

2016 Texas 200, Aboard "Ancient Mariner"

My crew this year was Steve Simpson who has crewed for me racing my Day Sailer II and has crewed on another Day Sailer II in several races. I sailed my 1973 O'Day Mariner 2+2 "Ancient Mariner" again this year. Steve and I went out sailing at least once a week for 2 months (March 15 to May 15) so he could become familiar with the boat and know how she handles. I had rented a slip for two months to allow us to get out more and to allow me to re-paint the trailer. I was going to get the boat on a slip a little earlier but additions to the boat were taking longer than I had anticipated. Steve told me he would not be able to sail in May, so I got the boat to the slip in March. I actually got more work done on the boat at the slip than I did at the house. We got a lot of good sailing in as well, including a race in my Day Sailer II. Steve needed to know the boat and how it handled, so whenever we went out, I had him take the helm (including the race). Steve said he wanted to know as much about the boat as possible. I told him I wanted him to know every aspect of the boat as well, including the motor. It was good practice and paid off on the event.



As in the past couple years, we were going to be using a SPOT tracker so others could follow along with us if they wished to do so. To let people know the SPOT was working, we turned it on during the drive to Port Isabel.

We left for Port Isabel on Friday June 10th. Shortly after picking up Steve in San Antonio, we had a trailer bearing burn out as we were going through San Antonio. Steve used his cell phone to locate someone who could repair it. A trailer builder agreed to do the work and we pulled in to their facility at 4:30 on a Friday afternoon. Thirty minutes later we were on our way. We got a break on that one.

We got to Port Isabel about 11:30pm due to missing our exit off the main highway. We suspected we had gone too far when we saw the check point for the Mexican border ahead. A quick 'U' turn

and we got headed in the right direction. On the SPOT track it looked like we bounced off Mexico.

Saturday we finagled a slip at the very booked up White Sands motel & marina and got the boat in the water. We prepared the boat both Saturday and Sunday. Saturday night there was a big dinner get together and party afterwards. At the party there was a guy showing off his hand built Viking coffin that he sells. Nice work, but personally I don't need to check out coffins before I start the Texas 200.

Sunday I drove the Jeep and trailer to the end point while Steve continued to get the boat ready. By Sunday evening the boat was ready. Steve and I got things ready for the morning, then went to bed. We had discussed taking the outside route in the Gulf of Mexico with Matt Schiemer's Mariner with his crew Chris Maynard. We were going to be up early to be able to start when Matt and the other boats taking the outside route. They wanted an early start.



Monday, June 13th, first day of sailing.

According to reports, fifty-seven boats left Port Isabel that morning. As mentioned, Steve and I had decided to sail with Matt's Mariner and a few other boats on the outside route in the Gulf of Mexico. The wind was stronger than we had heard it would be and more from the south. Last year we motored to the jetties and then sailed through out into the Gulf. This year the boats decided to sail to the jetties. We had to tack under the bridge to get through, it was some tight tacking. Four boats made it under the bridge to head for the Gulf. As we sailed to the Port Isabel Jetties we lost the split ring on the fiddle block (end of CB trunk near the cam cleat) for the mainsheet. Steve attempted to replace the split ring while I kept the boat turned into the wind, but it became apparent that we both needed to



deal with it. We got into a somewhat sloppy "heaved to, somewhat drifting aimlessly condition" and worked together to re-attach the block. We decided to not complicate things and didn't try to replace the standing spring. The shackle was bent and needed to be straightened before the clevis pin could be inserted. Once the pin was in we got the split ring back in. Just as we were about finished with our repair we got a call from Matt wondering if we were still headed for the Gulf. We told him we were finishing a repair and be along shortly. Also while we were doing the repair the Compact 16 with Michael and Pete Bustamante came by and inquired if we needed assistance, we told them we had it in hand and were alright. With the repair done, we headed outside the jetties to join Matt's Mariner which was waiting for us. The Compact 16 was just behind us as well.

