

The Rambo's First Texas 200 Escape to Quarantine Shores

“I really don't know why it is that all of us are so committed to the sea, except I think it's because, in addition to the fact that the sea changes, and the light changes, and ships change, it's because we all came from the sea. And it is an interesting biological fact that all of us have in our veins the exact same percentage of salt in our blood that exists in the ocean, and, therefore, we have salt in our blood, in our sweat, in our tears. We are tied to the ocean. And when we go back to the sea - whether it is to sail or to watch it - we are going back from whence we came.

[Remarks at the Dinner for America's Cup Crews, September 14, 1962]”

— John F. Kennedy

Pre-Texas 200

I see the boats sailing into Matagorda Bay every June and wonder who would be crazy enough to sail in such small boats. I love wooden boats though and learn at the Port Aransas Wooden Boat Festival about something called the Texas 200 where women and men sail from Port Mansfield to Magnolia Beach. I drag my husband, Bob, down to the beach a couple of years in a row when the boats arrive, and he's fascinated by the boats too. Two years ago, the Sunday after the Texas 200, Bob sees a wooden boat on Craig's List in Corpus Christi. It took two trips to Corpus Christi, but I talked him into buying our first sailboat, 16 foot wooden, classically built Lowell. We teach ourselves to sail on Matagorda Bay that summer. We purchase a pocket cruiser, a Sanibel 18 the next winter, and keep working on our sailing skills. After sailing to Sunday Beach in November with a Texas 200 group, we feel we are making progress and possibly could complete the Texas 200 this year. In April, Bob says to sign us up and so we will give it a go in 2020.

We buy our Com-Pac Sun Cat about six weeks before the 2020 Texas 200. The Sun Cat has a gaff rig, and we have no experience sailing with one. We have difficulty getting the sail up the first few times we tried to yard sail. It has so many lines and those tangled up lazy jacks! It isn't long before we learn the rigging through trial and error. Our first trip out on *Sandpiper*, who has revealed her name to us through faded lettering, is May 10 and we sail her about three times before the Texas 200.

Months before the scheduled starting date, in consideration of pandemic social distancing, the Texas 200 route is modified to start at Magnolia Beach. This change is made to eliminate the use of a charter bus to ferry participants back to Port Mansfield after dropping off trailers at JT's in Magnolia Beach. Bob thinks we should sail from Port Mansfield and attempt to complete a "real" Texas 200. We start a Facebook group with others wanting to sail from Port Mansfield and communicate weekly and sometimes daily with our group. We share our excitement and our to-do lists! We become the Renegade Northbounders!

Our list of "to-dos" is long: sand and varnish the teak wood, install an electric bilge pump, replace the wiring in the mast, make a hatch door with screening, change fuses in electric panel, make a pump-up sprayer shower, switch motors by installing a new 4 stroke, 6 hp Yamaha, get a slip at Harbor Bait and Tackle, etc....

Saturday, June 13 Trip to Port Mansfield

We finally have *Sandpiper* ready, with way too much of everything on board. We leave the house at 11:20 and drive down to Magnolia Beach to find eight boats around the boat ramp. Driving by the Texas 200 sailors, Matt, Chuck, Bobby, and Kelly, walking down the main street in Magnolia Beach, we offer to drive them to their boats. They prefer to walk as they are going to be sailing all day. We hope to see them all at Quarantine Shores on Wednesday!

When we arrive in Port Mansfield, we find Jeremy and Courtney Bennett launching *Merlin* at the boat ramp. The San Marcos crew is getting ready to launch, and Bob Carson and Mike Singleton are getting *Lulu*, a West Wight Potter 15, ready to launch after us. We picked up the *Escape to Quarantine Shores* burgees on Friday for the Renegade Northbounders, and while visiting with Adam Creech gave him the burgees for the Hobie group. He said the Hobie guys are calling me the "Den Mother." Oh Boy!

