



After building Poule d'eau two years ago and then having shoulder replacement surgery the week before last year's event, I had plenty of time to plan for this year's 15th Annual Texas 200. We dropped the boats off at Port Mansfield the second Saturday in June, then Sunday is a long day with the 7AM Captains meeting followed by driving cars and trailers to Magnolia Beach some 200 miles away, then riding charter busses back to Port Mansfield.

There is a published plan with "designated" camping spots along the route that are hopefully reached weather permitting to spend the night, hang out with friends, eat, rest up for the next day and often times repair things that broke during the day.

Day One

Port Mansfield to the Port Mansfield Jetties is about 10 miles due east. Some sailors departed the day before (Sunday) to go hang out, fish and test equipment etc. The majority of the group left Port Mansfield at their own pace on Monday. 20–25 knot south winds with gusts much higher made Red Fish Bay pretty rough. I started out with both reefs in my main and flying my roller furling jib.

Once out in the open I decided to furl my jib and go with my double-reefed main alone. In the heavy winds the jib jammed and I was unable to furl it in. I was in trouble. The sail was violently flapping and shaking the entire boat. I knew that there was no way I could make the jetties that way.

I loosed the main and tried unsuccessfully to drop the jib. The wind was blowing the boat out of the narrow channel into the flats on the north side and I didn't want to get caught in that predicament. I hauled in the main and continued to try to figure my problem out knowing that something would break soon.

I hadn't yet figured out the solution when suddenly the dyneema line holding the jib block at the masthead broke and the sail came partway down. My first thought was "Uh Oh" but quickly realized that my situation had greatly improved! I loosened the main, ran to the bow and stuffed as much of the jib I could into the forward hatch. I hauled in the main sheet and was able to continue to the jetties.

Ziggy had turned around when he saw I was in trouble and asked if I was OK. I communicated to him via the VHF the fact that "I Didn't Die". At the jetties I unloaded some of the gear out of my boat and had Ziggy stand on the gunnel and a couple other sailors heel the boat all the way over so that I could reach the masthead and a simple fix with some paracord and I was back in business!



There were other boats with broken masts and other problems that we all helped each other get ready for the next day. A few walks down the beach and I met quite a bit of the Texas 200 gang. Lots of folks from Texas, as well as Kansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Utah, Iowa, Pennsylvania, New Mexico, Colorado, Alabama, and North Carolina.

I had a quick supper of brisket tacos with some cold beer and got some good sleep in my boat protected from the skeeters by my homemade boom tent.



Day Two

Port Mansfield Jetties to the "Land Cut". You may not be aware but when you are sleeping in the wide open on the Texas Lower Coast, especially in a white tent the world begins to light up from the sun around 4:45AM..... Yes, before 5AM.

Most people were stirring by 05:30 and some were leaving. We had a 35 mile sail that day. The wind had not changed since the day before and I like to say "It's more wind than I need". I took off with Ziggy and David Brown who were both in Windrider 17s.



We sailed out of the channel and were zipping along. I saw how rough the bay was becoming as we were clearing the spoil islands and I decided to cut across the shallower side of the bay to hopefully avoid that rough water.

I left Ziggy and David who were heading to the ICW and started heading northeast. I was much farther out into the bay than I realized and was quickly in Big waves. Waves were breaking over the transom, sides and bow. It took a long time for me to work my way east into the shallows.

I built a small dodger to keep Some water out of the cockpit. It didn't keep All the water out though and occasionally a wave would be so big it would come over the bow and into the boat. Once as I went over a big wave, the wave broke over Both Gunnels at the same time. Lots of Bailing! I have an electric bilge pump for emergency situations that I had to use a couple of times on that day.

I wasn't the only one having problems. I sailed past Pat Hollabaugh who was bailing his Mayfly 14 out after being swamped in the rough water. I also found out that Bob and Lisa Rambo had to head back to Port Mansfield due to their mast coming down.

At the north end of the Lower Laguna Madre is the "Land Cut". When you are sailing straight north in a narrow channel with a strong south wind, it's pretty dang good! It's also good when I saw that Ziggy had pulled over and waited for me in the channel. Once again, "I Didn't Die!"

We still had several miles to go and I was tired of sitting. With miles of straight channel ahead and a following wind, I stood up in my boat. After setting the tiller in just the right position it's very easy to steer the boat by simply shifting my weight. Heeling to starboard makes the boat go to port, and vice-versa.

I got the tiller in the "sweet spot" and looked at my watch. I really enjoy "Lean Steering" especially since in my Melonseed you either sit on the floor or on the gunnel. Standing up gives my back and butt a

break. The wind didn't shift and the channel didn't either. It was a full hour by the time I reached camp two. I had gone one hour without ever touching the tiller!

