

“Mulsae” (almost) does the Texas 200

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Day 1, “Tackless in Trouble”

15 minutes after finally completing a laborious tack in water so shallow that the ultra-shoal Dovekie sometimes scrapes across underwater oyster clumps, I see trouble ahead. The water goes from shallow to downright Puddle Duck skinny 30' directly ahead and there is no way to tack with the stuck centerboard and raised leeboards.

There was only one thing left to do ... jump overboard!

It is the first day of the 2016 Texas 200, a 200'ish mile long multi-day sailing and camping trip starting from Port Isabel and sailing up the Texas coast to eventually end at Magnolia Beach. In between lies hundreds of miles of the Laguna Madre, bays, ports, bayous, passes, mud, sand and seashell beaches, and of course the Intercoastal Waterway with its barges, fishing boats, huge container ships, and ferries.

Over 50 boats and 100 sailors launched this hot Monday morning to embark upon 6 days of sailing, rowing, and motoring from camp to camp through oftentimes untouched and uninhabited waterways. A huge variety of boats from small home-built wooden boats to 25'+ production boats, from Hobie Al/TIs trimarans to a 30' wooden schooner, and everything else in between and then some is in the fleet. There is even two sail-less row boats this year!

There was zero Puddle Duck Racers this year though. The diminutive 8' x 4' scow sailboats may be able to sail over 3" of water, but sailing one 200+ miles requires a certain amount of insanity and apparently everyone passed the sanity check this year.

I'm sailing “Mulsae” (Korean for water bird), a 21' 5" Dovekie ultra-shoal unballasted boat by notable designer Phil Bolger and produced in the late 70s and 80s. Three weeks before, I drove to Pennsylvania to pick up the boat in an 1800 mile round trip. This is the first day actually sailing the boat since purchasing it and it has been ... umm ... interesting in the 25+ mph wind gusts.

The morning starts out mild but the wind quickly builds. Thirty minutes after leaving port saw Mulsae swinging wildly back and forth from her anchor just outside of the Inter-coastal Waterway (ICW) while her captain (me) struggles to install the first reef. The task was even more difficult since said captain had never actually reefed the boat's sail before now. The result was a somewhat sloppy reef, bruises, and exhausted relief. In spite of zero reefing practice beforehand, it gets done and the boat is back under weigh.

As the sun rises higher in the sky, so does the wind. Typical for south Texas summer, it is not uncommon to start a day with a mild south to southeasterly breeze that ramps up to a windy 20+ miles per hour by the afternoon. As the boat heels a little more with each passing hour, I watch the speed creep up on the gps. 5 mph ... 6 mph ... touching 7 mph ... almost 8 mph ... the boat heeling is getting uncomfortable and the weather helm induced tiller pressure makes my arm ache. Suddenly the boat is hit with a heavy gust, heels way over, and rounds up into the wind!

It takes a moment for the panic to wear off as the luffing sail flutters loudly. Ok, looks like another reef is in order. The reefing process is just as bad as the earlier attempt with the added excitement of dragging anchor and colliding with a fishing shack leaving me even more bruised. We really need a

better way to reef!

Feeling more comfortable with the second reef in, miles slip under the boat's keel. It is around 42 miles between Port Isabel and the first camp, but there is challenges. The last 5 - 6 miles is sailed eastward through the Mansfield gulf channel close to the wind. This portion of the trip is new waters for myself never having seen nor sailed it. How shallow is the Laguna Madre close to the intercoastal island? Can the boat cut the corner and trim distance? Would be really nice to skim the island's corner into the windward shore's calmer waters.

Unfortunately, I misjudge the course and get blown past the island, past the channel, and into the very shallow waters beyond. Mulsae claws to windward against the southeast wind while barely maintaining course on too small leeboards. An hour later finds us running out of sea room as we approach the intercoastal island's shore. Time to tack!

Right. Tack. You know, turn the boat through the wind to the opposite close-hauled course. I understood and practiced the concept many many times over the years without fail. One would think that a 35 year old boat knows how to tack. But for some reason, Mulsae exhibits stubbornness and fails the tack twice. What in the heck is going on with the boat?!

Wait ... didn't the manual say something about raising the front centerboard? Right! Ok ... front centerboard up ... up ... come on, up! Gah! Darn thing is stuck down! Lashing the tiller in place, I dash crawl to the bow and yank up the centerboard before dash crawling backwards to the tiller just in time to steer the boat before it decides downwind is a much better heading.

