

Log of Capt Jim Ray,AP M/V Starboard Coast 2006

Capt Jim Ray,AP was a member of Coos Bay Squadron, developer of round blue plastic coated crab pots, charter boat captian, chartering out of Empire from their office, the "Fleetwod" the big tug that sat near the corner of Newmark and Cape Arago Hiway.



Captain Jim Ray

East Coast Great Loop Report from Capt Jim Ray,AP and Terry

Well, it's time to put the Starboard Coast "on the hard" (for you landlubbers, that means stored out of the water on land).

The first leg of our circumnavigation of the Eastern U.S. is done. The start point was Pine Island on the West Coast of Florida. We crossed Florida through the Okeechobee to the Atlantic Coast, then turned north up the Intracoastal Waterway. We're on the Chickahominy River (off Chesapeake Bay) now, having put almost 1100 miles behind us since May 22.

The Intracoastal Waterway (ICW) is a pathway that allows boats to travel from Texas to the Chesapeake Bay via protected "inside" waters – no ocean traveling. So it winds (and winds and winds) through a series of rivers and manmade canals, and crosses bays and inlets where you can see the ocean without having to go out in it.

The boat is a gas-powered 32-ft Carver (wanna talk about gas prices?) with plenty of room for a couple of boaters who are used to very little living space. Lots of things have quit working on this old boat, but Capt. Jim apparently can fix anything. He disappears head first into the engine compartment for a while, and we're on our way again. The worst, however, was when the head (toilet) stopped up! He had to disassemble the whole system, flush out the salt-encrustations coated with you-know-what, and reassemble all. In 90-degree temps and high humidity. Yuk.

It's easy (and possibly unfair) to summarize each segment of the trip:

§ Okeechobee: flat, dusty, scrubby landscape, dotted with occasional "old florida" style houses and herds of cattle.

§ Florida's east coast: chock-a-block full of boats, most of which are traveling much too fast for safety and good sense, and closely spaced, huge, gaudy houses.

§ Georgia: endless salt marshes, very few boats and houses, lots of birds, and quite beautiful in a stark kind of way.

§ South Carolina: Large, graceful, "southern plantation" style homes surrounded by moss-draped trees, and long stretches of beautiful and uninhabited river.

§ North Carolina (south half): more civilization, but at a slower pace than in Florida.

§ North Carolina (north half): Wow! Gorgeous rivers, Great Dismal Swamp, charming villages.

The most memorable experiences to date (in order of occurrence) have been:

§ The instant monsoon on the Okeechobee, with rains so heavy we couldn't see the water in front of us, and coming so quickly we couldn't get the hatches closed before our bed below was drenched. The whole thing lasted less than a half hour, but it certainly was exciting for a while!

§ Towing a stranded sailboater in St. Lucie. This is memorable because we are semi-convinced he was stealing the sailboat. Oh well, even thieves can probably use a good samaritan once in a while, right?

§ Weekend American families. Picnicking, swimming, tent camping, and fishing along the banks of the waterways. Old-time family entertainment with no evidence of boom boxes or video games. Parents interacting with their kids. Heartwarming.

§ Wild horses grazing along Georgia's Cumberland Island shoreline.

§ Charleston, SC. Charming is the best word. They've maintained and/or renovated much of the original city. Took a city tour by bus, then hired a pedicab for a trip to a museum about Ft. Sumter. Pedicab driver (pedaler?) was a nice young man from Port Orchard, WA!

§ The Waccamaw River in South Carolina. Wide and deep (at least 12-15 feet!), with wooded shoreline and no sign of civilization for 20 or 30 miles. Lovely.

§ Tropical Storm Alberto. Knew it was coming so holed up in a marina at Oriental, NC. Big winds, a little rain, good show.

East Coast Great Loop report continued

§ Oriental, NC. Wow. A small village of about 800 folks and almost 3000 boats. Really! The big deal in town is the coffee shop where you can order a latte and sit on the big covered porch overlooking the harbor while gossiping about who did what to whom when and possibly why. Friendly to visiting boaters like us. Took us right in, shared the gossip, loaned us bicycles. Hardly gets better than that, right? The big problem there is the Oriental Virus, a malady that results in folks either dropping the anchor for good, or visiting a local real estate office. We almost caught the virus ourselves. If we were inclined to move to the East Coast, Oriental would be the place. Loved it.

§ The bicycle. The bike was too tall, Terry's legs too short. So when stopped the only thing that happened was bike and rider toppling sideways onto the pavement. After we stopped laughing and assessed damages (to Terry, not the bike), we developed a system whereby Jim dismounted his bike, then stood ready to catch Terry's bike and hold it steady while she dismounted. Wasn't a pretty operation, but effective.

