

Life in the Low Country

We're on the down hill side of our budget break from cruising. Costs were outstripping my retirement income, so we stopped to work for a year, and rebuild our cruising kitty. Mary has been working three nights a week as an RN at the hospital, while I've had part time work as a Captain with TowBoat U.S.

Ten months have passed; we're looking forward to getting underway again November 1st. (61 days left to go!)



It's been interesting to see the cycle of the seasons here in South Carolina. Port Royal has a mild climate, even milder than Atlanta. Even though it doesn't have "winter", there are still noticeable seasons. And, the seasons are more tuned to the life cycle of the low country and the sea life.

Here's a picture of a recent visitor, a fiddler crab who boarded our boat. In early summer, there are thousands of these little critters! They swarm over docks and onto boats, busily exploring everywhere.

Early spring is red drum season. They have a bladder they inflate and then squeeze to make a "BaaaRRROOOOMM" sound. They like shady places, like under docks and boats. So you're lying in your bunk, reading a nice mystery novel, and every few minutes.... "BaaaRRROOOOMM!" Just another red drum looking for love.

Here's another sign of the seasons; the summer high tides when the moon and sun are aligned bring the floating wrack of cane grass and spartina grass. The "spring tides" float it off the shore line, and the flowing current carries rafts of it down the river, until it hangs up on docks or in the marina.

Now we're heading into fall, and small brown shrimp which came in first in early summer are leaving, and the larger red shrimp are arriving. There are also seasons for black drum, cobia, whiting, and spanish mackerel. In Atlanta, we judged seasons by the passing of the holidays. On the coast, it's the changing cycles of sea life.





The people of the low country are always up for fun on the water. There are several sand bars just below the surface in the Beaufort River. With an 8 foot tide, when the tide is down you have a beach!

Cocktail cove on Lanier has nothing on these folks, they love to take their boats to the sand bar and party on weekends.

The local divers charge \$2.50 a foot to clean the bottom of your boat once a month. But, with sand bars and an 8 foot tide, there's another option.

If you have a true do-it-yourself attitude, you can careen your boat at high tide, and scrape the bottom yourself. Twelve hours later it refloats and you can do the other side. This used to be common practice, but these days few take the time. Here's a photo of a large sailboat intentionally careened for bottom cleaning in front of Beaufort. The photo is fuzzy, but there's a woman in ankle deep water cleaning the bottom.



This next one wasn't intentional. It was a TowBoat call, but I couldn't get there in time to pull off before the tide fell. Most sailboats have a robust keel, and careening on a soft bottom usually doesn't damage them. You need to check the keelbolts and the bilge carefully, and have all of the through-hulls closed.

Then, relax and wait for the tide. The TowBoat can still help, by tying on a line and having a gentle pull towards deep water as the tide rises. This way the wind or current won't drive the boat higher onto the sandbar. As the tide rises, the TowBoat gently pulls it off.



Here's "the rest of the story". I was with the sailboat as the tide was falling, and I let it get me.

Remember the rule of twelves? At mid-tide, a 10' tide is falling 10" every 20 minutes. That's 1" every 2 minutes. I was maneuvering around the stranded boat, and the tide fell enough that I couldn't get the TowBoat away to take it back to the marina.

Usually I go back to the marina and wait in comfort for the rising tide. In this case, the customer and I waited for the tide together !

But now, we're in count down mode. Stuff we don't need is being off-loaded from the boat. Repairs and deferred maintenance projects fill most of my time. We're counting down the days until November 1st!

Why is Mary smiling?
Because we're headed out
cruising again!

