

Our Lovely Daysail to the Goat Farm

Nick Seraphinoff, helm, and Chip Cunningham, crew, on Impulse, Wayfarer 10864, September 15, 2013.

A file of relevant pictures is available on the USWA website. Follow the link on the homepage.

Telling you we are taking a daysail to the Goat Farm is going to give you the wrong idea, but that's how we're starting. Its name is actually the Goat Yard which is more than just a play on Boat Yard. There really was a goat, Nemo. Nemo is gone now. Wild dogs, I hear. And he's not the only one. Everything is changing. People are starting to call it the Goat Farm.

"Let's sail to the Goat Farm!" Nick says.

"Great!" I answer.

"A lovely destination, don't you think? Do we have enough beer?"

"We're good. Camera batteries full?"

"Full up. Swing me the hook."

We are getting very smooth now about hoisting *Impulse*, W10864, off the Bayview Yacht Club pier. When she is fully lowered into the water her mast just clears the yellow hoist motor and chain mechanism. We have been repeatedly disappointed her Windex, the delicate wind vane attached to the top of her mast, does not clear. At least six of them did not before we got the hang of it. The hang of it is: bow down slightly, and as it touches the water pull the boat forward, away from the hoist arm.

Nick masters a Tilly Hat to complete his fall sailing outfit. He will have an important insight shortly. He will pull this hat off and say, "You take it. I'm not a Tilly Hat kind of a guy."

Free of the hook and floating at the dock we pull up the main and admire the new Windex. We sail out what remains of Connor Creek and head west down the Detroit River in the channel along the north side of Belle Isle. Poor Detroit. Detroit will shortly give the state of Michigan a long term lease to take over the island in exchange for little more than a verbal promise to improve it. Can you imagine what it would be worth in New York or Chicago—a thousand acre island right downtown?



In ten minutes we make good over one third of a nautical mile and arrive at the mouth of the Goat Farm inlet.

"Here we are!"

"Great! Ready for a beer?"

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The inlet is deep, high banked, 200 feet wide, and extends one quarter of a mile inland to the north. Along the east side is an idle development of upscale brick townhouses, some finished for years but never occupied. They sit in the shadow of what's left of an Edison coal-fired generating plant famous for its "Seven Sisters"—seven identical gigantic concrete chimneys. The girls were blown to dust in 1996. Nick attended the event. The wind that day was away from Bayview, and all over the Goat Farm.

The Goat Farm is the inlet's entire west side. Out here at the mouth and for three quarters of the way back is what you might imagine was the farm's pasture—a field of urban grass and scrub that by its distress and unevenness hints at the rubble beneath.

The high banks confuse the wind. We tack and gybe, heeling leeward to comply, working our way toward the slips at the back. After many ducks under the boom, chasing the wind, Nick says, "Look in that bag for my baseball hat."

At last we raise the centerboard and glide close by the stern of the Goat Farm's nearly submerged three masted wooden schooner. She's missing her masts, but still, she must be an historical treasure of some sort. Just beyond is the first of twelve or so empty slips. We tie up to the best looking one and consider whether what is left of the wood will hold us.

"I think it will be OK if we step where there are joists," I tell Nick. Because I was a carpenter, I guess, he believes me. When after a few steps we don't fall through, our thoughts turn to exploring. A system of jerry built ramps takes us toward shore, over the schooner, to the foot of a long worrisome wooden stairway up the bank. I hedge my recommendation: "Here we're just counting on good luck."

The stairway does not collapse and we arrive twenty feet up the bank at the Goat Yard proper—an abandoned brickyard. One is immediately struck by the astounding variety and density of junk.

At first it was not junk. Items arrived and Stephen, the Goat Yard's owner, placed them in an order. After a time his original inspiration must have gotten overwhelmed. Placement of new stuff became simply a matter of the next vacant spot. Such a tendency has always existed. Silently and unnoticed then, everything transformed into junk. Anything more arrived as junk already. I imagine this part of Stephen's life became a vast secret from himself.

Before the boatyard went feral Stephen might still have heard his guardian angel speak through a friend—something soft and playful—"Hey, Eve-stay! Ix-nay on the unk-jay!"

Instead, he opened the gate to the yard every morning and let more junk wash in. It washed into his eyes and ears. Baskets full of party lights. More boats and masts than you can count. And bicycles! There is a bicycle leaning on every other piece of junk.

"Look! I have this 150' hook-and-ladder fire truck here!" Stephen might beam, were he still alive.

"Well, not exactly..." his angel would want to caution, "It has you."

The fire truck is not independent either. Along with everything else, it is caught in the draw of the Goat Yard's centerpiece—a huge, nameless tugboat.