§ Elizabeth City, NC. Tradition has it that 2 old men give roses to the women on visiting boats. Been going on for 22 years. Well, times have changed a little. Now the roses are carnations, and the 2 men have evolved into an organization called the Rose Buddies. If there are 5 or more visiting boats, the Rose Buddies host a wine and cheese party on the dock. Turns out that Fred, the man zipping along the breakwater in his golf cart and handing out carnations was one of the original 2 men! He's 93 now, and he admits readily to less energy than the old days. During the party, he stood up and made a short speech in a booming voice about how welcome we all were.

§ Pasquotank River and Great Dismal Swamp Canal. Miles of lovely cruising, with the shoreline a mass of vine-draped cypress trees and wild roses, birds twittering.

§ Deep Creek Lock. Robert, the lock tender, played us a tune on one of his many conch shells. He then assured us that he is the foremost expert on the Dismal Swamp, and proceeded to prove it with a well-practiced and informative speech on the history and trivia of the area. Great fun.

§ Spectacular thunder and lightning storms many evenings. Usually without rain. Just great booming noise and huge bolts of light.

§ Wildlife. Dolphins everyday cavorting about the boat, herons, pelicans, egrets, cormorants, anhingas, and hundreds of Osprey nests, each with babies being fed by mama (or papa?). And HUGE biting flies!

§ The eerily mist-enshrouded calm waters of the anchorages in the wee hours of the night (seen only because an aging body demands a trip to the necessary room each night).

And last but certainly not least . . . THE STORM.

We were 30 minutes from safe harbor, cruising in light rain and no wind, asking the bridge tender to open the bridge for us when the sky opened up and the world disappeared. Literally. Blinding rain, thunder and lightning so close to the boat that our ears were ringing, and 45-knot winds. Instantly. This at 3:30 p.m. The worst of it was over in a couple of hours, but it continued to beat us up until 9:30. Jim managed to keep the boat from blowing into the bridge or ashore, thank God.

How does East Coast boating differ from the Northwest?

First the water out here is SHALLOW and BROWN. "Deep" water is anything more than 10 feet. And East Coast boaters are called brown-water sailors.

Second, one's absolute dependence on Coast Guard provided navigational markers. Most of the ICW waterways are narrow dredged channels that wind between ever-changing shoal areas.

And third, air conditioning. Love that AC!

That's it. We'll put the boat back in the water next April, and head on north. Right now, we're flying home to the Great Northwest! See ya.

Terry & Jim M/V Starboard Coast

It's not the distance that you cruise, but the fun you have.

BOAT SMART FROM THE START WEAR YOUR LIFEJACKET

Great Loop cruise, Part 2 Capt. Jim & Terry

As you know, last year we started our cruise of The Great Loop, a circumnavigation of the Eastern US. Starting at Pine Island on Florida's west coast, we crossed Florida on the Okeechobee Waterway to the Atlantic Ocean, then proceeded up the Intracoastal Waterway as far as the lower Chesapeake Bay, where we put the boat in storage.

This year we retrieved the boat from Colonial Harbor Marina on the Chickahominy River, and headed north on May 25.

Chesapeake Bay is huge. There was a steady stream of freighters and tug/barges in addition to pleasure boats. Most tug boats on this coast push the barges rather than towing them like in the NW. Two memorable stops on the Chesapeake include the Solomons, a sailing mecca where the masts in the marinas are so thick you can't see through them, and Annapolis where we broke our diet with a great dinner out.

Potomac River / Washington, DC. We cruised up the Potomac River 100 miles (each way) to Washington, DC, passing famous places like Quantico, Mt. Vernon and other stately 18th and 19th century homes. We anchored in downtown WDC, where we had a great view of the Washington Monument and dinghy dock privileges at one of the marinas.

Each day we would catch a bus across the street from the marina, which took us to the Washington Mall (center of all museums, monuments, etc.) in less than 10 minutes. Couldn't have been more convenient! We spent three tourist days there (along with 1000's of school children's "spring field trip time!"). When planning this trip, there were two specific Smithsonian museums that we wanted to visit . . . they were BOTH closed for renovation!!! But we visited several others, of course. The highlight was the International Spy Museum, very interesting. Some miscellaneous observations:

WDC is a city of beautiful gardens, whether park-large or pot-small . . . always meticulously planted and maintained, and, of course, at their best now in the Spring.

