

The 2015 Wayfarer Beach Week: A Neophyte's Report

Every year, as dependable as sunrise and Pacific Plate subduction, Linda and Jim Heffernan open their beach home at Emerald Isle, NC to the Wayfarer folk for a week of sailing, good conversation, good food, and good drink. While the “cast of characters” varies a bit from year to year, the tales that come out of Beach Week always paint an inviting picture.

Linda and Jim invited Trish and me (and #1392) to join the party last year, but we could not go: something about an IRS audit, the simultaneous failures of our heat pump, well pump, and electric toothbrush, and the final straw, a flat tire on the trailer. This year Trish could not go, but she urged me to, so I happily accepted. Our Wayfarer stayed at home; there would be one or more boats needing crew.

As in years past, attendees may arrive and depart at different times as their circumstances require. Linda and Jim, Uncle Al, Nick and Mary Serafinoff, AnnMarie Covington and I took part in the LTYC's Halloween on the Townsend charity regatta October 31 and November 1, then they headed for Emerald Isle while I completed some unavoidable tasks, with a planned Tuesday AM departure.

As Monday progressed, the beach weather forecast for the remainder of the week continued to deteriorate and I began to have misgivings. Sailors don't mind a little rain, but thunderstorms and high winds...er, maybe not. Even so, I remembered the many times that the forecast was poor for LTYC's races yet sailors had showed up in Proper Clothing For The Conditions, only to find that the forecast was a bit overstated (surely not!) and the races went on just fine. On Monday night I stuffed my truck with “Wonder if I might need this?” items, along with two of Trish's Spinach Braids, a perennial favorite side dish among the cognoscenti, and hit the road early on Tuesday.



The rain fell sporadically all the way from Greensboro to Emerald Isle, but Ms. Garmin got me there in fine style, notwithstanding an occasional arch “Recalculating...”. It being the off-season, the traffic was mercifully light. I was sure I was at the right address when I found Uncle Al's boat thoughtfully parked in front of the house (*above*) and three other Wayfarers scattered about in welcome. Linda came out on the front deck with her trademark big smile. I was home among the Wayfarer family.

A happy surprise as I entered the living room was Tom Erickson, whom I had met at the 2014 Halloween on Townsend regatta. He had come down from Massachusetts for the occasion and was planning to sail with his brother Bob, who lives in Wilmington, NC. The entire gang was hanging about, reading, napping, and tapping on laptops. With rain on and off there seemed to be no concerted effort to “make for the boats” so I settled in for a restful afternoon.



(l to r) Linda, Scott, AnnMarie Covington, Jim

It was not to be! Linda brought out *Trivial Pursuit*, and with a masterful stroke suggested that the eight participants should form two teams rather than having six play individually. With each roll of the dice, each team had to quickly come to a consensus while under a barrage of distractions by the opposing team. It was mayhem, with the quips flying like hummingbirds in a high wind. Good stuff!



Tom and Bob Erickson

Wednesday arrived after an evening of fine dining, good wine, and much talk about sailing in general and Wayfarers in particular. With no rain in sight and the threat of thunderstorms much diminished, the boats were stocked, the trailers were hitched and we were off to the ramps at Beaufort. Nick and Mary had other plans, so it was Tom and Bob in *Possum*, Linda, AnnMarie, and Jim in *Morning Star*, and Uncle Al and me in *SHADES*.



Jim, Linda and AnnMarie



Wayfarers off Queen Anne's Revenge on Taylor Creek in Beaufort, NC

Having never sailed in salt water, much less off shore, and with lurid warnings of skinny water, currents, sandbars and oyster beds ringing in my neophyte ears, I was content to let Uncle Al ease her down Taylor Creek, past the city proper (where the expected cheering throng failed to materialize) and thence through the Beaufort Inlet to the open sea. Uncle Al had other plans: grasping his camera, as we neared Pivers Island he announced that he wanted to take pictures and that I should take the tiller. I was fine with that, until he added that he wanted me to actually steer the boat.



The author at the helm

As most already know, Uncle Al is a masterful sailor, with the utter confidence that comes from having done everything at least once before, if not many times. He is also a fine teacher, and as patient as clay on the potter's wheel. We ran Bulkhead Channel, bucking a stiff current, then turned to starboard around Fort Macon and sailed through Beaufort Inlet. Off the Shackleford Banks, the trappings of civilization occasionally disappeared and I got a brief glimpse of what it must have looked like before Europeans arrived.



Soon after we left the inlet, Uncle Al pointed out a distant lighthouse (Cape Lookout) (*above*) and hinted that there might be beer, but there would be no lunch until we got there. It seemed impossibly far, but we three boats voyaged on, keeping each other in sight, much as mariners must have done before the advent of VHF, GPS, SONAR, auxiliary engines and the galley microwave. Easing along the Banks in six knots of wind on an easy reach, looking at the back side of the crashing surf a quarter-mile away, I felt quite the old salt.



