

The Adventures of HIGH COTTON - Volume II

HIGH COTTON is a year 2000 Camano Troll, a trawler that was originally designated as 28' but is now known as 31'. HIGH COTTON is powered by a single Volvo TAMD41P diesel engine and is equipped with a bow thruster. There is no onboard genset, but there is a four battery house bank and a 2000 watt inverter. The galley is equipped with a refrigerator and a three burner propane range with oven and broiler. Cruising at 2000 RPM, she makes 7 knots over slack water and burns about 1.8 GPH.

The following is an account of a cruise north on the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway from Charleston, SC to the Cape Fear River and on to Wilmington, NC and back beginning August 7, 2013 and ending on August 16, 2013

Captain's Log, day one (August 7, 2013)

They say a day when you don't learn something is a wasted day. Well, today wasn't a wasted day, I learned how to take apart, repair, and reassemble a Lewmar anchor windlass! But, I'm getting ahead of myself here.

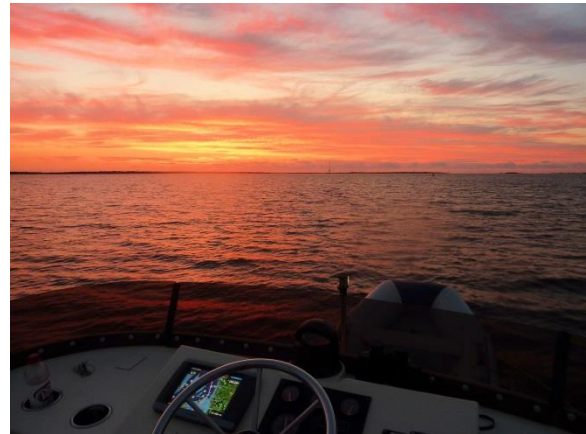
Our trip is planned to cruise to Wilmington, North Carolina, spend a couple days, and then stop at various locations on the way back as the mood strikes us. Possibilities include Bald Head Island, Myrtle Beach, and Georgetown.

Slack tide was at 4:00 AM, we elected to spend the night on the boat rather than getting up at 3:00 AM and driving to the marina. We got up, warmed some coffee in the microwave, got everything ready, and glided out of our slip about 4:45 AM. It sure is quiet and peaceful on the river at that hour. The chart plotter has the route in it so all I have to do is follow the orange line and watch out for crab pot buoys.

About half way to the harbor I noticed that there was no depth reading on the chart plotter. I handed the wheel over to Patti and went down to check things. Everything was on and connected.

Once it got light and we were in the harbor, I went back down and got out the instructions.

According to the blinking light on the depth sounder, everything was connected and working properly. About halfway across the harbor, out of nowhere, it started working. It worked for an hour or so, then stopped again. Twice more today it started working, then quit again.



Sunrise over Charleston Harbor

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The Ben Sawyer Bridge in our wake

We had a nice, otherwise uneventful trip, saw dolphins and a couple small alligators, and had a dolphin swim alongside the boat. Kiki (the puppy) was really impressed with the “big fish”.



A dolphin swims in our bow wake on the ICW

Rather than our usual stopping point south of Winyah Bay, we decided to press on and anchor on the Waccamaw River behind Butler Island, a popular ICW anchorage.

There was a sailboat already anchored so we picked out a good spot, I went to the bow, untied the line that secured the anchor, and pressed the windlass “down” switch. Nothing but a quiet click! I tried the “up” switch, same thing. After three or four tries, I decided to try the manual override so I got the handle out of

my tool box and tried it. Nothing, it would not budge.

I could pull the chain and rope off the windlass and deploy it by dropping it, but the thought of pulling it back up tomorrow bothered me to say the least. After nearly twelve hours on the water and faced with messing with the anchor or windlass, I decided to just continue on to the next marina where we wouldn’t have to use the anchor.

Now for the learning something part: Once we got settled in, I got out my tools and figured out how to get the windlass cover off. As I began to loosen it, water came out. Not a good sign!