This time the tack slowly goes off without a hitch which eventually leads to the first paragraph of this account; heading towards an oyster encrusted barely underwater spoil island.

My feet splash into 12" or so inches of water and just misses an oyster clump. Hauling and anchoring Mulsae in 8" of water just short of the spoil island, I explore for a way over it. Deeper water on the other side is a mere 25' away. Between the boat and deeper water is layers of oyster beds inches below the surface and marked by a light froth on the water. Walking over the oysters to check the depth leaves me wind milling arms for balance. Walking on oysters is like walking across a field of golf balls, except these have razor sharp edges! Indeed, two boats and crews are forced to retire on the first day for cuts and injuries requiring stiches after grounding on an oyster shoal.

Hmm ... bare sandy spot to the right 30 yards away might work. Sure enough, its ankle deep water over oyster-free hard-pack sand is barely enough water to stoutly drag Mulsae over the spoil island into the channel. Success! Got to love having a boat that only needs 5" of water to float! Phil knew his stuff designing the Dovekie. The boat is perfectly suited for extreme shallow water sailing and camping.

An hour later I finally motor into camp as the second to last boat to make the Mansfield Jetties. Even the rowboats beat me. It wasn't for trying through, but fetching up on the channel's lee shore after two more failed tacks and nearly losing the boat trying to relaunch it solo slowed the final leg down even further. All in all, the entire first day is an exceptionally exhausting sail.

Setting the anchor to keep Mulsae's bow grounded to shore, I wander through the 30+ boats beached and anchored at camp. The boat variety is stunning with literally no two exactly alike. Even the handful

of similar designs sport captain driven modifications and preferences. We marvel at the two rowboats, a single and a double, and wonder if they will complete the entire 200 mile trip through very challenging winds and waves, 90+ degree temperatures, sky high humidity, and the sheer fact of pulling oars tens of thousands of times over the next 5 days.

Then there are the absent boats failing to make the camp. Some divert to Port Mansfield to avoid the long beat up the channel into the wind. Others fall victim to mechanical failures and/or injuries. Approximately 20% of the boats launched Monday morning withdraw on the first day for one reason or another. Chances are good that there will be more.

The tough day leaves me with a dehydration and stress induced migraine. After making the rounds for brief chats with skippers and crews, I return to the boat, skip eating (not hungry), and fortify with another bottled water. Setting up the cockpit's canvas porch tent, I crash in the boat while the sun is still above the horizon and sleep through most of the night. Just after 4 am, the camp and I are woken up by a wake wave from a passing big ship. The wave was big enough to throw Mulsae sideways against shore and reportedly partially swamp another boat. Mulsae even takes a small splash over the rail! Still tired, I fall quickly asleep again to the sight of open starry sky seen through open hatch. After all, we have more sailing to do on the 'morrow.

Day 2, "Even Puddle Ducks are faster!"

A mild breeze greets us in the pre-dawn sky as the sounds of waves washing the nearby gulf shoreline serenade the sleepy boats and crews at camp. It is interesting that I wake early enough to experience this tranquil scene. Not a morning person, I usually sleep in late at home. Yet for some reason on every sail camp trip I've been in, the pre-dawn sky banishes my slumber.

Digging into the food box reveals breakfast for this trip; a yellow pound cake to go along with an ice cooled breakfast drink. This is a typical style breakfast for me every day. Nothing heavy and just enough calories to get moving. Not to mention preparation involves no cooking at all!

Looking about while kicked back on Mulsae's bench seats and enjoying the morning coolness before the day's blistering heat later, I notice activity on a couple other boats nearby. Today is a relatively long sail of around 38 miles so there are a few captains looking to get an early start. Indeed, even as the pound cake disappears, a homebuilt wooden boat glides slowly and silently past with white sails raised and catching the very light wind. The boat's bow sends small ripples out across the nearly flat channel water.

Breakfast done, cockpit tent stowed, and boat tidied up, I pause before raising sail. With the reefing difficulties yesterday maybe it would be best to put the third reef in now so I wouldn't have to do it later on the water. This afternoon is slated to be as windy as yesterday. The idea appeals, so it is done. The anchor comes up easily with enough momentum to send the Dovekie out into the channel. The heavily reefed sail picks up just enough wind to make headway and steerage west towards Port Mansfield.