Bob forgets our mantra of late, "If something isn't working, try something different". At the boat launch, Bob pushes and pushes, but *Sandpiper* won't come off the trailer. Mike comes over to give us a hand. We think about the same time that the darn centerboard must be down. Finally, the boat is free of the iron grip of the trailer and in the slip.

We meet Sandbar Boats/Paul and his brother-in-law, John, and check out Paul's boat, *Ishmael*, he bought last year for \$200 on eBay. Paul and John have gone through the boat, and it looks great. We also hear about the wheel hub exploding when it hit the water at the boat ramp. The Bennetts are busy getting *Merlin* ready for the sail and work late into the early morning. We grab a pizza & beer at Pelican's Bar and Grill right before it closes and visit with a few locals as they share their table with us. Then it is off to our motel room at the Sunset House.

Sunday, June 14 To Magnolia Beach and Back to Port Mansfield

Jeremy asks us to take his gin pole back to Maggy Beach, so we swing by the marina to pick it up and bungee it to our boat trailer. On the way back to our bay house in Indianola during a border patrol check station stop, our trailer is hit by a clueless man in an SUV coming in behind us. I don't know how the gin pole and trailer are not damaged. Our daughter is our shuttle driver and takes us back, and leaves us at the marina in Port Mansfield with our coolers. We enjoy our evening hanging with the Renegade Northbounders: Paul, John, Courtney, Jeremy, Kathy, and Will Roberson. The Russell's came by to visit and Chris Cherry shows up too to pick up his burgee. Gary and Merideth Kohut come in and tie up in our slip. We all are surprised when Cathy and Chris Tomsett sail up. It is their anniversary, and they hope to find a place to stay for the night and a shower after many days sailing pre-Texas 200. After hanging out drinking a few beers until all restaurants are closed, we all decide to eat on our boats. This is our first meal on *Sandpiper*. We are more and more excited about our adventure starting tomorrow late in the morning.

Monday, June 15 Sail to Land Cut Camp

27.9 miles

Sailing time: 5 hours, 57 minutes, 57 seconds

Port Mansfield to $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way into the land cut close to El Toro.

The Renegade Northbounders decide to leave around 11:00 in the morning, hoping for more favorable winds. The Hobie Group leaves earlier in the morning. We try to follow

Ishmael and *Merlin* but are left far behind. We motor/sail for a while, hoping to catch up. Through the beautiful, isolated shores of the Land Cut, we reach camp and find a muddy shoreline. I quickly have my shoe sucked off one foot! Mike Singleton comes to the rescue and helps me to shore while Bob anchors the boat. Camping here are the crews for *Merlin*, *Ishmael*, *Lulu*, and the Tomsett's with *Swiftly*, as well as six other boats.

The evening discussions include what happened to Will. Will has built a 12 foot Chine Runner *Sharpie* and learned to sail it this year. I swore I saw him sail back to Port Mansfield but he might have been tacking. The Tomsett's think he was behind them most of the day. We are concerned. Sometime in the night, a yellow sailboat sails by our camp and yells that Will is at the entrance to the Land Cut and is sailing back to Port Mansfield in the morning and look at all the phosphorescence glowing in the water. The Land Cut was shimmering with it. Later we run into the crew of this boat at Marker 37, and they told of a fantastic sail through the glowing Land Cut.

Tuesday, June 16 Sail to Padre Island Yacht Club Area

62.4 miles

Sailing time: 13 hours, 20 minutes

Tuesday is Sandbar Day! We hit three! The first sandbar we drift into is as we try to depart our camp in the morning. Arrivals and departures to camp seem to give us the most trouble! We try to follow *Merlin* and *Ishmail* again, and again they leave us in their wake. We have great sailing across the Upper Laguna Madre and Baffin Bay. We hope to meet the Renegade Northbounders in a cove close to the Padre Island Yacht Club. As we get near, I radio Paul and find out he's at Marker 37 getting ice, and our boats meet at the entrance to PIYC. Paul and John sail around looking for the cove while Bob and I go in circles trying to get into the cut for PIYC off the channel. We drift into sandbar number two.

