the Dugout rather than the entrance, but responded to frantic VHF hails and turned back in time. Meanwhile, the Mikesboat succeeded in circumnavigating the island east of the one where the cabin is - a mission I've never pulled off even in a kayak. Rodney's Newport came up the back channel a long way; he was able to motor most of the way out, and got some extra help as well. About then the Puddle Ducks arrived; they appeared to have selected the second false channel behind the cabin. More frantic hails, then good old-fashioned lung power: "No water, go back!" I looked away for a second, and when I looked back, three of the four had simply spun in place and were headed back out. The fourth was stuck, for half an hour or so it seemed. The other Ducks all banked up in the Dugout, along with the fifth which I think did not arrive in time to sample the false channels. I lost all track of who got stuck when or where; at one point there were three boats stuck east of the cabin, two west, and two south on the point of Fish Camp Island.

Stephanie kept cooking breakfast stuff; pancakes and sausage to the early comers, then brats that had been intended for grilling at Army Hole, etc. The Birdwatcher pulled up on the bank and stayed quite a while; I think the peak "guest list" was all five Ducks, David's Hobie 14, the Birdwatcher, and the two Hobie A1 kayaks. About this time, a serious situation (or two) developed in the shell/mud flats west of the cabin. Bobby's San Juan 21 had a centerboard problem; in a word, it would not retract. With a full press of sail and maybe a little shove from the outboard, it would bounce over most obstacles that didn't actually ground the hull, but on trying to sail to weather, as soon as headway was lost and the boat set back, the board sank into the mud to its full depth and precluded further motion by the father-daughter crew. John's 15-ft Potter was also well up on the flats; he was trying to sail out (motor too, we later learned) but couldn't make headway against the rising winds, now gusting near 20. He put a little bit of board down, and some rudder, and at that moment an unexpected puff of breeze came thru and knocked him over on his side. He stepped off the boat, turned it upright, bailed...lost it, did the same again a few times. We then saw him swim/wading after his duffle, which he released after a few minutes. He flagged down a crabber and caught a ride to the cabin. David and I and the five Duckers shortly decided to launch an expedition to return the two boats to the sea, and not Davy Jones' locker!

We caught a ride with a passing fisherman who dropped all of us at the Potter. We righted her and bailed for a bit, but quickly realized that the water was entering as fast as it was being bailed, partly thru the open cockpit scuppers but mostly thru the open top of the centerboard trunk. Since John stated he was done with the boat and no one was in danger, we decamped en masse over to Bobby's boat. Working together, we were able to move it forward so the board would rise on top of the mud; I think the final solution was to place a convenient piece of line connecting the two cabintop winches and simply raise the board like that. Anyway, they were shortly off and banked up briefly at the cabin - Bobby needed a little while to get his head together and realize that tho he and his daughter were the only ones on the boat, they were NOT alone and would not be left. Back to the Potter; the cushions were too thick to stuff in the centerboard trunk. I remembered reading about emergency repairs being effected on the wooden boats of yore by stretching a piece of sailcloth around the outside of the boat, letting the water pressure keep it pinned against the hull. We pulled the jib off and tried it, and lo and behold, it worked! In an hour's time, the little Potter was floating and ready to be towed across the Dugout. Stephanie pedaled a line across with one of the AIs, and the shore committee tugged it across. John reiterated that he was done with the boat, and we offered it a home. She's still going to need a lot of cleaning, but she's a Potter - she'll be fine! We cooked fajitas for the ad hoc rescue committee and sent them on their

way, maybe around 4 pm. We tidied up as best we could without a powerboat to haul out trash, secured the Potter, and set out for Army Hole at about 5:30.

I broke a rudder pin two hundred yards out from the exit of the Dugout - in chest-deep water, I popped in a new one in a matter of seconds. Whether it was the fifth or sixth of the week I cannot say, but changing them was almost second nature. We pulled up briefly on Panther Point to check maps and make sure flashlights were nearby - it was well after seven and the sun was quite low in the sky! With a couple of nervous glances toward the sky, we forged on. Soon we could hear breaking water ahead; we checked the GPS coordinates for South Pass and turned almost dead downwind. Around 10:30, we drifted up to the coordinates with reefed sails; there was clearly surf in earshot but none to be seen in the night-piercing beam of my 3-AAA-powered LED flashlight - so we rolled out the sails and headed out on a brisk close reach. I spotted a weathered creosote pole sticking 12 or 15 feet out of the water, but Stephanie missed even that - she navigated us to, and thru, South Pass with a fishin' map and an old Garmin 12 I'd picked up from a pawnshop three or four years ago, took apart, and re-sealed with Amazing Goop. Amazing navigation, I say! We set a direct course for Army Hole; I guess it's 11 or so by now. We had to detour for Vanderveer Island, and there saw an amazing bioluminescence show - the boats looked like there were sailing on green light, and even the fish scattering left greenish-white wakes. We pulled up at Army Hole around 1:30 am, and pitched the tent by the now-brilliant moonlight. I was only a little hungry, so I ate a bit of roast beef cold cuts from my ice chest, and mixed a Gatorade rum punch. The meat was a little odd-tasting, but I wrote it off to haveing gotten water (melted ice) into the packaging.

Friday morning, I felt kind of "off". I wanted to be done with the event, and also wanted the chance to sail with some of the other boats for a change - all week, we were last out and last in, and only rarely did we get to sail around any others. I suggested we NOT take the time to cook breakfast, to just load and go, and eat at Port O'Connor; it was only about ten miles. I left with three bottles of water for what should have been no more than a two-hour ride. Long story short, the two-hour ride took nearly four, and I felt worse and worse as the passage continued. I threw up a couple times and ran out of bottled water only three or four miles into my passage, and Stephanie appeared not to be looking back. She cleared the passage between Blackberry and Dewberry Islands and disappeared. I felt quite poorly, and stopped and sat on the bank for about 20 minutes, then went on. Oh: it didn't help at ALL that I had lost my last hat the previous night after taking it off, and that I had broken my last pair of sunglasses in similar circumstances. Anwyway, made it to Clarks (the restaurant) and picked at a beatiful cheesburger - I wish I'd have felt well enough to do it justice! I declared

that I was done, I wanted out, and wanted no more sailing; Stephanie would hear of no such thing and found an airconditioned place for me to crash while she spoonfed me aspirin and Gatorade for the next 5 hours. About 6 pm, we pushed off for Magnolia Beach and arrived around 8. The much-vaunted shrimp boil had been devastated to the point that all that remained were a few shrimp heads and a couple corn cobs; it didn't matter much since I still felt most poorly. Stephanie did most of the tearing down for the night, then drove us to the La Quinta in Pt Lavaca. The Texas 200 was done.

I spent most of Saturday in bed hydrating; I had run a 103.6 fever during the night and had been shivering uncontrollably as late as five or six am. We got the boats Sat evening and went our ways.