I got the cover off and everything was rusty. Removing one of the gears, I tried the switch again and determined the motor was locked up with rust. I put my trusty locking pliers on the motor shaft and pushed and pulled until it broke free. I pushed the switch and the motor turned. Pushed the other switch and it turned the other way. Now the trick was to put the gear back in and get the shafts lined up so the case would go back on. Eventually, I got it on and installed the screws. It works, but it’s going to need some more thorough work when we get home.

I took a shower, ate dinner, and feeling refreshed, decided to tackle the depth sounder. I cleaned the contacts on all the sockets and cables, but no dice. The last chance was the transducer itself which sits in a liquid fill cup inside the hull. I unscrewed it and noticed that the fluid was almost gone. I don’t know where it went, but it was gone. Not having antifreeze with me, I used plain water, reinstalled the transducer, and it works!

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The boat is fixed, I am tired, and I'm going to bed early.



HIGH COTTON at Heritage Harbor Marina

Captain's Log, day two (August 8, 2013)

We got up at a more normal 7:00AM this morning. For some reason, it took longer to get underway than yesterday. Close to 8:30AM, we slipped our lines and got underway. We saw a few alligators on the river, but they scurried away when we tried to get close to them. We also dodged several floating logs floating down the river.



Alligator swimming on the Waccamaw River



Kiki the Sea Dog drives the boat

RAIN DELAY: About 10:00AM it started to sprinkle. No matter, we kept going. Soon it started to rain. Since Q-Tip (the dinghy) is stored on the bow, we can't run the boat from the lower helm. We discussed moving on or stopping to wait out the rain. We decided to anchor and wait for the rain to stop. It's a good thing I fixed the windlass yesterday!

Soon the rain changed to a downpour so it turned out to be a good decision to stop. While we were anchored, we saw a bunch of jet skis that had passed us earlier heading for home. I'll bet they were drenched.

After an hour or so we decided we didn't really want to spend the night where we were so I broke out my foul weather gear (yellow rain pants and top from Home Depot), planning to move Q-Tip off the bow and rig it to be towed so we could drive from the lower helm. Just as I had the pants on and adjusted, the rain stopped. I went out anyway and got Q-Tip rigged for towing and we got underway. It's a good thing because it started raining again and we had to move to the lower helm. I broke out the folding metal helm chair that I got from a fellow Camano owner a few months ago. It

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works great and beats standing for hours at a time.



Q-Tip riding behind HIGH COTTON



Captain Ron in his high tech folding helm chair

By the time we got to the Socastee Swing Bridge, it was no longer raining so back up top we went again. The weather cleared up and it was much cooler.



Turtles on the Waccamaw River

Barefoot Landing seemed like a good place to end the day but there was a choice to make. On one side, a dock only with power and water but no other facilities. The plus side is, it's at a big outlet mall with lots of stores and restaurants.

On the other side, a "real" marina with restrooms, showers, and a pool. Strangely enough, the rates are lower than the dock on the other side. We chose the marina and had our showers and Ron tested out the pool. After that, we had dinner in the on-site restaurant. It was good and not expensive.



HIGH COTTON at Barefoot Resort Marina

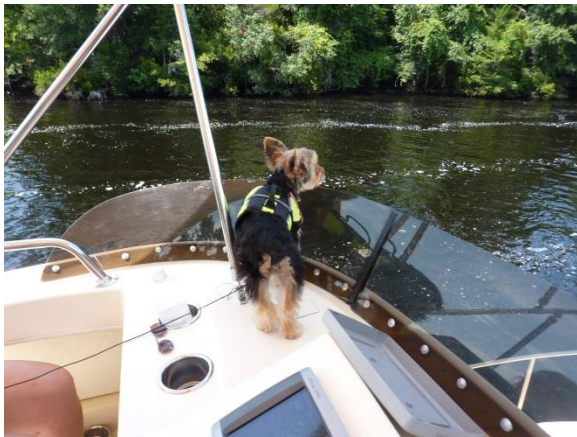
Back to the boat, we took Kiki for a walk and she met some other dogs. Then back to the boat to rest up for tomorrow. We were

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supposed to make Wilmington by Friday afternoon but I don't think that will happen. There will be another marina stop or anchorage, then Wilmington on Saturday.