We circle around again in front of PIYC, trying to find the right canal and run through fishing lines and get stuck on another sandbar. Sandbar number 3. John jumps off *Ishmael* and helps Bob push *Sandpiper* off the bar, and then they jump on the boat, and we finally make it to camp. It's a beautiful cove, and we enjoy our evening.

In the evenings, our routines go like this: we visit with everyone in camp, cook dinner, and then shower off the saltwater and sweat with the pump-up shower I made out of a

2-gallon sprayer. I've painted it black and attached a spray head. It's amazing how clean you feel after a quick shower after a 13 hour day of sailing. I can hear Paul and John talking tonight, and Paul says, "Do you know how hard it is to find a girl that would do this?" What can I say? The percent of women participating this year is close to 6%. Ladies, you don't know the fun you are missing.

Wednesday, June 15 Sail to Quarantine Shores

47.60 miles

Sailing time: 5 hours, 5 minutes

In the morning, as our Renegade Northbounders are waking up and getting ready to sail to Marker 37, we hear Paul say, "It's never too early to pop a top!" We love this guy!

We motor up to Marker 37 and buy ice, gas, and a few supplies. I check Facebook and see that Will's wife, Kathy, has not heard from him since 3:00 the day before, and he is in the Land Cut. Will has not turned back but has continued to sail on! I tell Jeremy and arranged for Kathy to call him. We all wonder where Will is now. We discover the crew at Marker 37 who shouted to us as they sailed the Land Cut and learn Will has plenty of water and beer, so we guess he has decided to keep sailing. A few days later, we learn Will has made it to Bird Island Basin and has a friend tow him the last ten miles. Will is the Rookie of the Year!

Today we sail across Corpus Christi Bay into the ICW and through Port Aransas dodging the barges, big ships, and the ferries. Today all the Texas 200 boats sailing from the South will meet all the boats coming from the North at Quarantine Shores. It's a perfect meeting place considering the Covid-19 Pandemic this year. Big Day Ahead!



As we sail under the JFK Causeway and cross Corpus Christi Bay, we are happy to find the bay calm. Corpus Christi Bay is usually choppy, and we think it might be challenging. Our next obstacle is to navigate our way into the shallow pass around Stingray Hole. We sail behind *Merlin* this morning, and as we approach the ICW, Jeremy calls on the radio and wants to enter the ICW close to Pelican Island. *Merlin* and *Sandpiper* have no trouble getting into the ICW, and luckily no barges are in our way. Quite a few sailboats are in ICW around the same time, so the car ferry seems to pause and let us through. A huge pirate ship full of tourists sails by as we entered the Lydia Ann Channel and sail close to San Jose Island. We pass the beautiful Lydia Ann Lighthouse. The channel is rough, but I thought we could sail up to Quarantine Shores and sail up to the beach. Bob thinks better of this approach and doesn't like the prospect of making our grand entrance by running into the boats that line the shoreline. Bob works to start the motor as we sail in circles, and I pull the sails down hoping not to run into shallow water again. Not the best display of our sailing skills.

WE MAKE IT TO QUARANTINE SHORES! We did it! It's a wonderful evening visiting with many of the other Texas 200 sailors, but miss a few friends who sail to Mud Island to camp instead. Twenty-seven boats are here out of the sixty. Matt Schiemer, President of the club, gave us our Texas 200 bumper stickers. Now we have proof we have made it!

