

2019 Texas 200 event write-up, by Chris Mackay

About 6 years ago - maybe it was 2013 - I sold a Sunfish hull to a guy for \$100. John Alesch - he moved slowly and talked a lot - telling me about an event called the Texas 200. It's an annual sail-camping event in June that goes one-way from south Texas near the border (this year started at Port Mansfield) up past Corpus, Rockport, Port O'Connor, ending at a Magnolia Beach in Matagorda Bay. The route is through a series of bays and the Intercoastal Waterway (ICW) - a channel for barges and fishing boats to travel without going into the open Gulf of Mexico. The waters are warm and mostly shallow - the wind normally strong and from the SE - making the trip mostly downwind - allowing the boats to travel 30-50 miles a day to cover the 200 miles over 5 days. Each day has a planned "camp" that most people try to reach and stop to socialize. I did the event with John in 2015, crewing on his boat. The weather was favorable, and the trip was pleasant. This year the wind blew from the north, and I only reached Corpus Christi (stopping the evening before the finish day). The event draws a wonderful group of people - they are the best part of the event. This year's north wind and me not motoring left me alone for much of the time, which was my biggest lament.



Photo by Kevin White. I think this is Monday night in the land cut.



Photo by Kevin White. This is probably Tuesday morning, somewhere in the land cut.

There are no rules for the event - no support boats - but people look out for each other, and are very friendly and helpful (as you would want them to be if you are in the middle of nowhere having an issue). There is some boat traffic up the ICW, but especially in the south - there is a lot of wilderness - and often not anyone in sight. Also in the south - there is a zone of about 50 miles where there is basically no phone coverage. You may think that with 50 boats, that there would always be boats around - but this is not the case unless people make an effort to stay together - because generally - longer boats go faster - boats of different sizes/shapes pull away from each other. It is common to only see some sails miles away, or not see any at all for hours at a time. That being said, it's nice to sail in company, and people often stay together in groups of 2/3/4 boats (fast boats can go slower if they want).

This year there were about 55 boats signed up, with a total of about 100 people participating. However the weather forecast was for abnormal north and NE wind for the first few days. This meant going into the wind - often with it blowing directly from the direction that you want to go (this means slow going, and

tacking). Many people didn't participate, and many people decided to sail near the endpoint of the event - so they could do a loop. The normal plan is to put your boat in the water at the start point, drive your trailer and park at the end point (one person per boat), then take the event bus back to the start point. I didn't count, but it seemed like the bus had 20-30 people in it.

I drove down Saturday, and stayed Saturday night at Fred Stone Park at the northern edge of Port Mansfield. There were some fellow TX200 sailors there when I arrived - thanks again to Paul, Bryan, and Adam who helped slide (lift) my boat off the trailer, saving me the trip to the city ramp and back and forth.

Saturday night I loaded my gear/food/water into the boat while it was at the water's edge - half on a patch of sand - and put everything in its place. I wanted to be ready, so when I returned Sunday evening, I could go asap. I anchored out about 30' and went to sleep - eventually. The spot was on the lee shore of the Laguna Madre, so there were some little waves. My little boat was bobbing around randomly like a cork. Between the motion and thinking about tomorrow, I didn't fall asleep until 1am, and woke up at 4. At least my little anchors held and I didn't blow onto the rocky shore.

My boat is about 250 lbs - I can move it off the trailer (without a boat ramp) - but with 4 people it's easy. My boat is a 12' long, 4' wide, plywood sailboat that looks like a barge or a box, with flat sides except for the curve of its bottom. It's 18" deep/tall - its sides are benches - I sit about 13" over the water level. Some people call it a "Goose", because it's a stretched version of a similar boat - the 8' long Puddle Duck Racer. I made the boat with sailing this event in mind - taking design ideas from various boats:

