

## The 2016 Texas 200

By: Skip Johnson

Slightly bittersweet. The slight bitter taste was from not having my 25' wingsailed proa schooner, Nomad, ready for the event. John Wright and I had worked on the boat on and off over a period of time but the Taxday and Memorial day floods thru my creek side residence outside Houston guaranteed the boat wouldn't be ready for the 200. There was a lot of sweetness to follow. John volunteered to take me on as crew in his 24' arc bottom sharpie, 40 Grit. Our membership fees, bus ride and room reservations were already made and I agreed on the condition that we tried his boat out with the extra load of me and my gear. Our regular testing venue Lake Somerville was closed due to high water, 20+extra feet at the time, so we met at Lake Fayette and a short sail established that the boat could handle over double the weight of John's Everglade Challenge trip with ease.

On to Port Isabel. The only item of note is we decided to check at Walmart to see if they had some backpacking tents that we could use in the boat as it was going to be dicey to get our two 2man tents in the boat size wise. No suitable backpacker tents but they had some 6'x4' children's tents for \$18+ that looked like they would work. Worked nicely, squeezed in slightly by the gunnels, tents stretched out a little over 6' and were very well worth the price. At Hap's Cut pitched on the ground under the trees away from the mud the nominal 6' long tent meant that you slept on a slight diagonal.

A few words about the boat. 40 Grit, designed and built by John, is a 24' arc bottomed sharpie, could just as easily be called a sailing canoe, bottoms not much over 3' wide if that with just a touch of flare in the sides and minimal rocker. Twin leeboards and kickup rudder are from repurposed Hobie rudders and worked well. Steering is via a continuous line around the boat and can be steered from anywhere in the boat. Construction is fairly minimalist and surely can't weigh more 200# or so rigged. Sail was a balanced lug of about 75 square feet with two reef points. I had brought some scrap 3 and 5 mm spectra that hadn't been washed away in the flood(s) for halyard and downhaul. John had a kayak style seat on a regular boat cushion and I ended up setting on my folded thermarest pad partially inflated. My gear primarily under the front deck, wedged in with at hand stuff tied to the spaced gunnels primarily in two zippered mesh bags. Pump up sprayer aka emergency water supply serves as a backrest. Central compartment carried water, most of Johns' stuff and mast support. More water and misc stuff under rear deck. The boat is a superb shallow water craft and can handle rougher water well rarely taking any water over the deck in spite of being quite shallow. It's only real drawback (besides crew) is being slightly under canvassed in light winds.

One last comment before a day to day exposition, it would be nice if someone set up a time lapse camera at the exit from the harbor to catch a short stop motion video of all the boats leaving Monday morning.

The only problems the first day were with yours truly, the crew. I had torched (literally) my venerable Delorme GPS and had decided to rely on my waterproof phone with a GPS app. Bad idea, besides eating

battery life, I couldn't see the blasted screen in bright daylight. After about 10 miles I switched to John's Garmin GPSmap78 which didn't eat electricity and you could see the screen. Totally unfamiliar with Garmin products I did manage to get a waypoint set at the Mansfield Channel at the point we had planned to come between the spoil islands just out of the real shallows. Missed it by just a little bit and we ended up drifting/poling/sliding across some 3" deep shallows to the wrong side of the spoil island. Previous to that we had been flying along in 8" to 3' deep water at 7-11 mph, great fun. Once out of the shallows, the cut between the spoil islands had a fair current running and we anchored for a few minutes to assess our situation and plan our next moves. Anchor up and bear off we are in the channel and headed for the jetties with the wind clocking around to the East. John keeps us footing up the channel but finally has to tack a couple of times and we pull up on the weather shore next to John and Rosa Goodman in Haps Cut to decide what to do. What we decide to do is accept the Goodman's offer to tow us the last bit to Camp 1. Camp 1 our only mistake is having only one anchor. An attempt at sleeping with the boat pulled up parallel to shore where passing boat wakes rocks the boat around is not repeated.