The Lower Laguna Madre and the Upper Laguna Madre are connected by a stretch of Intracoastal Waterway that was dredged sometime around 1943. The King Ranch is on the west side and there are many signs telling you to stay off. They don't play, you will go to jail. The camp itself is on the East side of the Intracoastal, affectionately known as "The Ditch".

The Texas 200 Website describes the camping area as "Make sure your shoes are tied on good and tight before you step off your boat, and keep one hand on your boat as you do so. This is some of the thickest, deepest, foulest-smelling, shoe-eating, child-swallowing, fall-down-and-never-get-up-again mud on the Texas coast". The description is not off base. You sink past your ankles and it stinks.

The channel is narrow and there's barge traffic. Everyone beaches along the bank. Tents are set up, cold beers opened and tall tales told. Eventually the sun sets and we retreat to our sleeping accommodations. At 2AM everyone was awakened by the sound of a loud tugboat pushing several barges towards Brownsville. I'm glad it happened at 0200 instead of 0400 because I was able to go back to sleep!



Day Three

"Texas Coastal Explorer Day." Starting off from Camp Two in the Land Cut to an area where there are several good spots to camp in a 7 mile stretch. I've seen pictures from other Texas 200 posts of "The Dunes" which are a couple miles north of the Baffin Bay where white sand from the Gulf beach is blown across the barrier island (Padre Island National Seashore) to the west side and piles up about 20 or 25 feet high. A beautiful place to camp.

That was my destination. About 40 miles of sailing. We all set off that morning. I left a little before Ziggy but I could see his sail behind me. I got the ole tiller in the sweet spot and started the count. I was going over 7 mph while lean-steering and wanted to break my record made the previous day.

I must have sailed through feeding speckled trout 20 times that were making shrimp jump out of the water for the seagulls to grab on the surface. I managed to sail an Hour and forty five minutes that day without ever touching the tiller.

I could've gone farther, but that's where the Land Cut opened into Baffin Bay. I had to laugh when I saw that Mitch Longtin was "Lean Steering" after seeing me do it the day before. He actually thanked me for showing him that trick!

Once out in the open water, I had "More wind than I needed" and tried to furl the jib and experienced the same problem with the jib not furling, but this time it was a 2 minute sail into shallow water where I jumped out in 3 feet of water and untied the jib halyard, stowed the jib and tied it down without anything breaking.

Eric Dalkhamp was taking a break on a spoil island a hundred yards or so from me so I sailed over to him and he held my boat while I secured my quick rigging. The ICW is a 12' channel in the otherwise shallow bay and the spoil islands on the east side were blocking the waves from the bay.

I hugged the spoils to stay out of the rough water for the most part. It was a welcome site after a few more miles to see the white areas on shoreline in the distance which were "The Dunes". I worked my way toward the shoreline a few miles before the dunes where the water was clear.

There were big grass-flats along the shore extending a couple hundred yards out. On three separate occasions I witnessed coyotes walking along the beach foraging. One of them was running along in 5 or 6 inches of water hunting mullets.

The Dunes are really something to see. A special place. Lots of wildlife, even scallops! We ate a few right out of the water. We all had to take pictures. The day wound down and after picture taking, swimming, and visiting it was again time to eat and go to bed.



Day Four

Destination: Quarantine Shore. We all looked forward to stopping at Snoopy's Pier near Corpus Christi for Beer, Burgers and Fellowship. The day started with relatively light air and I chose to stay along the shoreline and only go to the ICW when the shallows got too shallow.

Beautiful sailing with clear water. There were boats ahead of me starting their day that had camped at Bird Island Basin the night before and you could see the rest of the gang in the Intracoastal a couple miles to the west of us.

I would often hug the grass lines looking for fish etc. I thought I saw a turtle but it was one of the "rocks" that Baffin Bay is known for. These "rocks" are actually secretions from Serpulid worms. They have taken the lives of countless outboard motors' lower units. Wikipedia says that formation of these rocks began about 3,000 years ago and ended about 300 years ago. I **definitely** did not want my fiberglass over wood boat to come into contact with one of them!

Once I was forced to enter the ICW it was much better sailing than I thought it would be. The bay is very shallow on both sides and waves simply do not build up. When I was two hours from Snoopy's, I called my retired railroad friend Chester who lives 20 minutes away and put our plan into action. The plan? Chester and his wife Vilma met us at Snoopy's for burgers and beer while also delivering a case of beer and 4 bags of ice!