- Using the rig from a Sunfish (salvaged) - I added reef points to the sail to reduce its size when its windy
- Using pivoting leeboards - one on each side - that are relatively wide and shallow - so they pivot up without issue when you go into shallow water, only stick down 2', and are a lot less likely to break than a long board
- Using a pivoting rudder - relatively large, wide and shallow - for the same reasons as the leeboard, and because it sucks when you lose steerage and wish your rudder was bigger
- Storage for lots of gear/supplies
- Space to sleep on the boat (storage on the sides and ends, so there's a spot for me in the middle)
- Sealed compartments (air boxes), blocks of foam on its sides, and a foam float on the top of the mast: to make self-rescue relatively easy after a capsize - so it's easy to right, doesn't have much water inside after a capsize, and to prevent the boat from going upside down after a capsize (without the masthead float, the boat wants to turn upside down - after which the boat is hard to turn back over, especially when loaded with gear/supplies)
- Due to the shape of the boat, it floats in just 4" to 5" of water when loaded with gear and water for a week - so there has to be very little water for me to get stuck aground (ankle deep). So I can walk the boat to deeper water, unless there is deep mud, which is the stuff of nightmares.

My boat sails pretty well - its main downside is its bulldozer-looking bow - which does not cut thru chop/steep waves well - heeling the boat helps, as does having the weight back so the bow is higher. Chop can often be avoided if you can sail near the land in the direction the wind is coming from (and with my shallow draft, I can normally get pretty close to land). It is pretty exciting when the wind is blowing and the boat charges into waves - they explode when they hit the bow. But sometimes it's more like bang bang bang etc.. which slows you down.

The bus returned on Sunday evening around 6pm. Sunset was about 8:30. The wind was still favorable - it would turn during the early morning, and be blowing from the north on Monday. I don't like to sail at

night, because I can't see where I'm going, can run into things, don't want to have an issue when it's dark, etc.. Navigation on the trip is more to avoid things, not to find things - since my boat can sail most anywhere there is water - I don't really need a GPS. I had my phone to look up my position when needed (and laminated charts for the route).

I decided to take advantage of the favorable wind, and leave Sunday evening. I could travel 20 miles to the beginning of the land cut (channel cut thru a 25 mile long stretch of land in the middle of the Laguna Madre bay) in 4 or 5 hours. I would have daylight for about half of this time. Going this distance with a head wind on Monday would take much longer.

I left the Fred Stone park at about 7:15pm and headed for the land cut. Other boats left too. The wind was say 20? Windy but not scary. There were 2-3' waves, at a period not too much longer than my boat.

Earlier in the year, I cut out a 3' section of bench on each side of my boat, so when the top of a wave crested over the side of the boat - it came into the boat in this section. Previously, the water could wash on the bench, but not spill into center of the boat, because of a coaming. This bench removal was a new mod, and I was not liking it. Ironically I cut out the bench, so the boat would "flood" when capsizing, and sit lower in the water, so it would be less likely to turn upside down (turtling). The mast head float was key to avoid turtling - which could only happen in deep enough water - having the mast stick into the ground and get stuck would be equally bad. My fear for the turtling was that while loaded, I don't think I could flip my boat back right side up. It was very stable while upside down. While on its side - it was very easy to right.

It was dark by 9:15, and I sailed following the blinking lights (and for a while the lights of the Hobie AI's that were off ahead. A San Juan 21 and also [Kate Davis](#) in some other boat single-handing also both passed me with some authority). I have nav lights but did have a light to shine on my sail occasionally for other boats to notice - I didn't leave it on, because it killed my night vision. The moon was about 1/2 and in good position, so I could see pretty well. One boat went the same speed as me (about 5 mph), and we were near each other for about 30 minutes - both going along in/near the channel, say 150' from each other? I shined my light on my sail occasionally, but assumed that they could see me well. I was between them and the moon. At say 10 something, I was startled to see us about to collide! I believe it was them who changed course, I can't be sure. We were within 30' and approaching at a steep angle. I can only blame myself, as I had no lights. This is about 5 miles from the cut. I slowed and let them go on ahead. I turned so that I was close to gybing - that would have been interesting, depending on where I was on a wave. Some other time I almost collided with a green barrel style marker, I didn't see it until I passed within 20' of it.

