

Upfront

by Scott Lauretti

It's a different world on the water. In some ways, better. Quiet. Peaceful. Unhurried. The views back towards civilization frame it in generously flattering light.

The relatively unspoiled natural environs that connect our patches of population are visually magnificent in ways I haven't witnessed anywhere else. The islands protecting our eastern flank, especially the ones immune to the temptations of development, are hard to imagine if you haven't examined them with your own eyes.

I've run boats south into Florida and north up the coast of the Carolinas and more than 100 miles east offshore. Before I moved here 22 years ago, I had never stood at a helm, wheel in hand. Now, it's like someone else lived those 37 years of landlocked life. To experience your home from the perspective of a deck – humble or grand, moving fast or puttering along – is to appreciate its essence. It's an exercise in sensory perception. Like all exercise, it requires intention and effort, and the rewards leave you euphoric afterwards.

Last week, we navigated to Seabrook Island's Bohicket Marina, on Bohicket Creek off the North Edisto River, a few miles from the Intra-coastal Waterway, which takes you most of the way from here to there. You pass Daufuskie and Hilton Head Islands, then the Parris Island Marine Corps Recruit Depot, before idling through Beaufort between two bridges on either end of town. On the other side of the historic South Carolina town, you might find yourself underneath a simulated dogfight, or lifting and lowering eyes to follow the jet fighters doing touch-and-goes at the Marine Corps Air Station that seems in reach of a well-cast fishing line. From there, it's smooth, pristine sailing – or open-throttle powering – the rest of the way.

Why Bohicket? It's a short shuttle to Kiawah Island, and the magic that awaits there.

But what's it like to ride three and a half hours – give or take – under the late summer sun? If I could capture it fully, I'd be a famous writer. It's a thing that defies adequate description. It's a thing that wishes we hadn't minimized the impact of particular words through overuse. Because it is – simply and precisely – awesome. (Per the Cambridge English Dictionary: "causing feelings of great admiration, respect, or fear.") Which alludes to a source of the intensity behind the resultant joy of a nautical adventure – the water can be a dangerous place.

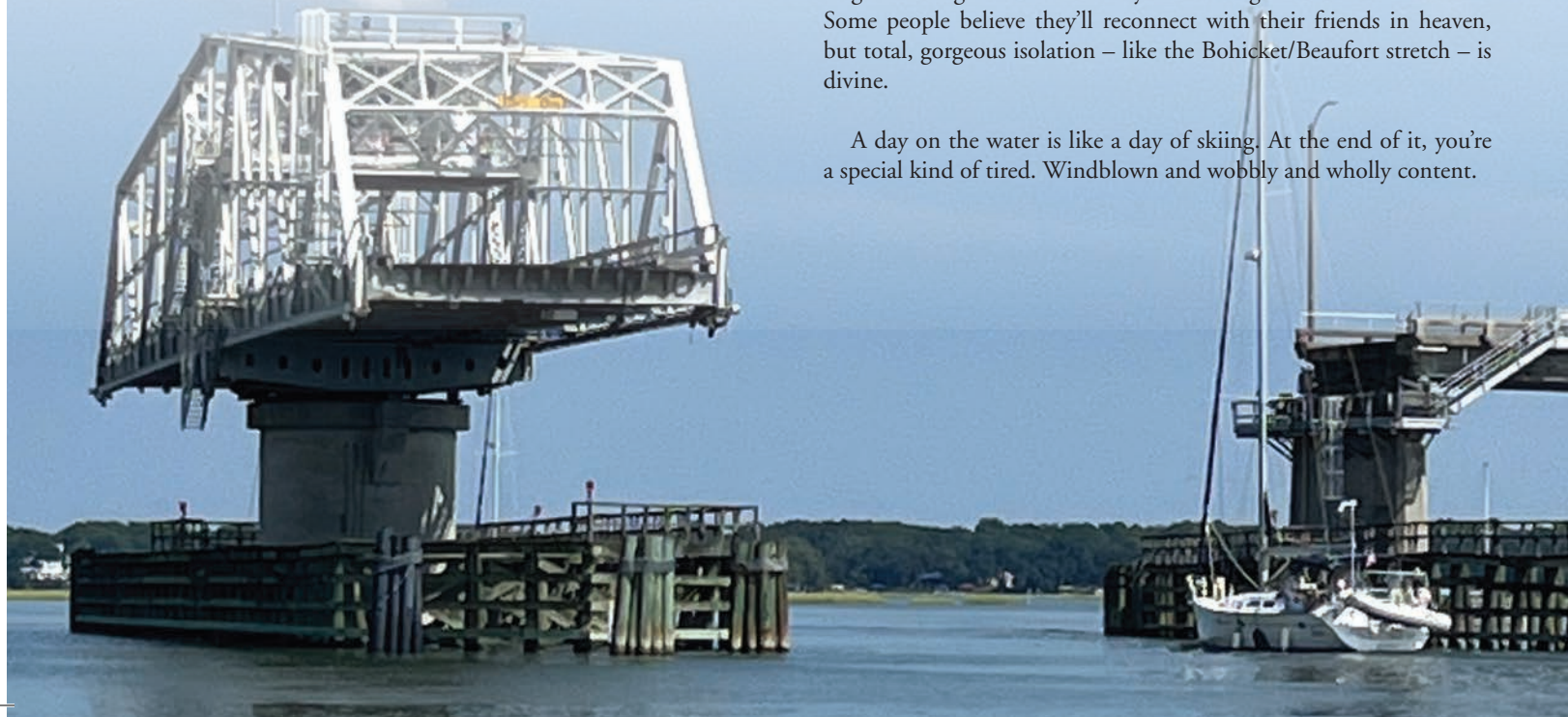
There are many moments of mind-blowing beauty; but, at any time, one of your engines – and you might well not have more than one – could fail...sometimes through no fault of your own, or because you've run it aground or inadvertently wrapped a trailing line in its prop(eller) or unceremoniously run out of gas. The tides wait for no man (or woman), so the water around here is always moving – in many places, quite fast. Without controllable propulsion, mechanical or otherwise, you'll be heading at something for which your vessel was not intended before you can finish yelling at your first mate.

And there's the weather. The land is flat here, so the horizon outruns the limits of your aging eyes. But, within your vast field of vision, you notice it's pouring over there. And over there is where you're heading...as marked by a sudden lightning strike.

As they say in finance: There's a tradeoff between risk and reward. The rewards of a long boat ride are so elementally simple that they might seem silly condemned to this page, but here goes. The colors. A range of greens so complete and perfect that the single descriptor – "green" – feels lazy. The grasses that line the route tease every gift from the sun that it has to offer. They sway gracefully, shyly darkening before enthusiastically returning to direct light and the shade of an overripe lime. The wet, twinkling surface in front of you yields to a baby dolphin's breach. A single bird, purely white, joins you, darting ahead, then falling behind. The sky's blue is so rich and heavy that you check your face for your sunglasses, wondering if such a saturated hue is available to the naked eye.

We returned home on a Thursday, leaving Bohicket around 1. For the hour-plus to Beaufort, we cruised at 37 knots, give or take. We didn't overtake a boat or encounter one coming the other way. Not a single building or a visible car anywhere along the route on either side. Some people believe they'll reconnect with their friends in heaven, but total, gorgeous isolation – like the Bohicket/Beaufort stretch – is divine.

A day on the water is like a day of skiing. At the end of it, you're a special kind of tired. Windblown and wobbly and wholly content.



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