After an easy voyage, marked by only a single grounding, Cape Lookout hove into view and we sailed to a convenient wharf near the lighthouse. Tom and Bob landed well up the beach and walked back, looking very marooned-on-a-desert-island, while the Heffernans and AnnMarie (*above*) stepped ashore at the beach just a few yards from the wharf.



(l to r) Scott Bogue, Linda and Jim Heffernan, Tom Erickson

While the park was largely closed, the sanitary facilities were open, as was a most inviting covered picnic shelter. (If this is what voyaging to distant lands is like, give me more!) Linda had prepared a sumptuous lunch, and with the exception of an emergency stash, all of the beer disappeared down appreciative throats. All in all, a most pleasant occasion.



The return journey was to be through Back Sound, between Shackleford Banks and Harker's Island, but with the tide being high, Uncle Al told me to take a short-cut (*above*) through a complex array of low-lying islands and shoals. The chart, being in a somewhat large scale, showed them largely in the aggregate, while our Wayfarer encountered them individually. Uncle Al cudged his brain to remember how he and Chip Cunningham had come that way a couple of years earlier while I tried my hand at interpreting the patterns on the water's surface, and between a bit of care and a lot of luck we got through, leaving our companion vessels mere dots in the distance.



Our having a commanding lead over our companions, Uncle Al suggested that we had time to return to Taylor Creek via the labyrinthine reed flats and channels between Carrot Island and Horse Island (*above*). Again, he cudged his brain to remember how he and Chip had done it, but the paths had changed and we began to wonder how all this was going to turn out. Beaufort was only a half-mile away but largely hidden by dunes, and we were in truly uncharted waters with the tide going out and daylight swiftly coming to an end.



As the breeze freshened a bit, we headed into yet another cul-de-sac, one that was just large enough to turn a Wayfarer around if the skipper were quick and got it exactly right the first time in the foot-deep water. Uncle Al shouted, "Give me the tiller!" and we switched positions as if we had been practicing for the America's Cup. He got us turned around and heading back out, but we still had no clear idea of where the channel was taking us. This was looking bad, and the beer was long gone.

At last the inlet from Taylor Creek came into view, perhaps 800 feet away, but there was no evidence of a channel that would take us there; it was a carpet of reeds. Uncle Al said, "Pull up the board almost all the way" and then, setting the sails for maximum drive, ran directly into the reeds. With a bit of grinding, we got through, then did it again, until we could see a path to Taylor Creek. It was only 300 feet away, and the way seemed clear, but with a KA-RUNCH and a lurch, we ran hard onto an oyster bed.

Mighty happy to have my water shoes on, and knowing there was no time to lose, I hopped over the side and began to pull. CRUNCH-suck, CRUNCH-suck, remembering someone mentioning at dinner the night before how the oyster beds enjoy trapping unwary shoes and keeping them. The perennially barefoot Uncle Al had luckily brought his water shoes in case of a bar stop along the way and was able to put them to good use by removing his 200+ pounds from the boat, giving us that last bit of needed clearance.



We exited across the reeds to the left of the mini-creek above.

Once free, we hopped back aboard and sailed like conquering heroes into Taylor Creek (*below*), but there was a stiff current running against us as we tried to sail back to the launch ramps. And that point the wind died to a zephyr. After a couple of ineffectual tacks, I unlimbered the paddle, not relishing the half-mile we had to go against that current, but Uncle Al pointed out a small, somewhat crude (and clearly private) launching ramp just a hundred feet or so downstream. We made for that, then made fast to a convenient wharf.



Knowing that for once I was better equipped for the task than Uncle Al, I squelched and dripped down the road toward the launch ramps. The closer I got, the more urgently the beer tried to make its exit, with no convenient bushes to be seen. But I made it, and managed to just catch Tom and Bob as they were preparing to head for the *Queen Ann's Revenge*, a bar and restaurant that is something of an icon among the Wayfarer folk who attend Beach Week. Jim, Linda and AnnMarie had already left, and I pictured them taking in some fine grub and grog as they speculated on the disappearance of *SHADES* and her crew.



The exit from our flats shortcut was right across from where we hauled out.

Driving Uncle Al's car back, now in full darkness, I delivered it to him for backing the invisible trailer down the unlit, narrow ramp. He did it with grace, only placing a single wheel off the pavement and onto the nicely manicured grass. I kept waiting for someone in the grand homes across the street to come out and take us to task for this intrusion, but no-one did, and we soon found ourselves sharing a table and some thoroughly delicious pizza and beer with our companions at the *Queen Anne's Revenge*.

On Thursday, alas! it was time to up anchor and sail for home, but with many a backward glance. Many thanks to Jim and Linda, who are as generous as they are gracious, and to the folk of the Wayfarer family.

Scott Bogue W1392