Two mph is slow but gives the captain an easy sail and plenty of time to enjoy the scenery. The Sport-a-Seat cushion is wonderfully comfortable to sit on while feet are lazily propped up on the opposite side's

bench seat. The sky brightens as the sun crests the horizon to grace all creatures on earth with a new day. And so it goes for the next hour and a half. The plan is to cut the corner to starboard just after the last right-side spoil island, but for some reason the GPS won't turn on and I well overshoot the mark to sail into the open Laguna Madre. Once past the southern islands marking the channel, the freshening wind-driven waves start working on the boat. Taken as a cue to start heading downwind, we turn to starboard, angling northerly to rejoin the ICW.

In the meantime, a parade of boats sail, motor, and row on by. With three reefs in and nearly everyone else with full sails raised, I poke along at around 2 – 3 mph while other boats practically zoom past. Yeah, maybe a 3rd reef wasn't a good idea this morning, but surely it'll pay off this afternoon when it gets really windy ...

A benefit of getting passed by everyone is the opportunity to video each boat. If there is one thing most captains like to see, it is video of themselves sailing. It is a view captains rarely get to watch. Hopefully the videos will eventually get uploaded to my YouTube page.

The Laguna Madre is a long stretch of water. Tens of miles long. Long enough for the wind to build up 3' – 4' waves by midday. Waves that easily overtake the slow heavily-reefed wallowing Dovekie. The 3 mph average speed is so slow that the boat refuses to surf on the faster overtaking waves. Heck, even Puddle Ducks are faster and can surf these waves! I am so glad no Puddle Ducks entered this year else the humiliation of getting passed by a Duck would be mortifying!

So the Dovekie wallows in the waves tossing its captain. All I can do is brace and hold on. Taking a reef out is not an option in these conditions ... besides, that reef will come in handy later on, right?

By mid-afternoon the sides of the Laguna Madre close in towards the Land Cut, a tens of miles long channel cut across shallow water and land to connect the Laguna Madre with the more northerly bays. Only 10 miles to go till the Hap's Cut camp! Woot! The water smooths out in the protected channel. In 2014, my Dad and I had some of the trip's best sailing in the Land Cut. Smooth water and good wind usually lets boats stretch out speedily. Mulsae likes the smoother water and the now working GPS shows a refreshing 5 mph pace in a mild 10'ish knot wind.

In fact, the sailing is so nice that I cleat off the mainsheet, bungee lash the tiller in place, grab a cool bottled water, and stand up in the cockpit to watch the scenery. Now this is good sailing! To my amusement, leaning from one side of the boat to the other causes Mulsae to steer in one direction or the other. Just like others have said, it is possible to steer a boat by leaning.

Tom J's Com-Pac 16 "Tomfoolery" slowly overtakes and passes. It is an easily recognizable boat because the name is spread boldly across the sides. We enjoyably chat back and forth before they pull ahead. But not for long. The wind abruptly gusts stronger and sends me scrambling back to the tiller. Within 15 minutes Mulsae is heeling and moving out at 6 – 7 mph. Now this is why that 3rd reef is in! We quickly reel in Tomfoolery, pass by, and pull away.

But not for long. Heh. Quickly another boat overtakes us both. The blue Mariner 19 "Odisea" captained by Matt S. is flying by with a single reef in, jib flying, and standing up with wing-on-wing sailing. It is nearly obscene how relaxed they are even as I grip the tiller to keep the heeling weather-helming Mulsae under control during the windy blasts. Ah, the difference between a ballasted boat and

an un-ballasted boat! Our 2014 Texas 200 in a Holder 20 was as relaxed as Matt and crew with the Holder's 4' deep ballasted fin keel keeping the boat upright.

Odisea quickly disappears ahead. The miles pass quickly. Our 2014 land cut camp is long behind us. Once or twice the wind nearly rounds up Mulsae but we hang on until finally the trees marking Haps Cut appear. Unfamiliar with the camp, I quickly run the boat's bow up on the southern edge of the beached sailboat group. Phew! Finally! Not the last boat either. Even beat the rowboats. Puddle Ducks beware! Buahahaha!

The migraine is back again this afternoon. Perhaps it was more stress induced than dehydration as I made a point to drink more during the day. Even so, no headache keeps me from getting Mulsae anchored to shore and then wandering around exploring this new-to-me camp.