Captain's Log, day three (August 9, 2013)

We topped off our fuel (45 gallons) and water tanks and were underway about 8:30AM. Just north of Myrtle Beach is the famous "rock pile" where the ICW channel is lined with jagged rocks. The best time to pass through here is low tide so you can see the rocks, but it was high tide when we left. The dockmaster warned us that if we met a tug and barge we should turn around, but we called on the VHF and no barges were coming so we got through with no issues by staying in the middle.



Kiki watches to make sure we stay in the channel

The ICW from Myrtle Beach north to Little River is Jet Ski heaven or hell, depending on your perspective. For me, it's hell. Hundreds of little fast noisy boats, mostly rentals, operated by tourists who have never driven a boat before and know none of the rules of the road. A dozen or more will be riding side by side coming towards you and at the last minute they split up

and pass you, half on one side and half on the other. At least I didn't hit any and none hit me.



Jet Skis on the ICW

Apparently, Kiki (the Sea Dog) agrees with me because she decided to bark every time one passed us. It was a noisy few hours. [Kiki writes: *Those little boats are noisy and they wake me up when I'm napping. They also rock our boat. You would bark too if you didn't know how to talk. And I don't understand why I have to wear a life jacket all day when Mawma and Pawpaw don't have to.*]



We decided to stop and let this tug and barge go through the narrow part of the channel

We passed Southport and headed north up the Cape Fear River. That's when we learned our lesson for the day. When the cruising guides

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say the going can be rough when the current is flowing down the river and the wind is blowing up the river, believe them!

As we passed Snows Cut (the ICW north), we called the dockmaster at the Wilmington City Docks and found it was another fifteen miles to the dock. We reserved a space and continued on. Our normal cruising RPM of 2,000 wasn't getting us anywhere against the current so we had to speed up to get there before the dockmaster left for the night.



Interesting artwork on the storage tank



Approaching Wilmington, NC

When we got to Wilmington, there was only one space left on the dock and it was between two boats. The guy on the boat in front looked a little nervous and he jumped out to help the dockmaster with the lines. No matter, we slipped into the space without issue. It turns out they have two dogs; one is a Yorkie so Kiki got to meet some new dog friends.

The dock belongs to the City of Wilmington (you probably guessed that already) and the dockmaster and assistant are city employees. The dockmaster couldn't have been nicer or more helpful. He checked us in right on the dock and gave us a map of all the attractions and some suggestions of where to go and what to see.



HIGH COTTON at the Wilmington City Dock

The river front seems to be the center of night life. There's a free band concert going on, a festival with live bands across the river, and street bands and musicians playing for tips. Lots of people walking around, some in some pretty strange costumes. We found a place to get sandwiches and ate. Patti asked the waitress for change for a twenty dollar bill (for the tip). The waitress grabbed the twenty, mumbled something about going down the street and ran out the front door. A few

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minutes later she returned with the change. She said something about not keeping a drawer.

There's a well-known ice cream shop in town so we looked it up. The line was through the store and out onto the sidewalk so we just came back to the boat ready for a good night's sleep without our desert. That will happen after the bands stop, I suppose.



The rib festival across the river from the dock

Captain's Log, day four (August 10, 2013)

The band across the river stopped last night around midnight. Whatever they lacked in talent and musicianship, they made up in volume. In fairness, they might have been good if "high-energy funk" is your favorite type of music. It's not mine.

I forgot to mention in yesterday's log that we moved Q-Tip back up on the bow before we left Barefoot Marina in Myrtle Beach. It's a good thing we did because it would have taken a beating going up the Cape Fear River and we couldn't have fit in our spot on the dock with it tagging along behind.

