

NC Couple Tackles Great Loop Adventures

By Geoff Bowlin Carolina Currents

Educators Gladys and Wright Anderson dreamed of retiring to the cruising lifestyle. For more than a year, they ve lived that dream while taking a lap around America's Great Loop.

The class of 1965 high school sweethearts from Burgaw, north of Wilmington, N.C., married after college. They then raised three daughters while Wright coached college football for two decades. When Wright took a job at Wichita State in Kansas early in his career, they found



Photo by Wright Anderson

that a Styrofoam sailboat came with their house. So we learned to sail on a reservoir lake, Gladys recalls.

They eventually moved to Greenville, N.C. to coach at East Carolina University. They bought a 21-foot sailboat and have always owned boats since. After 20 years of coaching, they returned to Wilmington and launched a second career as administrators. Wright became a high school principal while Gladys became an elementary principal. Wright later took a job as assistant superintendent of Vance County Schools, living on a Kerr Lake houseboat and commuting home on weekends.

Finding the Right Boat

Nautical life was a natural post-retirement transition. The couple bought a Pearson 365 totaled in Hurricane Fran to fix up as their dreamboat. But they chartered a catamaran and fell in love with twin hulls.

They re easier to handle physically and have so much room, Gladys says. You put your book on the table and it stays there all day - there s no heeling.

They found a 1999 Lagoon 410 with three cabins, a large head and a walk-in shower. After coming out of charter service in Belize, it was delivered to them in Ft. Lauderdale, Fla., in June 2006. The Andersons re-named it First & Ten. It means a whole new chance to try again, Wright says, recalling his coaching days.

The Anderson's fully expected the former charter boat to have issues. The twin 38 hp Yanmar diesels were their biggest source of heartache. The boat broke down in both Florida and South Carolina on the trip back to the Wilmington area. Still, after one year of preparation and a shakedown cruise to the Chesapeake, they put

their house on the market and moved aboard fulltime. The boat came with such amenities as an icemaker, but they still added some new gear, including a Garmin chartplotter, XM weather, cameras on both sides for docking, and DirectTV dishes with tracking so they can always watch ballgames. Thus equipped, they were ready to tackle the Great Loop.

The Loop was just an appealing adventure, Gladys says. We had never wanted to circumnavigate, but like the idea of doing something different. We got rid of all of our stuff from 40 years of marriage and a 3,000-plus-square-foot house.

They joined the South Carolina-based America's Great Loop Cruisers Association (see p. 11 in Nov/Dec issue) and attended an April rendezvous in Charleston to gather information. The popular inland/coastal waterway route generally runs counter-clockwise up the East Coast, through the Erie Canal and Great Lakes, down the Mississippi - often diverting as the Andersons did through the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway - to the Gulf, and around Florida back to the East Coast.

Setting Sail

Wright s earliest notions of sailing came courtesy of the 1950s TV series Adventures in Paradise. While the Loop is a far cry from that show s South Pacific setting, the Andersons found plenty of adventures during their voyage.

They officially set sail from Carolina Beach on May 16, 2007, crossed the state line into Virginia four days into their trip and headed up the Chesapeake with stops in Portsmouth, Va., and Annapolis and Baltimore, Md., before heading through the C&D Canal into Delaware Bay. It looks like our ICW cut at Myrtle Beach - narrow, lined with mansions and mobile homes, Gladys observed in their web log.

A run down the bay took them to Cape May, N.J., where they hit bottom on the way into a marina and ruined a prop, causing them to lose control and hit a piling, which sent their spare outboard sinking into five feet of mud - all before the marina staff said they couldn't stay there. Nine days and \$1,500 remedied that mishap.

By June 12 they were anchored at the Statue of Liberty with five other Loopers. Onward they traveled up the Hudson River past New York City and Sing Sing prison.

A day later they were in the Appalachian Mountains passing historic mansions and small towns with 140 feet of water beneath their keels. It feels like we are sailing thru the North Carolina mountains, Gladys wrote. West Point is a real fortress right on the river. We were amazed to find out that this was once a whaling port.

In the former textile town of Catskill they took down their 60-foot mast and lashed it to cradles erected on the deck.

On Father's Day, they entered the Erie Canal and soon were locking their way through the Mohawk Valley and then motoring across Oneida Lake which is like the Albmarle - shallow and kicks up big waves. Then it was on to the Oswego Canal, enjoying free docks and small town hospitality along the way.

On the shores of Lake Ontario, they joined half a dozen other Looper couples for a happy hour, contributing some North Carolina peanuts. They noted an inscription on a mural about the town s lighthouse: Trim your

feeble light my brother/Some poor sailor tempest-tost,/Trying now to make the harbor/In the darkness may be lost. Big waters lay ahead.

The Great Lakes

On June 26 the Wrights made the 100-mile run across Ontario and cleared into Canada with a phone call. They bought a Canada Parks Pass allowing them free dockage along the canal walls in most towns. A trip through the Trent Severn Canal included chasing muskrats off the deck and celebrating Canada Day July 1.

Soon, they had locked through the world s highest lift lock and, a few days later, they arrived at the Big Chute - a 26-foot wide rail car that vessels float onto before being carted over a road and a rocky precipice and down 57 feet. Watching big boats like First & Ten (which just fit into the rail car with 22 inches to spare) carried over makes the Big Chute one of the province s most popular tourist attractions.

The Andersons re-stepped the mast and entered into Georgian Bay where they met up with dozens of fellow Loopers for a rendezvous to gather information about the Great Lakes and Mississippi.

On Aug. 9, after 43 days in Canadian waters, First & Ten sailed into Lake Huron, re-entered U.S. waters and docked at Drummond Island, Mich. A few days later, the Andersons were at the Mackinac Island marina and enjoying a carriage tour of the famed car-free destination. They woke the next morning to the sound of four otters playing on their deck. The day concluded with a buffet dinner at the majestic Grand Hotel.

After passing under the Mackinac Bridge, they worked their way down Lake Michigan, to the Chicago area where they again un-stepped their mast before settling into heavy tourist mode. Several museums and a football game later, they entered the canals and passed under 52 bridges on the way toward the Illinois River and, a few locks later, the mighty Mississippi.

River Boating

After a side trip on Lake of the Ozarks to visit their former home, they cruised up the Ohio, Cumberland and Tennessee rivers. After a brief break in early October to fly to Wilmington, they returned to continue their voyage on the Tenn-Tom Waterway, which was completed in 1985 allowing boaters to avoid the Mississippi when traveling from the Midwest to the Gulf. Its 450 miles connect the Tennessee, Black Warrior and Tombigbee Rivers. In November, they cruised into Mississippi where they feel right at home now that barbecue is a noun and we can shop in Piggly Wiggly.

In mid-November 2007, they left First & Ten in a Mobile, Ala. yard and returned to Carolina Beach until May when their adventure continued.

EDITOR S NOTE: Read our March/April issue for the conclusion of the Anderson s Looping adventures and their tips for other would-be Loopers.