We headed north and the swells immediately caused Steve to get very sick. He re-decorated the port side of the boat, Steve was sick the whole way. The swells out in the Gulf appeared to be up to six feet high at times (might have been higher or lower, hard to tell), with chop on top of that. When we got into the Gulf we dropped the jib, the winds were now about 20 knots and gusty. We were still sailing under a full main sail, but headed downwind. With Steve sick, I was at the helm all the way to the Port Mansfield Jetties.



We made our turn to port and entered the opening to the jetties without problem, following the same track I had sailed the previous year. The SPOT track from the previous year was still showing on my GPS. There were really big waves hitting us from astern as we went in. We were on port tack. We had just surfed down a large wave when we got hit by a second with a wind gust causing the boat to start to capsize to port. The port rail went under water while Steve got to the high side. I remember my back going under water, then another wave swept me out of the boat. When I surfaced, I fully expected to see the boat on its' side, but found it was upright. I caught the line we had to drag behind the boat in case someone went overboard to be able to stay with the boat and help in re-boarding. At one point the stern was a foot above my head. The boarding ladder was on the stern, but so was the motor. I didn't

need the boat or the motor hitting me in the head and making a bad situation worse, so I decided since it was only about a hundred yards or so to the jetty rocks that I would swim over there as it was safer than being near the boat in turbulent waters. Had we not been near the shore, I would have continued to hold on the line to stay with the boat and attempt to re-board. In open water, the turbulence would have been less.

Steve told me later, that he saw that I was in the water, conscious, and upright with my PFD on and swimming away from the boat. At this point Steve took over the sailing (although still sick). He got control of the boat, kept it from crashing into the jetty rocks and took the boat on to camp. Steve later told me that his first thought was "John, why did you leave the boat". Steve told me it was then he knew he was skipper and it was his responsibility to save the boat, and he did a very fine job of it. The practice paid off. Steve told me afterwards that the cockpit was full of water, but didn't spill over into the cabin. The drains emptied the cockpit while he attended to sailing. Apparently a powerboat came by and was yelling something to him, but he said he couldn't hear what they were saying and concentrated on sailing (and saving) the boat.

While Steve was busy saving the boat I was making my way to shore, my PFD keeping me easily afloat, coupled with that I've always been a good swimmer. Matt's Mariner came by close to the jetties (where, in hind sight I wish we had come in) when I was nearly to shore, he told me he was going to throw cushions to me. I told him not to as they would impair my swimming. Suddenly two cushions were headed my way. I caught one, the other was nearby and as I suspected, they proved to be more of a problem than a help, but I'm still thankful for the gesture. I had to let them go to safely swim to the rocks. Matt couldn't stop since his motor wasn't working and it would have been dangerous for him to try to help under sail. Matt told me after the event that when he first saw me he thought it was a dolphin frolicking in the surf, little did he realize it was me "frolicking" in the surf.

The rocks were slippery, but I managed to climb high enough to where I could stand and see the boat at a distance. I did have some anxious moments on the rocks as I watched powerless as Steve saved the boat from hitting the rocks on the other side of the jetties. Not knowing really what he was going through out there, I was yelling and waving my hands for him to start the

motor, but he never saw me and couldn't hear me. Instead he did what needed to be done. In hind sight, it probably would have been difficult to start the motor and keep the boat off the rocks. Probably good he couldn't hear me. The Compact 16 with Michael and Pete (following radio advice from Matt) came by me while I was still on the rocks, I told them "I seem to have misplaced my boat". Their motor was not working either so they went on to camp. Steve had maintained control and I could see he was taking the boat into camp. When I was climbing up the rocks, someone who had driven out to this end of the barrier island from Port Isabel on an excursion saw me and helped me off the rocks, he and his buddy gave me some water and a ride to camp. I was prepared to walk to camp a little over a mile away however despite my bad knees. The boat and Steve were secure at camp when I arrived. The practice sailing before the trip to get Steve confident in sailing the Mariner had paid off, we and the boat were safe. As stated, Steve did an excellent job with the boat when the need arose.



Both exhausted, we ate dinner, then Steve set up his tent ashore and I crawled into the cabin on the boat, turned on my fan and went to sleep.