We were counting on sleeping late this morning but as soon as it got light, Kiki decided it was

time to get up. We showered and cleaned up a bit, then started breakfast. Just about that time, we noticed a very large log floating up the river towards the boats. When I say "large", this log was about sixty feet long and three feet in diameter at the base. It was more of a "tree" than a "log". Along with two other boaters we managed to keep it away from the boats and it continued up river under a commercial dock. With luck, it will get caught and stay there when the current reverses. Two smaller logs followed and we pushed them away as well.



This log floated by the dock and several boaters cooperated to keep it off the boats

We walked a couple blocks to the Saturday farmer's market but it was hot and Kiki was panting so we bought some dog treats from one of the vendors and brought her back to the boat. Later, we left her on the boat and went looking for lunch, supposedly something "light". Walking along the street and looking at the posted menus, we didn't see anything "light" so we decided to try the Chinese restaurant lunch specials. When we walked in, it was just like the food court at the mall with pictures of the meals above the counter and it smelled like a garbage can so we turned around and walked out. We decided to go back to a Mediterranean restaurant we had passed. We went in and had

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an excellent meal. It's the Black Sea Grill on South Front Street if you're ever in the area.

We came back to the boat and took naps. Once we woke up and went outside, a couple with a boat in front of us that we had met the night before suggested that we join them in the pool at the Hilton Hotel behind the dock. We asked if that was part of the deal for the dock and they said no, but who would know? That seemed like a good enough answer so we went for a refreshing dip in the pool. After that, we went back to HIGH COTTON, got dressed, and took our folding chairs up the dock to chat with our new found friends and let Kiki have a play date with their dogs. Kiki and their Yorkie had a blast chasing each other around and barking at each other. The other dog just watched.



Kiki and her new friends get acquainted

Considering our (not so light) lunch, we heated up some leftovers we had on the boat, ate, and now it's time for bed. Of course the bands across the river are still playing and will probably play until midnight again, so who knows?

Captain's Log, day five (August 11, 2013)

Up at the crack of nine, we thought about breakfast but decided to just eat lunch early

today. We bid farewell to our new found friends and helped them off the dock. Kiki is missing her doggie friends.

Nothing more of note happened today, we walked around the town, checked the shops, ate lunch, came back to the boat, walked some more with Kiki, ate dinner, and we're back at the boat about to turn in for the night.



The Wilmington, NC River Walk

The bands are still going strong and they might as well be playing right next to the boat as across the river. Our new boat friends are from this area and recommended Southport Marina so we made reservations for tomorrow night. From there, it's probably Barefoot Landing in Myrtle Beach, then a night or two at anchor and probably the weekend in Georgetown. If anyone wants to meet up with us there, let us know.

Captain's Log, day six (August 12, 2013)

Nothing exciting to report today. We got underway a little after 9:00AM and pulled into the Southport Marina about 1:00PM. Again, we were travelling against the current most of the way but today the water was smooth. We had to get slightly out of the marked channel to

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avoid an incoming tanker but that wasn't a problem, it was still over forty feet deep. After we docked in Southport, we saw a couple of ships that we had passed at the port in Wilmington. If we had left later or gone slower, we would have had to worry about them overtaking us.



Ship docked in Wilmington

We took showers, and then walked into Southport for a meal and to check out the shops. Southport is a quaint little town with lots of tourist shops. Patti bought some jewelry.

Back at the boat, we ate a light supper (our leftovers from lunch), then took showers again (because it was so hot out walking). It's quiet tonight for a change so we should get a good night's sleep. Tomorrow, on to Myrtle Beach again. We plan to meet up with friends who live in the area.



HIGH COTTON at Southport Marina

Captain's Log, day seven (August 13, 2013)

Last night as we went to bed the wind picked up. It was holding us against the dock as we left in the morning, but with a little help from the bow thruster, we managed to get away from the dock and headed back south on the ICW. It stayed windy most of the morning.

Just about at the North Carolina/South Carolina line we entered Jet Ski hell again, this time with a vengeance. Several came up on our starboard side and passed between HIGH COTTON and a dock with little room to spare. One cut across our bow, circled back and did it again. The second time, he slowed and explained that he was the leader and just trying to keep his customers safe.