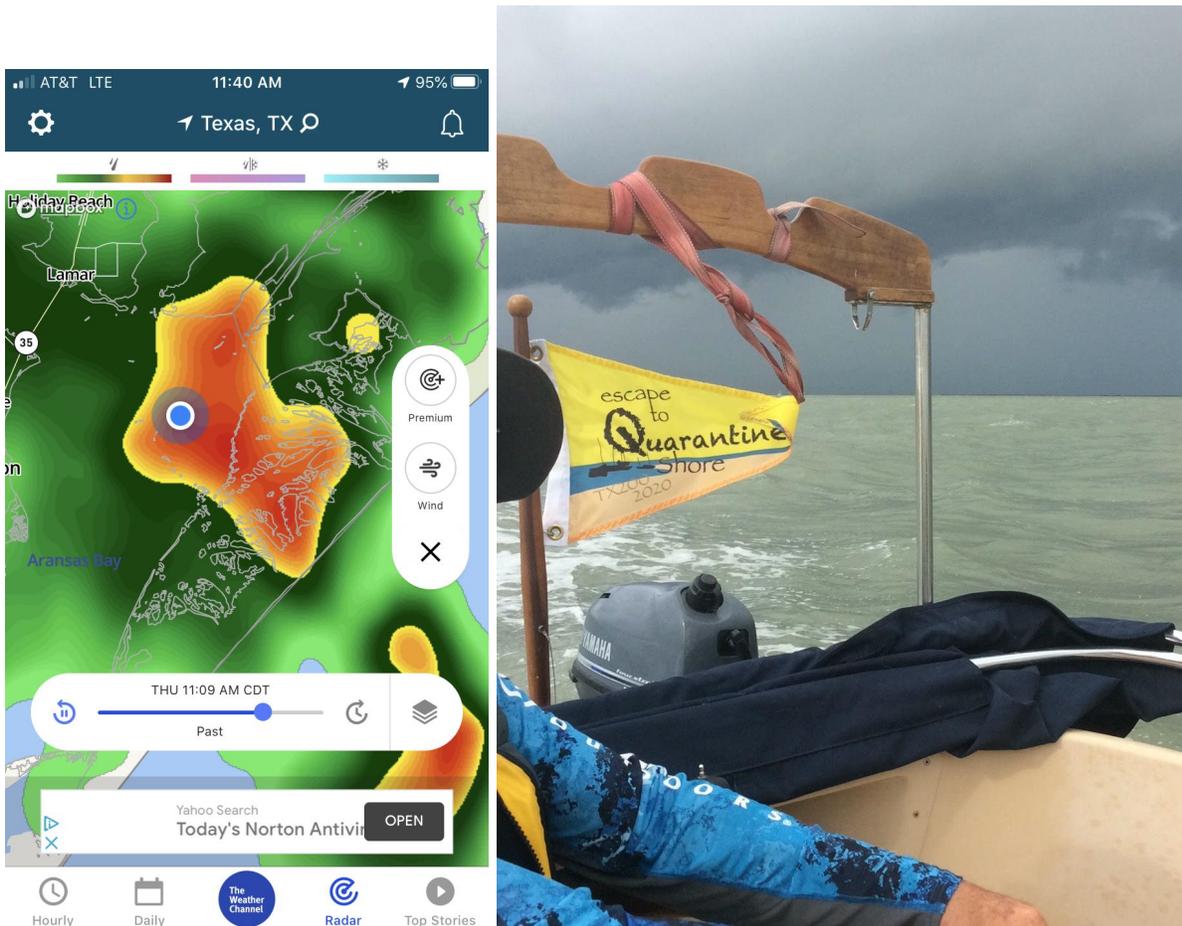
Thursday, June 16 Sail to Steamboat Island (Paul says this is our easy day)

46.4 miles

Sailing time: 12 hours, 31 minutes

Paul is planning an easy sailing day today for the Renegade Northbounders. We are not going to try to sail to Army Hole. We are going to Steamboat Island through South Pass. We are excited to sail in the bays close to home to find new places to camp.

As we depart from Quarantine Shores, we see storms develop all around us. The worst of the storms are behind us. Aransas Bay is rough. We are in front of our group of boats and in the lead. It starts to rain, and I attach my Spot X to my life vest. This is the only time I have to take it out of the cabin. We decide to reef the sail, often done before casting off, but not something we have ever tried while sailing. We'll try to outrun the storm. While Bob starts the motor, we see Calvin's Sea Pearl 21 take off toward the shore. Later we learn that he has capsized and is rescued from the top of his boat and his sailboat salvaged in Port Aransas. Our slow and amazingly stable Sun Cat continues to motor/sail through Aransas Bay and then into the ICW.