Second day is one of those sweet ones. John takes us down the cut until he is comfortable that we are past the oyster reefs and turn north. We run or fly as the case may be through the shallows in the lee of Padre Island. John wants to enter the land cut between the last spoil island and Padre Island and this time I get it right. Once in the land cut we catch and pass a Hobie Island Tandem before John decides it is time to reef. Once reefed, we make it on into Haps Cut for Camp2.

Day three the wind is a little Easterly and John decides to continue up the cut rather than mosey along the shallows to the East. Coming out of the cut we pass the point where I turned and headed for Yarborough Pass during the 2011 event in my 14' EasyB canoe, never again. Once again turn and angle for the shallows, a nice smooth sail. Arrive at Camp 3 co-ordinates, a few boats are already there. But it is shallow in all directions and any boat drawing more than 8" or so is going to be anchored way out. John and I decide the next point a half mile up looks more suitable with deeper water closer to shore and we head there after telling the other crews our intention. Only item of note at Camp 3 was I lost my pants. Travelling minimalist I had one change of clothes plus some camp and sleepwear. Ready to shuck 3 day old clothes I waded out chest deep to switch to a bathing suit. Thought I had stuck my arm through the pants leg of pants but was mistaken. In the also mistaken belief that my pants would always be with me it's where I kept a few dollars, drivers license and a credit card.

Day 4 John takes us about 4 miles through the shallows before easing into the channel for a straight run up to Snoopies for an early lunch date with my lovely wife Susie and her youngest sister Sarah, recently retired. Susie finds it convenient to holiday in the area when I'm on an old man adventure since there's a 50/50 chance I'll need some form of rescue (actually this trip brought it back to 50/50, had been 66/33). Nice lunch, (with ice water!). Susie offers to take Mike Mangus up to Magnolia Beach to pick up his trailer knowing she'll have plenty of time to get back and see us through under the 361 causeway at Fin and Feather. We leave Snoopies and turnout of the channel four spoil islands past the bridge and head for the lee of Mustang Island. We bump the boards just a bit then beeline for the passage between Shamrock and Mustang. Wind is moderate so John takes us straight to Stingray hole and then across the channel to Redfish bay and on to Fin and Feather. Pier is pretty shaky for an old man to walk down but

nobody goes swimming. Susie and Sarah are there and help refill our water supply and we drop the mast to go under the causeway. John would like to beach on the Eastern side of the causeway but doubts that we can make the 300 yards or so in a crosswind but it's a pretty simple paddle for an old man with a big bladed paddle. Restep the mast and on to Quarantine shore.

Day 5, light winds, sail shaken out, we don't hug the shore but take a more direct route to pass Pauls Mott and head for the cuts. No chart of the area, I had given ours to a father son team that had left that particular chart at home. We make it fine, John's memory is good and even has me steer the boat through the second cut. In turn I set a waypoint at Ayers a little too far into the cut and we approach the cut from the shallows and have to walk the boat a few feet. Camp 5 at Hidden Pass was on the next chart and we make it in good order.

Day 6 still light winds we leave camp and head more or less straight for the pass that bypasses the channel at Port O'Conner, we've both drug boats along the boulders into an easterly wind and don't relish the prospect. Light winds but we make the pass in good order and are through, into Matagorda Bay looking intently down the channel to make sure there's no barge traffic. On to Magnolia beach, our estimated arrival time varies wildly according to Mr. Garmin depending on the (very variable) intensity of the wind. We make it a little after 3:00 PM and are done.

Great trip. Lessons learned. Going with John Wright significantly increases your chance of making all camps. There's some merit in the move to have John known as 'Saint' John but after sailing with John in the lee of the barrier islands I truly believe it should be 'Shallow' Saint John. Two anchors are better than one. Enjoy the moment; there were some golden ones that week.