Tuesday June 14th, second day of sailing. Steve slept a little late and with not being used to packing up tent and everything, we were one of the last boats to leave. Just before we were ready to leave, a Sea Pearl 21 trimaran left the beach, unfortunately the crew was not aboard. One of the crew jumped in the water to swim after the boat, but the boat was faster. The boat was stern to shore with sails furled on the mast with only a very small amount out, but it was enough sail. Halfway out in the channel, he returned to shore and a boat that was already underway retrieved the runaway boat.

We needed help pushing off from shore. The crew of the Sea Pearl, Jason and Jack, helped us while they waited for their boat to be returned. Pushing off the beach was complicated by the fact the centerboard had dropped and we didn't notice right away. We soon got underway and headed down the channel toward Port Mansfield where we would turn to starboard and follow the channel up the Laguna Madre to the land cut and then Camp 2 at Hap's Cut. As we sailed up the channel we saw a pelican flying

towards us, not all that unusual. This particular bird decided to land on my mast head however, or more correctly on my wind vane. We couldn't get him to leave, yelling and blowing the air horn all proved to be worthless. In the meantime he was using his feet to re-design the wind vane. When he finally left, the vane had a 90 degree bend in it. I guess we were fortunate he didn't drop anything on us.



Strong winds on that day were again blowing. We had a single reef in the main and were flying the jib. The wind and the waves in those bays really make it hard to stay on course with some of the larger waves causing the boat to surf on them.

We also began to experience some GPS problems. The GPS would lose its' connection to the satellites, and the SPOT could only send our last position. This problem would continue to plague us for the next couple days, then finally working properly again the last couple days. I had brought my old GPS for Steve to learn with and as a backup in case my primary GPS was damaged. Unfortunately, the old GPS did not connect with the SPOT tracker. Until the main GPS starting working properly again I kept the backup handy when navigation was needed. I had the primary GPS on me when I went overboard and it may have caused the problems.

The first couple days of the Texas 200 getting cell phone coverage can be difficult. When I was able to get my tablet connected to the internet, I found several questions from friends wondering what was wrong with the tracking and why we stayed in one spot so long.

Once in the land cut we passed the two row boats doing the event. One was a single rower, the other was a doubles team. I think both made it to the end, I know that the double team did. Before getting to Camp 2 Matt's Mariner passed us.



We got into camp at Hap's Cut around 4 or 5pm. We had sailed about 42 miles that day. Hap's Cut may be the muddiest place on earth. Why use such a camp? Simple, it can accommodate a large number of boats and keep them safely out

of the shipping channel. Nobody really likes the place. Steve got off the boat to set the anchor. Somebody was holding the bow until he could get off. Steve sank 2 feet in the mud, I'm heavier and knew I sink deeper so I stayed on the boat, besides I've experienced Hap's Cut more than once. If I had gotten off, I might have sunk out of sight. Within 5 minutes Steve declared he never wanted to see Hap's Cut again in this lifetime or the next. He only unloaded his tent, 2 bottles of water and half a bag of beef jerky for dinner.



We were told that 33 boats had made it to Camp 1 at the Port Mansfield Jetties, the rest were in Port Mansfield, with at least 6 pulling out of the event. At Camp 2 there were still about 30+ boats at camp. Some skipped Hap's Cut and found another place. We were having carnage this year.

Wednesday June 15th, third day of sailing. This was to be a short 23 mile sail. We got our best start, Steve really wanted to leave Hap's Cut. We had a fairly good sail up to Camp 3, although the winds were once again 20 knots plus. When we got to the area where the Camp 3 turnoff was we noticed the boats ahead of us passing it up with one of the boats ahead suggesting on the VHF to do so. I got on the VHF and told them this was the camp and it was a good anchorage. The boats ahead of us sailed on, we turned into the beach. A couple boats followed us in. The skipper of the third boat, St John of Bastrop (a.k.a. John Wright) came to where we anchored and suggested we were about a half mile further south than we were supposed to be. They moved further up the beach and we too followed. John W. was correct (of course) that we were too far south. Soon most of the boats behind us came into the anchorage.