First, everything said about the legendary Hap's Cut mud is absolutely true. Sticky, soft, slippery as ... only a small handful of many words used to describe the mud. Upon beaching and jumping overboard, I nearly fall as sandaled feet skid a little before sinking into the calf deep stuff. Messy as well. Before entering the boat one has to spend a handful of minutes trying to swish wash the sticky slippery gray stuff off foot and shoes. Even so, some still makes it inside the boat.

Unseen from where I beached and around the corner in the cut itself lies docks, small shacks, and most importantly the only true shade trees in this part of Texas. The copse of trees contains a cleared shady area where the early arriver's tents are set up. There is even a picnic table. This is where I meet for the first time participants previously only known by Facebook names such as Ray W. sailing "Merlin" and his crew Painen D.

The migraine eventually drives me back to the boat, a cold bottle of hard root beer, some beef jerky, and a short nap that somehow lasts until dusk. Taking advantage of the Dovekie's perfect suitability for camping on board, I get the canvas cockpit tent put up and the Sport-a-Seat placed down flat as a bed cushion. Yeah, it is that comfortable as an impromptu bed. Leaving the hatches uncovered, I get a brief view of the darkening sky and the first glimpse of stars before sleep reclaims me.

Day 3, "Holy Round-Up Batman!"

Waking up even earlier than usual to a shade lighter than dark sky, I blearily blink sleepy eyes, note how early it is, and immediately decide to roll over and snooze in. That snooze only lasts about 15 minutes before the cell phone alarm suddenly goes off next to my head. If anyone had been watching, the next handful of minutes spent trying to open the cell phone's hard case's stubbornly tight latches while mumbling hopefully inaudible curses may have seemed comedic. That alarm sounds awfully loud, but afterwards seems like no one else heard it.

May as well get up. The sky is still pre-dawn yet light enough to see shore and boat activity. I give the guy just crawling out of his shore-line tent 25' away a cheery good morning, because no matter how sleepy and disoriented a person might be, a cheery good morning is a great way to start a morning on a good note. His reply might not have been quite as enthusiastic.

The rowboats are already on the water getting a head start to the day. Even though today is a relatively short 25 miles to the next camp, we have to pass through Baffin Bay on the way. Good chances they also wanted to put distance in during the very light morning wind. Using the knowledge gained by last year's successful rower's trip, the two boats and three men look to have a solid plan to not only complete the entire trip but to make all the camps at the same time everyone else does. It will take some doing to row 200+ miles in only 6 days!

Getting Mulsae straightened out and ready to sail, I pause at raising the sail. Like yesterday morning, I contemplate what reef to use to avoid having to reef on the water. While the wind today is supposed to be the highest of the week projected into the high 20s, the lesson learned yesterday was a slow boat and big waves did not make for a good sail. In spite of the wind projection, I decide to go with the 2nd reef instead of the 3rd reef. Hopefully the short trip and higher boat speed will get us to the Bird Island camp by noon to avoid the stronger afternoon winds.

Launching from Hap's Cut is an adventure. The slippery mud and relatively quick drop off does not give much to push off from. Given a light wind parallel to the beach, a weak push, a scramble into the boat and a rush to get sheeted for steerage equals sailing hijinks galore! In this instance, I fail to clear a moored boat nearby and bounce off with a thud that wakes the owners. Sorry! Luckily, he is gracious and even helps with a good shove to get Mulsae headed out cleanly into the channel.

Embarrassment aside, I get the sail sheeted, settle into the now familiar feet up semi-reclined position at the helm, and enjoy the easy sail.

The narrowish land cut shores slowly pass, dotted by stilted fishing houses in various states of repair (or disrepair) usually depending on the owner. Some look like full blown well-kept homes with multi-stories, generators, and water catch and store tanks. Others tilt and lean half over the water, peeling weathered walls and drooping docks giving them an abandoned haunted feel.

Sometime in the past, Texas reportedly passed a law to prevent new builds as well as reverting existing structures to the state upon the private owner's death. A side story to that is a savvy owner who upon hearing about the new law went and registered his baby child as his fishing house owner days before the law went into effect, thus ensuring family ownership for another generation. Given the signs posted on some of the houses by the Texas state, I'm inclined to think the stories may be true.

A couple hours later finds the port and starboard shores receding as we enter the bay and pick up the ICW markers. Looking back over the starboard stern sees the last green island slide further behind. Ugg. More waves. Luckily, the waves remain a relatively manageable 2' – 3' due to the partially sheltered lee of the intercoastal islands. Having one less reef also helps keep the boat moving near wave speed and actually surf occasionally. This is nice sailing.