• No skyscrapers—all buildings are less than 12 stories high. Seemed strange for a large city.

• More buses (mostly tour buses) per square mile than we have ever seen before.

• A tour bus driver being handcuffed by the cops just before his tired passengers returned to the bus after a long, hot day.

Washington DC and Annapolis were great, spent two days with daughter Tracy, Phill and granddaughter Julia in northern Chesapeake. Got escorted out of Atlantic City by State Police for anchoring in front of Trumps Marina, I won't spend any money in his place.

New Jersey waterways . . . AWFUL!! Narrow, shallow, and crowded . . . very unpleasant stretch of water all the way from Delaware to New York. If we weren't inching our way along in 3 feet of water (we draw 2-1/2 ft!), we were dodging kamikaze boaters.

The housing density is way beyond anything we have in the Northwest. most of the shorelines were lined with wall-to-wall (literally, no yards) houses and condos. We transited one stretch of it on a hot, sunny Fathers Day Sunday. Yikes! 1000's of boats, all at high speed with big wakes, going in all directions. Add hundreds of sailboats into the mix with their God-given right to tack into the path of any powerboat. STRESS!

New York City. Cruising into New York Harbor was a kick. The Manhattan skyline, the Statue of Liberty, lots of freighters and a few mega-yachts flying flags from around the world. Saw the Staten Island Ferry shuttling back and forth . . . brought to mind the old movies and books where that ferry is where spies meet and strangers fall in love. Neat!

The first night we anchored right behind the Statue of Liberty. It was a rough anchorage, but it seemed like we should do it one night. We then moved into a marina (\$4/ft for moorage!!!) while we played tourist for a couple of days. Did an all-day tour of New York City I can't believe that people actually choose to live there!

Funny note: Our tour guide, in all seriousness, pointed out a shoe store where they actually measure your feet before selling you shoes! I guess we Northwesterners are a little old fashioned . . . we still expect our feet to be measured!

The two Ladys.

We anchored behind Liberty the first night in NY. Park Police are not nice. (Another sea story).

New York City was fun for a day or two, did Ellis Island and that was very interesting. We visited Ellis Island, they've turned the immigration processing buildings into a marvelous museum. Loved it. Spent a little time on their computer and found the shipping records of when Natale Dalla Santa, Sr. and his sisters came from Italy in 1920. Spent an evening

watching an NYC Shakespearean company doing *As You Like It* on the patio of a shoreside restaurant near our marina. Free . . . part of a summer art-in-the-park program. Great fun.

Erie Canal.

We are now at Mile 151 of the Erie Canal, which began at Waterford, NY 7 days ago. The first 90 miles were on the Mohawk River, the original canal having been abandoned once mules were no longer required to move the barges along. We could see bits of the old canal once in a while as we cruised west. The Mohawk River gently winds through hilly deciduous forests, interrupted occasionally by small villages, a handful of houses, or a farm.

Much of the way, Interstate 90 runs along the south bank and a major rail line runs along the north bank, so noise can be a factor. But, always, there is a wide buffer of trees that visually separates the boater from them, plus endless forests beyond them. Very beautiful. We transited 22 locks in 151 miles, which moved us ever higher into the hills . . . a total elevation climb of about 420 feet.

We had the canal to ourselves almost every day, perhaps seeing only 2 or 3 eastbound boats, and none going west like we were. Lockmaster said everybody goes west now, and returns east in August.

Most of the towns are extremely small and economically dying, but almost all of them have free docks for transient boaters, some with free electricity and water. And very friendly people.

We're sitting in a marina in Brewerton, NY, right now, waiting for the generator to be fixed. 10 miles after we leave here we will leave the Erie Canal, and head north on the Oswego Canal which will take us to Lake Ontario and then on into Canadian waters. Trip to date has been pleasant and interesting and scenic (well, except for New Jersey!). We've done more anchoring than tying up at marinas. Some anchorages have been beautifully rural and quiet, and some on the edge of a high-traffic channel where it was bumpy from boat wakes. Once on the Erie Canal, we were usually able to tie up at free docks provided by the small villages.

The weather has been mostly good, and when thunderstorms and wind hit us we had enough warning to get hunkered down. Most of June was very hot and muggy.

There have been lots of picturesque lighthouses, some quite old.

Wildlife: Lots of birds, of course -- swans, egrets, geese, ducks, gulls, etc., etc. But the only non-bird wildlife spotted were some deer at several points along the Hudson River.

Terry and Jim



(Captain Jim passed away before they could complete the Loop. Starboard Coast was in Lake Michigan.)