This plan was one to repeat in the future because I was the only sailor for the next two nights with cold beer! After the break it was time to head to the next camp.

I hadn't sailed more than a mile from Snoopy's when I sailed right next to tailing redfish! So Cool! The wind was once again "more than I needed" and roughed up the water. I decided to hug the east shoreline of Corpus Christi Bay, however that meant my route would be safer but a little longer.

At the end of the bay a right turn at Stingray Hole puts you into the Corpus Ship Channel through Port Aransas dodging ships, tugs with barges, offshore fishing boats, pilot boats and ferries going back and forth across the ship channel to Port Aransas....Fun and Games!



Once again I got through that and "I Didn't Die." The rest of the trip was a nice sail. The destination was Quarantine Shore but a couple of guys said that Mud Island was a better place to camp so that's where we went. It was really cool. It had lots of seashells and we were protected from the wind. Once it got dark we were enjoying some adult refreshments and turned on our pretty nav lights and boat tent lights while we took pictures.

I got a phone call from Will Robertson. He and his sister Jennifer were sailing in the dark trying to find camp and saw our lights. He called to confirm that what he saw was us. He was glad we had our lights on! He told us he was late because he was having too much fun at Snoopy's and stayed there too long. I bet he doesn't do that again. Once again I slept like a baby in my boat at anchor in a foot of water with a good breeze and gentle rocking.



Day Five

Destination: Army Hole. I've been there several times, great camp, but a long way from Mud Island. The wind was light that morning and I again opted to stay in the shallow water. There are several lines of oyster reefs going across Aransas Bay, Carlos Bay and Mesquite Bay so it was going to be a challenge.

Ziggy doesn't like to play around with shallow water since he doesn't have a retractable keel and I understand. I wanted to **navigate**. The wind stayed light so I was able to slowly approach the first reef near Paul's Mott and size it up. There was about 15 inches of water over the oysters ahead of me. I lifted my centerboard and went right across it.

I went a couple more miles and still with very light air I approached the next line of reefs. Spaulding Reef, where I saw oyster shells sticking 3 and 4 inches out of the water... I got out the old push pole and started feeling my way around and I was able to see a little current meandering between reefs and wound up finding a two foot deep channel! I marked it on my GPS and got through without ever touching bottom.

After that reef the next one was Cedar Reef. The wind began to pick up which create unfavorable conditions for picking your way through an oyster reef so I headed west to Cedar Dugout. There I met up with David Brown, Jerry Veglia, Will Kopf and a couple other Tandem Islands sailors.

I worked my way to Ayers Dugout channel and decided it was the perfect place for sharing cold beer and taking a much needed break. Matt Schiemer caught up with us there and that was the first time we had met. The cold Yuengling hit the spot! I now have a new waypoint in my GPS called Ayres BeerSpot and I think Matt should add it as a Suggested stop. The wind increased and we headed towards Army Hole.



The Windrider 17s and I went to Steamboat Pass and the three Tandem Islands and Matt went towards Hidden Pass. In hindsight I would have made a better choice to go with the Tandem Islands.

It was very rough and even before reaching Steamboat I had to stop and use the bilge pump since I had taken on so much water. Once I got through Steamboat it was so rough I wound up tacking back to the shoreline on the north side of Hidden Pass to get out of the rough.

Along the shoreline the conditions were fantastic. Close hauled into 20mph winds I was flying behind the shoreline with low waves and plenty of wind. What more can a sailor ask for?

When I made it to Army Hole my Trip Odometer for the day registered 52.1 miles. A personal record. 88 boats began the trip and only 21 boats made the last camp, and I was one of them! One day to go.

Day Six

Destination: Maggie Beach, BBQ, and Cold Beer. The wind forecast for the morning was accurate. Almost no wind. Started out early, Matt and I sailed within feet of each other for over an hour then I took off. The wind was very light and pretty much on the nose and there was an incoming tide which, of course, was against us.



I headed for Big Bayou. I had to paddle to maintain momentum several times anticipating a puff of wind. If you allow the boat to stop and you get a little puff it blows you sideways, not forward. Keeping the momentum makes a huge difference.

Going against the wind and the tide in Big Bayou meant quite a bit of paddling but I managed it. I rounded the corner with the Little Jetties in sight still in light air. About a mile north of there the wind once again picked up, water got rough and I was beginning to wonder if I would capsize within sight of the finish. Once again, "I Didn't Die!" I reached Maggie Beach at 2pm for the BBQ which was scheduled to be ready at 3pm, Perfect!

A little more than a week later I still wake up every morning wishing I was hoisting sail for another day. Can't wait till next year!