By mid-morning finds the wind rising quickly. Very quickly. By the time the GPS rings off the mark for angling out of the ICW towards camp a mere 3 miles away, the wind feels as strong as yesterday afternoon ... especially on a beam reach in an unballasted boat with only two reefs in! Mulsae heels sharply and I brace with feet upon the opposite seat. The sheet is out as far as it will go without pressing the shrouds in an attempt to spill some air. The tiller quickly loads up as weather helm

increases massively enough to require both hands to hold it. I'm horrible at guessing heeling angles, but I can see water splashes toying with the bottom edge of the port side rowing port.

This reminds me of another time sailing 3+ decades ago on a local Michigan lake. My uncle had an old fiberglass 14' day-sailor boat which was kept moored at a friend's dock. One summer day the wind was really blowing. All excited, I hoisted sail and boomed out across the water towards the best beam reach sailing spot on the lake. For the next hour, that boat and I planed back and forth with me hanging out over the sides whooping with glee and barely under control. Multiple times the boat heeled far enough to actually pull the rudder out of the water and round the boat safely up. Since the water was only 5' – 6' deep, I did not worry about a capsize. It was perhaps the most fun sailing I ever had even after capsizing at the end.

I wasn't having much fun now though. Even though the water is only around 3' – 4' deep, capsizing in a 21' boat can be serious business. Yeah, the Dovekie has enough flotation to not sink, but it is not something I want to go through in a mostly desolate area.

The GPS shows 7+ mph while waves bash against the windward side. On gusts, the boat heels even more and the speed jumps up past 8 and flirts with 9. Only a few miles to go, we can make it! Just hold on, keep holding on because land is right there! I glance back at the rudder and wince. Although the tiller is pulled to starboard, the main cassette looks to be twisting under the relentless weather helm load. Come on baby! We can make it!

Suddenly, a huge wind gust smacks the boat and throws her over to near horizontal. The oar port, blocked off with flat plexiglass and weather stripping, goes underwater and leaks water in like a broken dike. I'm frozen in panic with thoughts of death and dismemberment. Holy \$&\*#%!!

Well, ok. Maybe it happened too fast for those thoughts. But the freeze does let Mulsae round up for what seems an eternity on its side but is probably closer to 10 seconds. With sail fluttering, the boat stands up as the gust continues to batter the sail, keeping us moving along at a reduced yet good clip. After the gust abates back to the still windy normal and myself calming down, I put the boat back on course for camp. Mulsae heels, I grip the tiller hard with both hands as the boat leaps forward once again.

Looking back weeks after the event, those last three miles to Bird Island camp could have been awesome sailing. Perhaps if I had sailed the boat and gotten comfortable with its sailing characteristics, it would have been great fun like that breezy day three decades ago on a local Michigan lake ... without the capsizing ending of course.

The water smooths in the intercoastal island's lee. Mulsae stands up a little and the sailing gets less tense. Up ahead and just pulling into the camp area is "Ancient Mariner", a Mariner 19 captained by John A. and crew. Five minutes later I sail past into water too shallow for the Mariner but just fine for a Dovekie. All anchored, we talk about the camp. Oddly, the GPS coordinates are 75 yards off the shore. A few more boats arrive in the next 30 minutes to join the discussion. The general consensus is to relocate further down shore where the water is marginally deeper for the deeper draft boats. So we do, dragging Mulsae 150 yards leeward to the new camp.

By now it is only noon, still early'ish in the day although very windy. A radio call comes through; a few captains decide to skip tonight's camp and sail onward to Padre Island and possibly as far as Port Aransas. That still leaves a lot of boats to trickle in over the next couple hours with multiple stories of the morning's sail and of the 30+ mph wind driven carnage to include: a blown out sail batton, broken rudders, jammed centerboards, a catamaran with a fairly serious hull leak, and a bent mast. The afternoon hears the sounds of battery powered drills, pounding hammers, and snippets of conversation from the guys trying to straighten the bent mast on shore. Luckily, it seems everyone gets repairs made. One unrepairable item is my GPS. It will not turn on. This is not good since John A's great chart pack is sitting 900 miles away on the kitchen table. That leaves me chartless and with a decision to make: should I continue the trip and stay on the known ICW course that Dad and I did in 2014?

By this time 3 days into the Texas 200, I am exhausted, not thrilled with the Dovekie's sailing characteristics (although its camping ability is unparalleled!), suffering daily migraines, and honestly scared of taking the Dovekie solo and unsupported into the upcoming big bays. Losing GPS ability knocks out the back bays (a huge disappointment). Bottom line: I was not having fun.

