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All Together Now By Lisa Targel Favors

We're traveling in a caravan of seven boats moving slowly upriver on the windy Tennessee River toward Chattanooga, Tennessee. It's a stunning fall morning as we followed each other out of the marina at the Joe Wheeler State Park in Rogersville, Alabama. Louis and Diane Wade, on Bella Luna, invited us to join their flotilla, heading east, a few days after the America's Great Loop Cruising Association's (AGLCA) 2008, Fall Rendezvous.

We'd all just spent a fun-filled week at the Rendezvous, which was attended by approximately 186 (50 currently on the Loop – 65 boats docked at the marina) members of AGLCA. This event was a precious opportunity to not only meet people who share a similar passion for boating and adventure, get a chance to learn, gather, and exchange information about routes, anchorages, marinas and safety, but to also to gain time socializing during the evening receptions and dinners. We also attended seminars by qualified speakers, took notes, collected numerous handouts from all the different sponsors, and exchanged boat cards with other Loopers we'd just met.



On the last day of the Rendezvous we all posed for a group shot

AGLCA was founded in 1999 by Ron and Eva Stob. The Stobs are also the authors of the popular Looper book, Honey, Let's Get A Boat. You could say that this book is a Looper's Bible. The Stobs were instrumental in highlighting a little-known route back when boats did this trip all on their own. Now run by Janice and Steve Kromer, this organization of boaters, who've cruised or dream of cruising any or all of North America's eastern waterways, is committed to sharing navigational and cruising information that will enhance the enjoyment and safety of those cruising these waterways.



We had excellent weather while at the Rendezvous, with warm, sunny fall days and some amazing rising moon scenes.

There are usually three of these rendezvous during a one-year period. The first one in the spring, this year at Charleston, South Carolina, catches all the Loopers as they come up the eastern ICW as they head north. The second one is usually held mid-summer in the Georgian Bay, Canada, area. Finally, the most popular one is held in the fall. Historically, the fall event is the best attended and that's the one we just experienced. It's held in Rogersville, Alabama, at Joe Wheeler State Park.

When you become a member of AGLCA you buy a club burgee to display on your boat, which identifies you as a Looper and immediately helps shed any social distance between boaters of any type. If you run into a fellow Looper they'll immediately strike up a chat whether over the radio, or while passing one another or at dock. Oftentimes boaters who are non-Loopers recognize the flag and will have

questions regarding what we're doing. In addition to the flag, the other important feature of joining this association, maybe the most important, is the email forum. This is a daily email from AGLCA that includes posts from members about any aspect of doing the Loop. Sometimes it's just ideas, suggestions, and tips that have to do with boating in general. There's a wealth of knowledge shared here and we find that this is one of the best sources of information around. It's up-to-date information that focuses on helping each other have the best experience while cruising. An example would be a posting on a great fuel price, where to get a repair, or details on a special anchorage.

Each of the scheduled rendezvous feature well-known speakers and presenters from the boating community. The speaker agenda breaks up the waterway from the departure point of the current rendezvous to the next rendezvous location. This is then broken into six or seven areas for discussion. There's also seminars on safety, appropriate clothing, medical emergencies, boat-cleaning tips, along with miscellaneous lifestyle talks such as life after the Loop, and so on.

I found that one of the most enjoyable meetings is the Women's and Men's sessions. I don't know about the men's group but the women had a lot of fun, sometimes at their partner's expense. But many gender-related issues were addressed with many innovative tips shared in the process.

All good rendezvous include a little old-fashioned fun. Day one included a Scavenger Hunt, which was really a vehicle to get people to introduce themselves to each other and gain information needed to complete the task given. There was a fun kayak race, and a dinghy race that we signed up for. The object of the dinghy race was to go around a buoy, only 150-feet from shore. The trick being that the captain of the dinghy was blindfolded and had to steer the dinghy going backwards. The crewmember had to then verbally instruct the captain on where to go. It was sidesplitting entertainment as the relationship between captain and navigator became unusually animated.



A little physical activity at the end of the day was a welcome thing for participants and spectators alike.