Nearing Myrtle Beach, I called the dockmaster at Barefoot Landing (the side with the stores, on the other side from the marina we stayed at on the way up). When I told him the boat's name was HIGH COTTON, he said "Hey, I've read about you." It turns out he is a member of the BoatUS web forum and had gotten the link to our trip in May, 2012 to Sanford, Florida and

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back. Anyway, we got the last space on the dock.



HIGH COTTON at Barefoot Landing

We walked around Barefoot Landing a bit, but it was hot so we retreated to the air-conditioning on the boat. Later we ate, and then took Kiki for a walk. She met lots of friendly people.

Back at the boat, it's time to check messages, watch a little TV and turn in for the night.

Captain's Log, day eight (August 14, 2013)

Up at the crack of nine again, we skipped breakfast. We helped a large boat off the dock, and then took Kiki for a walk. After that, it was lunch, shopping, walking, dinner, more shopping, and another walk for Kiki. It sprinkled on and off most of the day.



Kiki poses at Barefoot Landing. Where's Kiki?

We called my musician friend who moved to Conway from Maryland and Patti called a friend who has a home on the waterway. Neither one called back so it looks like we'll leave in the morning and hopefully anchor at a lovely spot on Thoroughfare Creek off the Waccamaw River for the night.

Captain's Log, day nine (August 15, 2013)

Well, it rained all night and was still raining this morning so I donned my rain gear again, let the air out of Q-Tip and lashed it down on the foredeck so we could see to drive from the lower helm. We got out the folding helm seat and set it up again. It's a big improvement over the cheap folding chair we used to use.

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Q-Tip deflated and stowed on the bow

We got underway about 8:30AM. There was hardly any boat traffic and no Jet Skis this morning. We stopped in at Osprey Marina to top off our fuel tanks. They are known for some of the lowest fuel prices on this part of the ICW and we paid 25 cents less per gallon for diesel than we paid at Barefoot Marina on the way north.

It finally stopped raining just before we anchored on the North Santee River. It's about sixty miles from here to RiversEdge so if the weather stays like it's predicted to be, we'll just head on home to our empty slip. That's the plan anyway.

Captain's Log, day ten (August 16, 2013)

We spent a quiet night in solitude on the North Santee River, a few hundred yards west of the ICW. No other boats around, no lights, no bands, just the gentle rocking of the boat and the sound of water flowing past the bow.

Since it stopped raining, we dried off the flybridge and helm station and ran the boat from "up top", our favorite place. We left the folding helm chair set up at the lower helm in case we needed it later in the day. We saw a small alligator and a couple of bald eagles as

well as a large group of dolphins. As usual, Kiki enjoyed watching the "big fish" and barked as a couple jet skis passed us.



Dolphins on the ICW



Bald Eagle on the ICW

The weather went from overcast and cool to warm and partly sunny, then back to overcast and finally, light rain as we started up the Ashley River. It stopped again as we were approaching RiversEdge marina and we backed into our slip with a little help from Tracey and the staff.

Tired, but happy, we cleared the rest of the food and the dirty laundry off the boat and made it back to our home on land. A great trip, but sadly missing a couple of good anchorages. Maybe next time.

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Epilogue

Duration	10 days
Distance (round trip)	300 nm
Time underway	51.6 hours
Fuel used (diesel)	105 gallons
Fuel consumption	2.03 gallons per hour
Fuel mileage	2.86 nautical mpg
Fuel cost	\$393
Nights anchored	1
Nights docked	8

Having a portable wireless hotspot and a laptop PC on board allowed us to keep in touch with friends and family. It also allowed us to find anchorages and marinas and read reviews of these places by other cruisers. Two of the resources we used were <https://activecaptain.com> and <http://cruisersnet.net>.

Other resources were:

Anchorage Along The Intracoastal Waterway (Skipper Bob Publications)

Marinas Along The Intracoastal Waterway (Skipper Bob Publications)

Dozier's Waterway Guide Atlantic ICW

Cruising Guide to Coastal South Carolina and Georgia (Claiborne Young)

Our neighbor brought in the mail and packages, and kept an eye on the house for us.