Wise Everglades Challenge captains have a saying that goes something like "Get a good sleeping rest before making a final decision." It is sound advice that I completely ignore. Given that Padre Island is the best possible mid-trip place to pull out and I am not comfortable sailing Mulsae in the upcoming challenges, the decision is made to end my Texas 200 tomorrow morning.

I'm not the only one to make that decision. A Laguna 23 family decides to press on to Padre Island this afternoon and pull out. A couple other captains at camp have also decided to pull out the next morning.

With an entire afternoon to relax at camp, people drift from boat to boat starting or joining conversations on a wide variety of topics. Chuck and Sandra L. on a Loon 19 "Loonytoon" relates a side trip taken to explore a possible new camp and end up sailing wonderful miles downwind in 1' water. John B in an immaculately build CLC Pocketship "Candy-O" tells of a stuck up centerboard that seemed to hardly slow him down while passing me yesterday. The stories of Saturday Night Specials zooming downwind and one SNS's mast bending under the morning's unexpected windy onslaught. There are many other stories told as sailors enjoy the shortened day.

On into the early evening tents bloom upon shore and boats while fires are lit for dinner. My gourmet meal consists of a slice of Spam on a bread roll and an iced hard root beer afterwards. The food does not go down well and leaves me nauseous. The normal light appetite on previous sailing trips has totally disappeared the last few days. Maybe I should get better food.

Like previous nights it is to bed early. Asleep before star speckled darkness fully takes over the sky, I rest.

Day 4, "Anyone offering a ride?"

Like yesterday morning, the barely lightened sky greets my sleep filled eyes upon waking. Unlike yesterday morning, I heed the pre-dawn's call to work that every farmer hears and get up. Not that I am a farmer mind you and sailing is not work unless getting paid to do it ... and I'm not getting paid.

Poking head out of the open hatch shows no one else on shore or boat is up or moving around yet. One may figure this is the best time to kick back and enjoy the coming dawn. Yet with the prospect of a possibly long day ahead I quickly get the camp gear repacked, scarf down a yellow pound cake followed by a cold breakfast drink, and ready Mulsae for sailing.

The wind is light and with only 12'ish miles to Padre Island I don't hesitate to go with a single reef. Yeah, no reef may have been better but the ever cautious chicken part of me wins out. The water is shallow enough to drag Mulsae out beyond the other boats for a clean launch that goes off without a hitch. Shortly after, leaned back with feet kicked up, I enjoy the easy sailing through smooth yet very shallow water while angling northward towards the ICW.

We are the first boat out of this morning's camp catching both wind and the dawn's first rays in tanbark sails. 30 minutes later another set of white sails appear at camp. They are too far away to see who it is. Yet the captain must be very familiar with the area for taking a far more angled course towards the ICW. So much so that the other's sail reaches the ICW well ahead of me and slowly fades further in the distance.

The sail down the ICW is beautifully perfect. Mild wind lets me lash the tiller and stand up to admire miles of passing landscape. From behind a boat speedily catches up and passes. It is the long, lean and green Flying Scot "Watermelon" captained by Chris D. He has full sail up, even what looks like an asymmetrical spinnaker ... it's a LOT of sail and the boat flies on by.

By 9'ish AM the spoil islands have grown higher and greener, turning into natural islands as we close in on Padre Island. Homes appear to starboard amongst trees further inland as we leave the desolate uninhabited Laguna Madre behind. I keep eyes peeled for the channel leading eastward towards Padre Island Yacht Club. Never having been there nor seen it, I'm curious where it is. Yet like in the 2014 trip, I miss guessing the correct channel and the club itself. Luckily (or unluckily, depending on one's point of view) it isn't a stop this year.

A couple miles further along though is a planned stop for many Texas 200 participants; Snoopy's seafood restaurant and a nearby marina. Traditionally a good place to take a break, captains and crew can stock up on ice and stuff while enjoying a seafood plate. Some captains have actually taken impromptu showers using Snoopy's outdoor water hose! For some, myself included, it serves as a mid-trip pull out point.

The boats ahead must have bypassed Snoopys for none are moored at the dock. No surprise really since it is early yet. Around 9:40'ish AM, Mulsae's bow bumps the restaurant dock. A single soul greets me and launches into a conversation about the Dovekie. He apparently used to own a couple over time plus the Dovekie's bigger sibling, the rare 28' Shearwater. We chat back and forth while I tidy up and secure the boat.