A Cortez 16 sailed by Noel Nicholls and crew Steve Skunkel came in with a bent mast. A Pacific Catamaran sailed by Mike Sulen and crewed by Bruce Wagner had a leaking hull. The boat with the bent mast dropped their mast and managed to straighten it with the help of other sailors. They sailed with reduced sail for the rest of the event and are one of the boats that finished.



The sandy bottom of this anchorage found many sailors swimming and socializing. The rowers came in, but left after a couple hours to take advantage of day light since we got to camp between noon to 1pm. Steve was swimming a lot, it wasn't Hap's Cut. We had a good nights' sleep and had a rest from the strong winds of the last 3 days.

The count for the boats that made it to Camp 3 was 24. We don't know how many passed the camp.

Thursday June 16th, fourth day of sailing. Once again we were one of the last boats to leave. Many had left early to stop at Doc's, Snoopy's, and Marker 37 (a small store at marker 37) just before Corpus Christi Bay for food and to replenish ice. Marker 37 is one of Matt's "must stop" places to stop on the Texas 200, he left camp early and was there as we passed by. We weren't carrying ice, so we didn't plan to stop. We sailed on by and headed into Corpus Christi Bay hoping to get through before the winds strengthened. Winds again were in the 20 knot range. We crossed the bay without any problems.

We made it through Stingray Hole only bumping bottom once lightly and got out into the Corpus Christi Ship Channel. Because Stingray Hole is a very winding channel we released the jib sheets to slow us to go through the channel. When we got into the ship channel, the wind had shifted to the ESE. The jib had wrapped on the forestay. Steve went forward to release it so we could sail into the wind better. We started to drift into oncoming ships, so I started the motor and got the boat out of the channel until Steve could free the jib. Once freed we headed for the ferries which run 24 hours a day at the highway crossing. We managed to get to the ferries on one tack. We noticed as we approached that the ferries had moved to the Port Aransas side and waited until we passed through their area. First time this has happened in my years of doing this event. We



then turned north up Lydia Ann Channel and headed for Camp 4 at the "Quarantine Shore".

We finally saw Camp 4 and the boats gathered there. Most were boats that had passed camp 3. We beached the boat and set the anchor ashore. This was an oyster shell beach with a sandy bottom. Steve enjoyed another swim. Soon other boats of the fleet started to arrive. The Pacific Catamaran with the leaking hull came in with a worse leak which they tried to repair during the night. A Striker 18 trimaran of John Farrell with crew Doug Bruning came in with a borrowed mainsail, theirs had ripped in half. They had the replacement sail at camp 3, but I hadn't noticed.

The count was 29 boats at Camp 4. The Cortez 16 with the mast damage made it in.

Friday June 17th, fifth day of sailing. This was going to be about a 45 mile sail. Once again we were one of the last boats to leave. We assisted the leaking catamaran crew in finding a ramp where they could pull out, the leak had gotten too bad to continue on. They planned to sail to the town of Fulton just north of Rockport to pull out. They were very disappointed that the event was going to end early for them.

We headed out into the bay and headed for Camp 5. The winds were about 8 knots and it was a long sail to camp through three major oyster reefs and a few minor ones. Not trusting the winds to stay light and increase like the previous days, we kept the one reef in the main. Also didn't want to go fast through the reefs. We got lucky with the reefs this year and passed through at high tide, no major bumping. The Cortez 16 followed us through the reefs.

Once through the reefs we headed for South Pass and on to Camp 5 at Hidden Pass. I had never sailed through Hidden Pass, so I opted for South Pass which I was familiar with. After seeing pictures of several boats going through Hidden Pass, I'm going to have to try that someday. Once through South Pass, we had a little problem finding the camp. This was a new camp for the event and although I've been on this trip many times, I was unfamiliar with this corner of the bay. We finally spotted a line of masts at the camp and headed for them. Another shell beach with a deep slope along the shore. We beached the boat, a half dozen boats came in after us. Official count for this camp was 27 boats.

There was to be a "making a boat out of a watermelon" race, but only Dana Munkelt who organized it and Steve had a watermelon. Steve carved his watermelon into an interesting boat as we ate some of the watermelon which was very good. Afterwards, Steve setup his tent, I crawled in the cabin and we went to sleep.