Things got a little animated between captain and navigator during this unusual dinghy race.

The Rendezvous also provides a chance to become familiar with the different types of boats that have been chosen to do the Loop. They come in all sizes and styles. To be able to see so many of them in one place is an eye opener for a boater looking for the "perfect Great Loop boat." There's a Looper Crawl scheduled daily for those who wish to share with others a peek at the vessel they themselves have chosen to make their home for the duration of their trip. This event is well attended -- especially by the non-active members who are doing research on what boat to buy for their future Loop. The Rendezvous also provides an opportunity for boaters who've finished the Loop to have their boats available for sale during the week's activities.

During the first night's get-together and dinner a few Loopers put together a little presentation to mark the trials and tribulations of the group of Loopers named the River Rats. This was the name given to the Loopers such as Jim and me, who'd had to deal with the flooded waters, lock closures, and sections of the Illinois River which were closed for a period of time due to the aftermath of Hurricane Ike. In the end this list of boaters numbered 72. Early on, just after the downpour of rains that caused the flooding, one couple, Ron and Linda Gumm, on Etc., were instrumental in recognizing a situation that could've been disastrous if it had not been dealt with ahead of time.



Dad's Idea was one of the more unusual boats we saw at the event.

Because of the flooding, boats were piling up at marinas in unusually massive numbers. Instead of the normal, spread out, cruising pattern, now there appeared to be a mass exodus about to occur when the waters opened up again.

Because of the foresight of the Gumbs, a plan was put into motion with the help of Janice Kromer, executive director of AGLCA. They established a database and email group of all the boats to help organize a plan that would move boats in an orderly manner through the downriver marinas and anchorages, that could not handle a massive arrival of boats. An award, of sorts, was given to the Gumbs; appropriately it was a large rubber stuffed rat. More important than this presentation is the concept that when people work together to achieve a task it's amazing what can be accomplished. Due to the hard work and cooperation of many, there were no incidents as the Loopers negotiated these troubled waters.

Another award given on the last night of the rendezvous was the Skipper Bob "Making it Better" Award, which went to Fred Myers. This award, which was started by Elaine Reib (Skipper Bob's widow) and Anne and Bob Levine, is given to the person most deserving of making the Looping experience better. We know Fred well, having met him and his wife Joan in 2005 while we were docked for a month at their homeport -- Grand Harbor Marina in Counce, Tennessee. Now retired, Fred, having provided boaters with exceptional river guides over the years, has become a bit of a legend on the river system.



The Gumms were very deserving of the "River Rat" award given to them for their part in organizing the Loopers as they traveled the flooded rivers.



Fred and Joan Myers received "Skipper Bob's Making It Better" award.

other boaters including Bob and Kay Creech on C-Life; Larry and Margie Ross on Wandering L&M; Charlie and Linda Thomas on Freedom's Turn; Bob and Lois Christopher on Going There; and Bud, Muriel, and Shelly Lovett on Sunshine; we're looking forward to being a part of a caravan for awhile. Many of these boaters have been traveling together since they left their homes in the Carolinas and New York.

We were excited to join such a wonderful group of boaters for this amazing stretch of water called the Grand Canyon of Tennessee. As we tag along at the end of the caravan we can't help but feel the warmth and glow from all the fun we had together at the Rendezvous. We know that we'd be having a great time doing this stretch of river just on our own, but the experience of trailing behind the row of boats, our little homes on the water, is indescribable as we bask in the warmth of the sunshine and the camaraderie of our fellow Loopers.



Here we are, last in the procession of boats out of Joe Wheeler State Park, in a seven-boat caravan.

Shortly after leaving the marina we pass a Nordhavn going downriver. Immediately Jim asks, "Is it a Looper boat?"

"Nope!" I answer. "No flag."

"Wow!" says Jim. "A Nordhavn. That's a good-sized, sea-going vessel. I wonder where they came from and where they're going?"

We watched them pass, wondering what would be the stories they might share? They wave to us like old friends and we feel an immediate kinship. Maybe we'll cross paths again as Jim and I head back down on the Tennessee River, and eventually the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway towards Mobile and beyond. I hope so.

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