Snoopys doesn't open until 10:30, so we keep chatting and shortly start helping newly arriving boats moor up at the dock. There is so many so quickly that I cannot remember all of them. Pretty soon I'm directing traffic, tying off deck lines, catching boats without working motors, and generally having fun helping out. Heh. Snoopys finally opens and the boating horde descends upon the restaurant. Like the

2014 trip, I get and enjoy a wonderfully delicious 3-piece fish plate washed down with copious amounts of sweetened tea. Funny enough, my long lost appetite seems to have returned with a vengeance!

At the table next to mine sits Skip J and John W along with spouses Sarah and Susie. A stroke of luck because they offer a ride to Magnolia Beach to pick up my truck! After the meal with Skip and John on the water again, Susie and Sarah and I get on the road. What a great trip in itself! The two wonderful women chat the entire way, all of us laughing and enjoying the ride.

While waiting for the Port Aransas ferry, we spy a TX 200 boat playing water Frogger with the ferries. Wow! He is quick to be here already! Must be one of the boats that bypassed the Bird Island camp yesterday.

By 2 PM, we bid each other farewell at JT's One Stop at Magnolia Beach. The ladies are off to try to catch their husbands crossing Redfish Bay in Port A. Meanwhile, I'm off back to Port A and Snoopys to pick up Mulsae.

After arriving back around 4 PM, I notice a familiar sailboat still docked at Snoopys. Which is odd since this late in the day everyone should be well on down the route or even pulling into the night's camp at Quarantine Shore. Finding the captain and crew (Father and son?), I find out they suffered a broken forestay not far out in Corpus Christie Bay, did a temporary on-the-water fix, and epically sailed upwind back to Snoopys. They were waiting for a taxi, so to save them time and money I offer a ride back to Maggy Beach.

Originally, I was going to stay in Port A for the night after loading up Mulsae. Yet there was no way I could not help out a fellow TX200 captain. Especially after receiving a ride earlier from Sarah and Susie! So we got the Dovekie loaded and headed back to Maggy Beach where I dropped the father off at JTs for his vehicle.

Given no rooms left in Maggy Beach, I head to the nearby town of Port Lavaca and track down a reasonably priced motel near the beach. After a hearty pizza meal and some reading, I crash to sleep in air conditioned comfort that takes some of the sting out of withdrawing early from the Texas 200.

Day 5, "Historically Epic"

Ah, the chance to sleep in late! So nice ... air conditioned ... er ... wait ... darn its cold ... and the sun peeking in through the curtains brightening the room. Not to mention a bit of hydraulic pressure I'm feeling. Bleah, may as well get up!

With the morning "chores" taken care of, I open the door to a brilliantly lit seaside view that promises the usual Texas heat later on. Given a full day before tomorrow's finale on Maggy Beach, I figure a trip back to Port Aransas is in order, this time to visit a boat far older than I; the USS Lexington, a WW2 carrier turned museum ship.

Over the decades, I have been fortunate to tour or visit most of the existing historical USA ships across

America. From the USS North Carolina and USS Alabama, to the mighty USS Missouri and the Arizona memorial. There is a few to see yet though and this is a golden opportunity to check the Lex off the list.

The self-guided tour is fantastic with well-done displays, historical facts, an incredible media driven presentation on the Pearl Harbor attack, plus rooms dedicated to other WW2 ships and the brave men manning them. All throughout I record hours of video documentation for another of the many hobbies I do; Model Warship Combat.

Halfway through the tour the phone dings a message. Turns out Gordo is inviting me to go out for dinner. Sounds like a plan and something to do tonight! I agree and we set a meetup time later.

Heading back in the late afternoon, I reflect with satisfaction on taking the trip to see the ship. For some reason seeing history at places and objects makes it more real to me. Knowing that I am standing where history took place, seeing things that was seen back then, fills the imagination and makes one wonder what it was like to be there. A great example is the Arizona memorial park in Hawaii where tables placed about the park point out significant Pearl Harbor attack events. After reading the history, a person can look up and see where a ship was moored and what direction the torpedo planes swooped in. The historical information and vista makes it easy to visualize the event.

I get the same feeling when visiting various old forts and lighthouses such as the civil war era Fort Sumter in Charleston, South Carolina. Fort Massachusetts on Mississippi's West Ship barrier island is another To Do listed place to visit.