Sailing at night had its bad moments, but there was bioluminescence. I first noticed it in the wake. I could drag my hand in the water, and see a stream of sparkles. When I reached the north part of the bay, I missed the entrance of the cut - the ICW - and found myself in 16" of water - far from land - but in a shallow area. The wind was slowed, shifting to the east. I was moving slowly, and spooking fish - they were flashes of light, zipping away. One I swear was big and moved 30' in a second.

As I approached the cut, I was off to the west, and had lost track of where I was supposed to go. I ended up in a large area of 16" deep water, and not sure where I was. I have no gps. I looked at my phone to see my position, and then find myself on my charts. My phone was giving me changing positions - so not helpful. I didn't want just anchor there because there was the big wind shift coming within hours. It was say midnight and I was going on 3 hrs of sleep and was not doing well mentally - fatigued and feeling

some anxiety. The wind was shifting and was light. I did see a boat stopped with a light, and did see a blinking red light but couldn't judge how far it was (turned out to be red marker 22 at the start of the channel). I could hear some voices - I thought it was a man with his son flounder fishing. I wondered what they were thinking about some boat approaching in the middle of no-where after midnight. I rowed to them (1/4 mile?), calling out, but didn't hear a response. I came up on them (with lights on of course), and was pleasantly surprised to find it was the Team Makai (Hawaiian word that sounds the same as my last name) boat with Gary and Meridith - I didn't know them but did happen to have talked with Gary on the bus ride that afternoon. They were stuck (maybe just the centerboard was stuck in the ground?) in about 12-16" of water, quite close to the channel, and the channel marker. That Sunday morning I chatted with Chris of the Rockport Maritime Museum, and he was telling me about how he read a book talking about how barges could suck water towards them, especially with shallow water, and ironically that author of that book later died from being sucked under a barge. So there we were on the edge of the channel in a foot of water at say 1am, and a barge was coming, quite on the edge of the channel, looking like it would pass quite close to us. I told them the water would rush past the boat and could pull the boat to the barge. I rowed to them - I was ready to row away, and suggested that they do something, and that if they wanted they could jump on my boat right then and I would row away (they didn't seem interested :), then I suggested that they throw their anchors out, which Gary did. As the barge passed I was rowing away, and the water was moving towards the barge. With its bright lights - I could see nothing except the barge, their boat, my boat, and the water surface around us. I became very disoriented like when you're in a car stopped, but the car next to you starts to move slowly, and you are startled, thinking that you need to press the brake? The barge was moving slowly along, but the water was moving towards it at say a fast walking pace, and I was staying in place more or less as I rowed - but my lizard brain saw the water moving and was very confused. I even questioned if I was rowing my arms the right direction (being tired didn't help). Anyhow, the barge passed and we were fine. Gary and Meridith moved on up the channel (I believe they motored), and I rowed across the ICW and spent the night in the boat, pulled up on shore (slept in my tent as a mosquito net sack). At some time, I am not sure if it was before or after the barge passing, [Meridith Kohut](#) interviewed/filmed me - not sure but maybe the question was like - what I am I doing there - I would like to see that sometime.



Photo by Meridith Kohut (thank you, so much!) Sunday night at the south end of the land cut. The bright light is the barge coming.

Monday morning, sure enough had a north wind blowing directly down the channel - the land cut, complete with a current. I slept in, and took my time having breakfast and getting ready. The guy whose boat almost crashed into me the night before stopped by, and kindly offered to tow me. I didn't expect it to take me a couple of days to get thru the land cut, and I didn't like the idea of being towed so far. He said the guy who was steering at the time of our near-miss later admitted to not seeing well at night. Oh well, no harm done.

