

## Home from the Sea

The Texas 200 was quite an adventure but I really needed a second reef. Winds were strong every day. Day two, in the Land Cut, started out with gentle breezes but strong enough by the time we got to Corpus Christi Bay to cause some boats trouble.

I have a few stories to tell about the 200 and I gained much from my experiences, but might as well start with the zinger.

On day 2, Land Cut to Padre Island Yacht Club, I had the trip's videographer on board. Coming up on Sting Ray Hole I heard a request on the VHF for help from anyone with a motor. A Cartopper (11 foot Bolger design) was capsized.



Finding the boat was a challenge. All we saw from a distance was a little dot popping up now and then. When we got close, videographer Kevin didn't say a word and just dove in to assist. God bless him for that.

Motoring at a knot or two into the waves wasn't fun. I had water over the bow a couple of times. Not a splash, but water flowing over the bow - sure made me think about that hawsepipe. While Kevin helped the owner right the Cartopper I

alternately motored upwind and drifted downwind, idling in reverse to slow my progress.

My thinking could have been much better - I just couldn't figure what I could do to be much help. If I'd anchored I don't think the anchor would held and getting back to the boat would have hellish. The Cartopper ended up drifting about a mile before Kevin and the owner had the boat upright and the owner back aboard. I would not have been able to swim or row my dinghy a mile in those conditions. On the other hand, letting my boat blow up on a mud flat wouldn't be much of a price to pay for preventing injuries - or worse.

Having no better ideas, I orbited the capsized boat as Kevin and the owner struggled.

The Cartopper was dismantled and her sail and mast were lost. I knew that much, but communicating with Kevin or the owner wasn't easy. Not knowing what was going to happen next I called the Coast Guard and requested assistance.

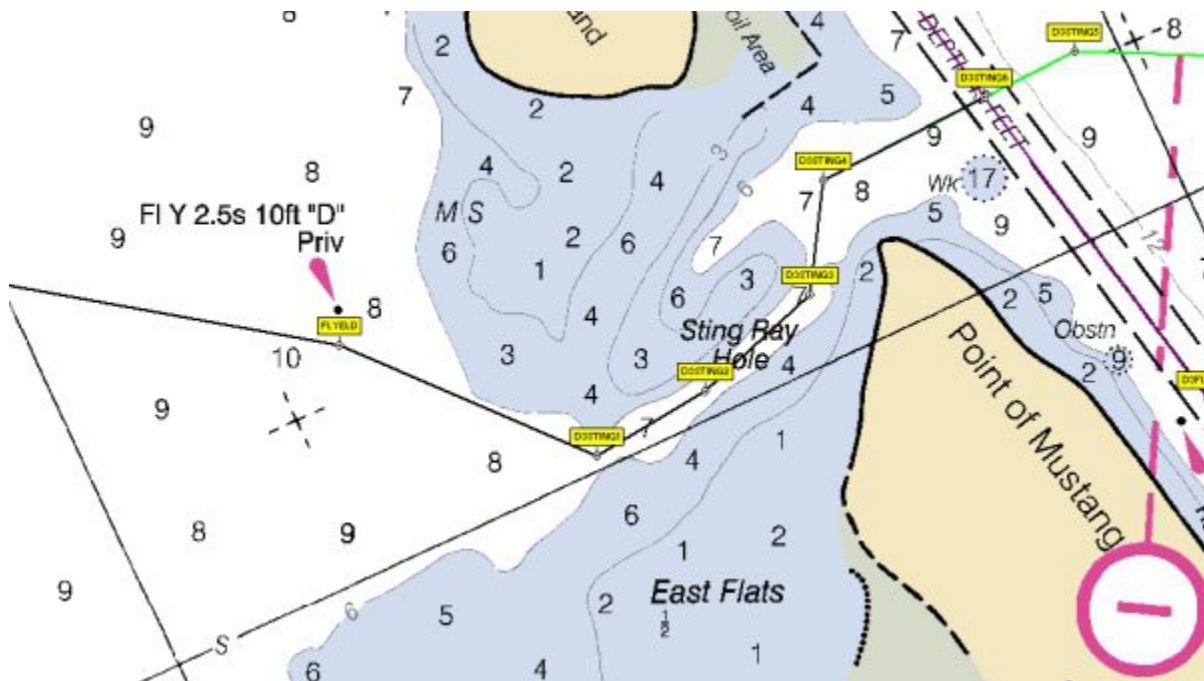
Kevin and the owner got the boat righted soon after that and I drug a pfd on the end of about 120 feet of line to windward of them. There must have been some sort of bailer on the boat because they were able to get water out quicker under tow.

In just a few minutes, though, they cast off the tow line. Later I found out they had tried to stop on a sand bar. At the time I was concerned the Cartopper might have had further problems. Structural, or stability, something.

After drifting through most of Sting Ray Hole, Kevin and the owner had the boat bailed and the owner back aboard. As I got close up to the Cartopper, all I could think of was how to get dry land under that guy's feet, risking the shortest tow possible.

Understandably, he wanted a tow to the next camp at Paul's Mott, probably 30 miles distant and across Aransas Bay. Forgive me, but I declined, I just wanted dry land, any dry land, under that guy's feet.

I told him I was dropping out of the 200, my intention at the time, so he asked me to get him on to Mustang Point. Here's the area:



The Cartopper capsized somewhere around the left edge of that graphic, drifting to the right through Sting Ray Hole.

Mustang Point sounded good to me - it was dry land, it was a hundred yards away or so, and there were boats beached there. I towed him over the edge of the East Flats and cast him off where he was sure to be caught by land.