After getting cleaned up at the hotel it's back to Maggy Beach to visit Gordo. He and his wife are RV'ing it in a local RV park. Very cool! RV'ing and taking trips is another thing our family likes to do. We've done epic trips to include California (north for the redwoods, south for Disney), Yellowstone national park, Lake Tahoe, Vegas, Reno, and a few cross USA trips in between military assignments. Yeah, it's a slower trip but we see way more than anyone flying thousands of feet above ground!

We chat for a while and find we have a good bit in common. So much so that we actually don't get to talk about it all before it is time to head out for dinner. Apparently there is a small local marina in nearby Indianola with a reportedly good grill. A short drive later we meet up with a few more TX200 participants (sorry, but I forget names). Even from the parking lot we can hear the dockside music. Inside, the marina store is tiny. They take our order (steak!) at the checkout counter and we head out the back to the dock ... to be blasted with a great sounding but VERY LOUD live band. It is so loud that even while shouting it's hard to hear the person next to you! We move to another table at the dock's other end which helps a little ... at least we will go deaf slower.

The food lives up to the favorable reputation. While loud, the band is pretty good. People fish off the electric lit dock into darkened nighttime water. The place is literally packed with people. All in all a good time by everyone on a Friday night.

After dropping off Gordo and saying goodnight, I head back to Port Lavaca and the hotel. It was a good day, even if not spent on the water with the Texas 200 sailors still on the trip. We will all meet up tomorrow on Magnolia Beach for the finish and celebratory shrimp boil. Until then ... a soft bed ... air

conditioning ... zzzzzzz ...

## Day 6, "All Good Things"

Checking out of the motel at 9 AM is refreshing. Not having to worry about being someplace by a certain time makes trip planning incredibly easy. Not to mention being able to sleep in a little. Heh.

A couple hours later finds me at Maggy Beach searching for our pavilion. Interestingly, we are in the first one instead of the middle like 2014. Pro: next to the parking lot. Con: gotta walk to the bathrooms.

Gordo and a few others are already there. Greeting everyone, I wander off to see and video the beach last seen in 2014 when Dad and I finished a day early. The beach is pretty much the same as then. A guy zips around on a PWC (personal watercraft) just off the beach. Families enjoy the water and beach. The sun is bright and day is warm with little wind.

Hmm ... not a lot of wind at all. What little there is seems to be coming from the North straight into the faces of our sailors. That may make a longer day than usual.

Over the next few hours, reports trickle in from the boats. Odisea left came at 4:30 am in very light wind ... a handful of boats stopping last night in the ICW to shorten the trip to Magnolia Beach today ... perhaps a Saturday Night Special sailing in the darkness watching glowing phospherant wake and dodging those little flying fish popping out all around them ...

Sometime midday sees boats starting to trickle in. Not sailing though. The few with motors put them to good use. Luckily for those without motors, the wind shifts to the normal southern breeze and picks up some, though remains light. As the boats arrive, I attempt to video each landing.

By 4 PM'ish, most of the boats have arrived. Matt S. gives all a short congratulatory speech and gives thanks for the organizers before turning us loose on the ship boil. Mmmm ... huge boiled shrimp, potatoes, corn on the cob, all seasoned spicy for an outstandingly delicious meal! With many participants already on the road, there is enough for seconds. All washed down with refreshing Shiners beer. Very good!

Wanting to get on the road, I bid adieu to all and get on the road by 5 PM for the long 13 hour drive home to Mississippi. Unlike past epic trips, this one is smooth with a nighttime stop over for rest. Midday Sunday finds Mulsae and myself safely home.

## Final Thoughts

On the Texas 200's final day in 2014, I made a video comment about getting asked if I would return to the sail in the future. The answer then was "Ask me in a month." I needed time to mentally process the adventure before deciding if it was something to be done again.

This year, the question's answer is an immediate "Yes!" Withdrawing early feels like a failure even though there was valid reasons. Although I had prepared for this trip, there was gaps and things that

could have been done to be more successful. Such as sailing the boat before the trip to get used to it, practicing reefing, bringing the paper charts versus accidentally leaving them on the kitchen table, and doing a lot more prep work on the boat to make it easier to single hand.

Chances are very good Mulsae and her captain will be sailing in the 2017 Texas 200. This time far more prepared and ready for a full course adventure! Until then ...

Fair Winds!

Michael Mangus  
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