Saturday June 18th, last day of sailing. We were the last boat to leave camp. It was about 30 miles to the finish. The winds were light, lightest of the week coming out of the SE. The earliest boat to leave was at 4:15am, Matt's Mariner.

I had planned to take the boat through Saluria Bayou, but went a bit too far to the west to make the channel through the bayou (I hadn't been able to update my GPS with the new waypoints due to a computer connection problem prior to leaving). Our option now was to go through Port O'Connor channel and deal with the boat traffic. The wind was starting to switch to the east. As we entered the ICW for Port O'Connor we saw an alligator's head near the shore. This was the first alligator I have encountered on the Texas 200. I got a picture before it disappeared.

We entered the ICW and as we got close to Port O'Connor the boat traffic increased a lot. A few powerboats slowed down, most went by at high speed. A few would slow down until they were right beside us, then power up producing a big wake. Finally though we made it out of the jetties and into open water again in Matagorda Bay and headed to the finish. With the light wind we felt the heat more. It made it longer knowing this was the final leg. About half way (on this leg) to the finish the wind shifted to right on our nose, then died altogether. It was time to start the motor like all the boats ahead of us were doing. We motored for about a half hour until the wind freshened. We motor/sailed a short



distance, then shut down the motor and were fully under sail again for the final run to the beach. The wind was now out of the NE. Finally the beach was in sight.

We followed a couple boats in. We saw a good place to beach, but some swimmers in the water forced us to go elsewhere. We beached the boat. Those that were already there came to congratulate us on our finish. The shrimp boil was under way and we headed for cold drinks and shrimp with potatoes, sausage, and corn on the cob.

After the meal I got a ride from Noel Nicholls to the Jeep/trailer so we could retrieve the boat. Matt's Mariner had the tongue of their trailer break when they loaded the boat. We loaded the boat on the trailer right off the beach. We got some help de-rigging from Bill and Christopher Jardine who had sailed a Compact 16; secured the boat and headed for a motel in Port Lavaca for the night.

The official count of boats at the finish was 28. Of the 28 finishers, only 18 had made all 5 camps. Matt's Mariner and mine were both included in the 18. A special thanks to Matt for heading the Texas 200 committee to make this years' event a success. Sorry for losing the cushions.

Sunday June 19th, heading home. We got up in the morning to find it was raining. What luck, we missed the rain by a day.

On the way home as we were going through Victoria, a truck pulled alongside of us and said we had a bearing burning since he saw smoke. This was the same side where we had the bearing go out on the way to Port Isabel.

We pulled off the road and found that the trailer had a partially broken spring causing the tire to rub on fender bracket rivets and creating tire damage and smoke. The bearing was alright, but the fender needed to be removed to prevent losing a tire. We found a tire place and had the fender removed. It was a



slow drive home watching that the tire did not rub on the boat hull. The drive was a bit more tiring because the AC in the Jeep had gone out also. I had the AC repaired a week before we left and it wasn't cheap. No AC going home was no fun. All the same

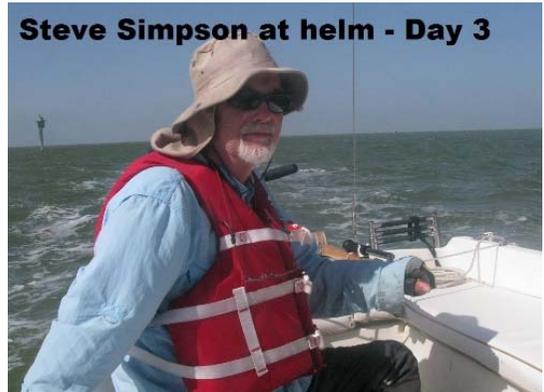
we made it home safely, Steve to San Antonio, me to Dripping Springs. It was a good sailing trip.

If anyone wants to follow the article with charts for the event, they are downloadable at

<http://www.texas200.com/Route.html>

The charts are located at the bottom of the page. There are also stories from other sailors and photo archives on the Texas 200 website under the 2016 archives.

Many thanks to my crew Steve Simpson during this years' event.



John Alesch;

"Ancient Mariner" #2607