A guy George Davis IV and his teenage son left Port Mansfield about the same time as I did (I am not sure when), sailing his small homemade plywood boat of his design. It was not big, but had two masts. They ended up camping Sunday night about a mile south of where I did. They sailed up and tacked up the channel. They sailed up against that wind all the way to the finish, without a motor. They were the only boat to do so. They said they sailed from dawn until midnight or 2am to make it, taking turns napping. Incredible.

I knew I was not going to tack up the channel against a current. I had done that before in Port O'Connor - it was faster to walk along the shore and pull the boat. But that was a mile. This stretch of channel was 25 miles, and I sure as hell wasn't going to walk any sort of distance with wet feet in my big clunky ray-guard boots, and get blisters at the beginning of this event (I was concerned about flesh-eating

bacteria). There were also a number of docks, shacks, channels, etc that would make the pulling a boat less efficient. I did give sailing a go - for a couple of hours, I tacked about once a minute, and went about 2 miles. To tack I was dipping under the sail, almost going to a knee, so it was a bit of effort - normally not a big deal, but after a 100 times, it seemed to be too much effort for so little progress. I pulled over and set up my tent for some shade, ate lunch, and rested. In hindsight, I should have reefed, which would have made it easier to tack - not needing to duck under the sail. I marked lines on the ground to help decide where the wind had to come from for me to sail without doing a lot of tacking. After 5, the wind had swung round enough - I headed out - it was nice - to be making progress - only the wind was pretty light. I think I sailed about 7 miles that day. At sunset the wind stopped completely - and I pulled over. It was by a cut, I am not sure which. I left the sail up while I put things away and ate some dinner. Soon after dark, I heard a high-pitched buzzing - I feared mosquitos and put on my mosquito net hood. My sail was up and motionless - looking up, I saw it was covered with thousands of little flies..I guess they liked my sail. There was a large open flat area of sand - just inches above the water level. I walked up close to the vegetation and pitched my tent.

Tuesday morning the wind was again blowing straight down the channel. I could see a current moving even with the light wind. My tortillas were bad - I found they were good for seeing the current, as they almost sank, but stayed by the surface. The current was about walking pace. I waited - resting in my tent. It was hard to wait, but I waited. Some boats came by, and passed, motoring. John Hippe came sailing, but then switched to motoring. The wind shifted enough by midday that I was going to sail - then came some boats. However just as they arrived, so did thunderstorms with wind and rain. The wind calmed down and so we went. The wind light - I think I sailed about 8 miles that day. There were a few boats ahead of me - they stopped at Haps Cut. I was about two-thirds of a mile away when the wind stopped, and it rained. I rowed. I felt like I was in the amazon. Warm, cloudy, soaked, raining, quiet, except for the noise of the heavy rain on the boat and the water. Until I heard the buzzing from the shore. I was rowing in the middle of the channel - at least a hundred feet from shore - and there was a droning buzz of countless flies. Luckily I passed the fly zone, and pulled up to the shore at the Hap's Cut camp (which seemed to have no flies).