In the ICW, we meet Jim and Makenzie Palmer in their little O'Day Daysailer 17, *No Regrets*. A double barge follows us for 10 miles and then passes. Then another barge passes while I'm at the tiller and Bob's napping. We follow *No Regrets* as she leaves the ICW and sails into San Antonio Bay. This is the roughest water we have sailed in yet. I watched *No Regrets* coasting up and down in the wave crests. Mackenzie is sitting on the bow like she's the boat ballast. I see Paul's *Ishmael* in the distance and so plan to follow him through Steamboat Island Pass. *Merlin* is far behind us. *Ishmael* carefully circles the entrance of the pass and then crosses at an angle east to west. *Sandpiper* and *No Regrets* follow through the pass too. Yes! Now we wait for *Merlin*, and she makes it in too!



It is decided we should move to the leeward side of the island. *No Regrets* moves to the south side of the island. We follow making a loop first lining up in the deepest part of the channel before crossing. Unfortunately, we are in too shallow water, and not on the most favorable side of the island. Stuck in the shallows again, Jeremy wades to us and helps Bob pull the boat into deeper water. Finally, we motor back across the pass to anchor. We all have a rough time setting our anchors, but eventually do, with some success. No leaving our boats much to visit this evening and our boats rock and roll all night as thunderstorms blow through. I look out our window frequently to see if I see *Ishmael's* mast light to make sure we have not lost anchor and then finally sleep. I wake up and look out at dawn and find *Ishmael* has moved several 100 feet. No more easy days for me!

Friday, June 17 Sail to Home Port Maggy Beach Jibe Day!

27.3 miles + 4

Sailing time: 5 hours, 38 minutes, 23 seconds +?

We wake up to what we think is going to be a stormy morning in camp and we see beautiful cumulus clouds filling the sky. I hear Jeremy on the radio call, "Good Morning, today's breakfast entrees include steaming hot coffee and raw fish." That's the way to get the crews up and going!

We sail across Espiritu Santos Bay at a pretty good clip around 5.4 mph. and are through the Ferry Cut and into the ICW in 4 hours. As we cross the bay, a cotter ring comes sliding down the front of the bow and into my lap. I pick it up and think I wonder where this is from and show it to Bob. Neither of us has an understanding that the little ring would lead to disaster shortly.

The ICW near Port O'Connor is always busy with barges and fishing boats but isn't too crazy today. We are concerned as we see *No Regrets* turn close in front of a barge and have difficulty maneuvering out of its way. A small coast guard crew on the scene motors over to check *No Regrets*. There are no barges coming into the jetties now so we have a clear path into Matagorda Bay for *Sandpiper* and crew.

The most beautiful blue water we see on the entire event is at the end of the jetties at Port O'Connor and out into Matagorda Bay. Our bay waters are the most beautiful we have sailed!

Almost home and our sail suddenly begins to jibe repeatedly as we sail across the bay and near Powder Horn Lake. We want to cruise in front of our house so our daughters and neighbors can see us come in. Something is wrong. I lose track of how many times the sail jibes. One last jibe and the mast comes crashing down in the water next to the boat. The starboard stay has come loose after the pin, missing the circle ring, comes loose and brings the mast down. Bob gathers the sail, and I steer as he loops a line around the mast, taking up as much of the sail and rigging as he can, and ties it all to the side of the boat. He starts the motor and we motor towards Indianola and Magnolia Beach.



Our neighbors and our friend, Mike, who sees the mast fall from the shore, drive to Maggy Beach and meet us. Mike and Bob drag the sail and mast back on the boat and get the boat on the trailer. Bob and I are so lucky the mast fell in sight of our home and Magnolia Beach.

We did it! The Rambos finish their first Texas 200 with a mast splash! We didn't die. The mast is repairable. We will sail the Texas 200 again!

The Renegade Northbounders made this adventure successful and fun! We are looking forward to many more adventures with this renegade group of sailors. Bob and I also appreciate Charlie Jones and Bobby Chilek for all their help preparing us for this year's Texas 200.