About that time Boat US showed up and I directed him to the Cartopper. I left the Cartopper to the Boat US tow and the other Texas 200 boats on Mustang Point. I'm not happy with myself for leaving. He had Boat US and other boaters, but I should have stayed.

My call to the Coast Guard was considered premature by some. From my view there weren't any other Texas 200 boats around, not on the water, and the boats on Mustang Point would have had trouble getting to windward to provide assistance. In the same circumstances and the same steep chop I would make the same call.

Where the Cartopper was finally righted and bailed was about a quarter mile from the Corpus Christi Ship Channel.

Things took a turn for the better, though, because among the boats on Mustang Point were the redoubtable Puddle Duckers. From their spares they selected a good spar and from spare tarp material they jury-rigged the Cartopper. The Cartopper made it the rest of the Texas 200 under sail.

Puddle Ducks are tough little prams and they were manned by some really resourceful sailors. Hats off to them, and that wasn't the only rescue they

performed. The Potter 15 Tetra was lost - it's a story I have no firsthand knowledge of but once again the Puddle Duckers were there and raised the boat.

Anyway, at that point I was determined to retire from the Texas 200. If I ran into further trouble I didn't want to explain to the Coast Guard why I stayed out on the water with good evidence it wasn't a good sailing day.

Friends of the family live in Rockport and I figured I could find assistance there, just a few miles down the ICW from Sting Ray Hole.

A couple of miles towards Rockport I heard a boat frantically calling for the Coast Guard. One of the Texas 200 boats had washed up on Shamrock Island without any crew.

The Coast Guard wasn't responding, so I offered to relay the message. I used a felt tip pen to write the coordinates on the leg of my blue jeans and relayed the position to the Coast Guard.

Controversy number two - Boat US heard the coordinates, zipped over and grabbed the boat, and I heard there was a hefty salvage bill once the skipper was recovered. When I called the Coast Guard for the Cartopper I figured I wouldn't run from any costs involved. Relaying somebody else's message it didn't occur to me I might dig into somebody's billfold - there was someone potentially at risk for his life and I was better than an hour distant.

I sympathize with the cost but in the same situation I would also relay the message, or I would originate the call if I found a boat drifting without crew.

The missing skipper was found somewhere near Shamrock Island by Caprice, Chuck's boat. God bless Chuck for that. Counting the jog through Sting Ray Hole I was six miles from where the boat was found and who knows how far from that skipper floating in the bay.

For an hour I kept getting calls from the Coast Guard, both by VHF and by cell phone. At one point it sounded like they were going to consider the incident resolved because they recovered a survivor from somewhere floating into Port Aransas Harbor. I explained that was probably 10 miles downwind of where the boat was found, around islands and land, and that the missing skipper just about had to be upwind of the boat. Finally I heard a Coast Guard helicopter talk to Caprice and was convinced the missing skipper was safe. Poorer by a hefty salvor's fee, but safe.

Finally I got a call from the Coast Guard that indicated from their perspective my actions were all appropriate.

Everybody was safe, the Coast Guard wasn't mad at anyone, so I decided to get ice at Rockport and then on to Paul's Mott.

Aransas Bay decided otherwise. Small craft advisories were out, I think, and sailing to the edge of the bay was enough fun for me. Videographer Kevin and I spent the night at Rockport and then made the 46 nautical miles to Army Hole on Matagorda Island, catching the Texas 200 fleet.

After landing at Army Hole a dot appeared on the bay - the Cartopper, toiling to windward on his jury-rig. I told Chuck I wanted to go out and offer a tow, and Chuck hopped on my boat with me. When we got to the Cartopper I offered a line, saying I'd like the chance to gain back a little of my lost karma from my earlier reluctance, and we motored back at a gentle 2 knots.

Conclusions, so far? I was right calling the Coast Guard and I wouldn't refuse to relay a weak signal. No choices there. However, singlehandedly a heavy boat means it's hard to be much help in choppy water. If it hadn't been for videographer Kevin I would have helped but it would have been difficult to provide for my boat. Anchor, hope for the best, and figure out a ride back is about the only thing I can think of, and that would have ended any radio communication with rescue.

I will be much better mentally prepared for emergencies before I go on another Texas 200. The 200 is excellent fun, but you embark on five days of sailing. If you don't keep going, you're not with the group. Next year I'll have a two day buffer so I can linger with others or sail my own alternates without any pressure of keeping to a schedule.

I'm not going to take our Horizon Cat again, either. She's a lovely boat, but I want something lighter and much shallower draft. I also won't take a boat I can't sail in 25 knots. With a second reef 25 knots would be survivable in the Horizon Cat but the weight is a factor. I'm prepared to be corrected, but 2500 pounds slammed by a wave is just more stress than 800 pounds slammed by the same wave.

A light, tough boat with all gear secure, with plenty of reserve floatation, and capable of self-rescue will fit the bill - perhaps the Core Sound hidden in that pile of plywood in my garage. I have mused from time to time about taking our Picnic Cat to gain lighter weight and much shallower draft - that won't happen. Maybe if someone put a gun to my head, but I'd still be thinking that bullet would be less unpleasant than some of what awaits on those bays in a blow.

Some mental exercises to keep thinking and respond better to others in trouble is the least I can do. My goal this year was not to require assistance and to be able to provide help, and I could have done much better in the 'provide help' part of that.

Best wishes to those whose voyages brought foul fortune, particularly to the foundered Tetra and her skipper, and to the Sea Pearl damaged on Day One.

Carl Haddick