When I arrived, it was sprinkling. I think it rained a couple of inches that afternoon. The ground was mud - flat - mud covered in puddles. I was worried about flesh-eating bacteria. I had a couple of nicks - one place on my thumb, another above my ankle where the skin was broken. I was taking care of them with liquid bandage and bandaids. But with the rain, the bandaids were not working well. I didn't want to wallow in the mud setting up a tent - I was imagining being covered in mud, crawling into my tent, all muddy and soaked. I deliberated, sitting in my boat, rigging a pancho over myself, wondering if I could create a dry place in my boat. I was not prepared for rain. I could keep most of the water out, but was still getting drips. I had been wet since noon, and really wanted to be dry. Sleeping while being dripped on - I didn't think I could do it. I really didn't want to be covered in mud, not with cuts I wanted to keep clean. I tried again to improve my pancho - could I sleep like this? A dry tent sounded so good...I had gold-bond powder - I was going to powder up. And be dry-ish. At least - if I could use my tent. People were gathered under a little pop-up shade structure. I went out - maybe they knew of a place to put my tent that wasn't a mud puddle. It was so nice to chit chat with people. Jeremy and Courtney were going to sleep on their boat. I heard some grumbling while they were setting up their tarps - trying to keep all the rain out, the drips out. Cathy and Chris Thomsett were walking around thru the mud - I believe Chris was not wearing shoes. She pointed out an area that was covered in a thick mat of washed up sea grass - said to pitch my tent there. Dear God I was saved. It was not muddy at all. My tent was great - dry - until a storm came, and so did the dripping - dripping fast on me at like 3 in the morning. No! My tent was perfect back in the day - I slept thru many rain storms in it. But now it leaked. And I wanted to cry.

Thankfully, I was sleeping on two foam sleeping pads, and thankfully, I thought to pull one out from under me, and cover myself with it. I went back to sleep. And although I had little puddles in my tent, they were not as deep as my ½" thick pad.

Wednesday I got up and the wind was favorable - enough - we were sailing into the wind, but hey I was happy. We sailed up and out from the land cut, and into the upper Laguna Madre bay. At one point I turned east, thinking that the chop would be better if I was close to the land. It took me away from the other boats (some had pulled away from me - a couple of others were slower going to windward). I turned north and as I got back to the channel, the chop was smaller - the detour seemed unnecessary. I wasn't able to call the other boats on the radio. I guess they were out of range. I sailed on, until sunset. For some reason I didn't want to sail to windward to the barrier island to pull up on land, and decided to anchor near a tiny bird sanctuary island (about 17 miles south of Corpus). I sailed about 20 miles that day. I couldn't pull up on the island; there were signs saying to stay off - it was protected (and covered with birds - they sounded like monkeys from a distance). I reached down to push an anchor in - I was in the lee of the island and in the lee of the ICW. But the ground was loose bits of shell, and the anchor seemed to pull thru it easily. Plan B was to tie up to a big post near an abandoned fishing shack nearby. The post seemed solid. The shack was out of a horror movie.



Creepy little shack to sleep next to, alone and isolated.

The shack was in 4 feet of water, and was sunk - resting on the bottom. It was a single room with a door open. Inside were some bunk beds, with the upper bunks about a foot above the water - complete with mattresses and sheets. It was as creepy as it sounds. There was a single post - a post inside a 8" pvc pipe sticking up out of the water, about 30 feet from the shack. The post didn't move when I pushed on it - good enough. There was hardly any wind, the water was basically flat. I wrapped a line around the post and tied it so it stayed up above the water - I didn't want it rubbing on the barnacles. There was no one around.. and slept well.

There was no wind Thursday morning. I cleaned up, and put everything in its place. Took apart and cleaned the sand out of my cam cleat for my main sheet. With nothing else to do, I thought maybe I'd row a bit - maybe I'd cover a mile or two. Took in my lines, and took a few strokes - and then slammed dead into the pole, startling myself! So I put up the sail and started creeping towards Corpus. There was a little wind, and I covered 3 miles in the first 2 hours - I was optimistic - thinking of how the wind normally grows as the day heats up. I started writing the time on my chart as I passed markers, to see my actual mileage/speed. The wind was light - one hour I went half a mile.

I did visit another bird sanctuary island - this one full of big white pelicans. Some sitting, some strutting around, some flying overhead.

I came to a group of a dozen dolphins, and they swam with me for a few minutes. Some were a very dark gray. One nudged my boat - pushing up the bow a bit.