She began as the beautiful Canadian quarantine cutter *Polana* in 1911, and was renamed *Macassa* in 1954. (I'm pretty sure I'm the kid standing on shore, wearing the checked shirt in a picture of her coming in to dock.) Now, one thin coat of paint has wiped away the most recent of her former identities, the *Queen City*.

As the *Queen City* she was a restaurant. Her engine and boiler were removed to make room for a commercial kitchen. Anticipating the crowds dining on her top deck, she was over-ballasted with rocks. She did an unremarkable business tied to the wharf at the foot of Ouellette Avenue in Windsor until she settled awash to her gunwale and the city wanted her out of there.

The plan was to turn her into a cottage at a nearby island, but pumped out and under tow to the island she grounded. It was discovered that with all those rocks she was too deep to go to the island or nearly anywhere else, and she was left at the Detroit Boat Works—the Goat Yard.

This is how it can go, not heeding your angel: Stephen is lured into a slick exchange for the *Queen City's* overdue docking fees that were never too clearly specified to begin with, and—voilà—the derelict is his. I do not mean to make fun of Stephen. The way I see it there is really no throwing anything away. You may throw a thing more or less far from yourself, but it still exists—here on Earth. Consider plastic and radioactive waste if you doubt me: welcome to the Anthropocene Era, everyone!

Stephen did not cause all the stuff at the Goat Yard to be made—well, not any more than the rest of us. He merely owned the place where it came to rest and he

didn't bury it so you can still see it. That's the criterion we have for junk, I guess: something nobody really wants anymore, but you can still see it.

We spent all afternoon marveling at Stephen's collection. There was a convenient smattering of chairs to relax on and regard it from. We didn't move a thing.

No one else was around except the very dog you would expect. Heading for the front gate, it turned stiffly toward us and then, not interested, continued on. Arthritis. Eye trouble, maybe.

The air began to cool. We made it back down the stairs and across the dock to our boat. We set a return course to Bayview and enjoyed an easy evening sail up the Detroit River.

Stephen died of cancer three days after our lovely daysail to his Goat Farm. Mary, Nick's wife, noticed the obituary in *Smoke Signals*, their neighborhood association newsletter, of all places. No telling where sailing a dinghy is going to take you.



View from the deck of Blackbeard SC looking down the long dock. In background is Broad Creek that runs to the Neuse River.

**Blackbeard Sailing Club Regatta
Eastern North Carolina**

August 22 & 23, 2015
Regatta Review

By Richard and Michele Johnson W10873

The thought struck me that we are the lucky few. Swilling warm Gatorade while standing under the hatch of the truck to escape the late afternoon sun, I took a moment to look around and listen. Boats were bouncing dangerously off their trailers as they were pulled around to be de-rigged. You could hear the low

murmur of conversation, the laughter of small groups discussing the racing, and see masts being lowered and sails rolled. Typical post regatta activity, but that is the point, it is typical, and we are the lucky few who can and do race small sailboats. And... it is good.

I guess a bit more information would be appreciated. Specifically we were in Eastern North Carolina at the Black Beard Sailing Club on the Neuse River. This is my 4th year at this late August regatta which is also one of my favorites, if not my favorite. The beauty of this location is the club and the Neuse. The club is tremendous and the members are very welcoming. The facilities are excellent. The race committee sets the standard of excellence for race committees everywhere. The Neuse is a wide river that empties into the Pamlico Sound and always seems to have a breeze. Oddly enough for the last three years the breeze has been out of the North for this regatta which makes for an interesting dynamic on the course. Despite the race committee's efforts to get away from shore the windward mark ends up to the lee of the marsh. So as one approached the windward mark the wind gets puffy and shifty, the nautical equivalent of Chutes and Ladders.

My recollections of races are just a series of snap shots. Remarkable moves, surprising appearances, and moments of fear, seem to be easily remembered. The rest of the race seems to be staring at tell tails, adjusting sails, and interrogating my poor crew and wife for information. So I will do my best convey my impressions and the results of the race.

Unscripted seems to be the best ways to describe the regatta. Of the 6 races, I only recall one race where the leader got out in front and stayed in front. In the first race, Anne Marie Covington and Andy Foreman headed for wind lines far to the right of the course while the rest of us muddled along in the middle picking our way through the lifts and headers. They caught a wind line, came screaming back, and opened up a lead that could not be closed. It was a tremendous win that highlighted that trying to be safe and conservative was dangerous. The sane sailing script was tossed and it was *improv* from that point forward.

Fortunes were made and lost on the windward leg. The course was very square and the combination of a slight oscillation near the leeward mark and more significant shifts at the windward mark created a fun house mirror effect that made it very difficult to determine where you really were on the course. It rewarded the attentive and the brave. It was fun to see Trish McDermott and Ali Kishbaugh rounding the windward