Thursday evening I approached Corpus Christi. Earlier in the day I speculated how far I'd go, but the wind was light. I was excited about reaching Stingray Hole, on the north side of Corpus Christi bay, where the big ships create a breaking wave in the shallows between two islands. I thought it would be cool to camp there and watch. But no. I thought of places to camp for the night - where could I leave my boat, while I got a ride to the finish point? I had cell reception again - I was going to call John Wright and ask. However as I approached the turn for the Padre Island Yacht Club, the radio came to life. Jeremy said Hey! We're here! Come on in, or over - basically. They happened to be looking and saw me there. I had a place to stay - the club let us camp on their patio/sidewalk, and use their facility. One gentleman, I forget his name, gave me a couple of beers no less.

The beers were not a good idea. Having slept on the boat the night before, I had been on it continuously enough to be feeling some land sickness. With that and the beer, I felt a little off. And feeling off when you are wondering about the reddish spots on your leg, wondering about a flesh eating bacteria infection are not good for peace of mind. The consensus was to mark the edge of the redness with a marker, and if the redness spreads significantly, to go the ER...

Friday morning, Jeremy and Courtney gave me a ride to the finish point, Magnolia Beach. I needed to leave my boat somewhere, and the consensus was the dock at Marker 37. It was about a mile away, and indeed it was a great spot. They didn't charge me to leave it tied up there all day, since I bought something at the store! I was directed to use the part of the dock that was about to be replaced - and indeed it had loose boards.

We drove to Magnolia, and got to see more boats and people - sad wishing that I had seen more of them along the way. The shrimp boil was delicious. I gave a bottle of vinegar to a kid who was crying from a jellyfish sting - he said it didn't help. The kid's dad happened to have a big swastika tattooed on his chest. We didn't talk about that. I left early to go get my boat - back to Corpus. The ramp seemed shallow - I didn't want to drive my van into the water, and ended up asking a few passerbys (leaving the bar) to help me just lift the boat onto the trailer. It was dark - I started the drive home, and ended up stopping after an hour or so. I stayed at a hotel - and really enjoyed the hot shower.

Lessons, feelings, take-aways

- I don't like being wet for a long time. Getting wet's fine if I can dry off.
- I would like to set up a cover so I can sleep in my boat in the rain.

- I can sleep in my boat, sleeping inside my tent without the poles, just propping it up to keep the mosquitos off me.
- I was OK to not cook or use a stove. I went with no stove/fuel or cooking. Used "cold brew" liquid coffee cups and ½ and ½. Ate ready-to-eat packets of indian food and rice from costco. Salmon packets. Dried fruit and nuts. Oatmeal soaked overnight tastes good if not better than cooking it. Cooking with a stove is nice, but it's more stuff. Like fishing - I'd like to, but it's just more stuff, and I feel like I am bringing so many items already.
- The diy mast head float, and extra foam that I lashed on gave some peace of mind.
- I could use a bigger anchor - the ones I have are marginal.
- "If you like it, then you shoulda put a string on it". Catchy for tying everything in/down so you don't lose it.
- I loved being able to stand comfortably while sailing, swaying side to side to keep from getting stiff. I had cut out some of the bench that was full length - giving me a place to stand that's at the edge of my boat (and thus prevent some heeling). Before the place to stand was in the middle, which doesn't keep the boat from heeling.
- It was nice sailing in company and wished I could have done so more.
- Longer boats are generally faster - and thus will be far away relatively quickly, be out of sight after a couple of hours.
- I get land sick if I'm on the boat for a couple of days straight.
- My biggest anxiety was the flesh-eating bacteria, and it was really hard to avoid getting any sort of cut, especially when your skin is wet, especially when you are doing a lot of moving around/moving things around.
- A permanent marker was good for marking where the redness/inflammation was around cuts, and for writing on the laminated chart (it did rub off, but stayed for a while).
- When I reef my Sunfish sail, I take up the sail at the boom, bringing the boom and yard together. I had been lowering the yard too, for less heeling. Having the yard angled lower seemed to decrease the pointing ability.