

Now Monster works with tuscaloosanews.com



The Tuscaloosa News **monster**

Post Resume

tuscaloosa.monster.com

Log in | Register | Why Register

Current weather: CLOUDY, 64°

Calendar



- HOME
- NEWS
- SPORTS
- BUSINESS
- LIFESTYLES
- OPINION
- WEATHER
- FORUMS
- AUTOS
- JOBS
- SHOP
- OBITUARIES

Search Tuscaloosa News  --Select Section--

Published Tuesday, November 20, 2007  
**Tenn-Tom boosts 'looping'**  
 Waterway subtracts about 2,000 miles from sail around 'Great Loop' of rivers

By Tommy Stevenson  
 Associate Editor

- LARGE TEXT
- PRINT
- EMAIL
- DISCUSS
- SHARE

TUSCALOOSA | When the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway was completed in 1984, it provided a shortcut to the Gulf of Mexico for commercial barges in the eastern part of the United States.

(Video at bottom of story)

But that wasn't the waterway's only advantage. It also gave impetus to a nautical subculture: "Loopers."

Named for the "Great Loop" of rivers and intercoastal waterways east of the Mississippi River that include the Great Lakes all the way to the Florida Keys, loopers are people who make that 5,000- to 7,000-mile voyage on their pleasure craft, be it a pontoon boat or a large yacht.



Mary and Bill Russell stand on their boat, the Harbour Reach, at Eagle Cove Marina on the Black Warrior River on Friday. They are taking a trip around the waterways of the eastern United States.  
 Staff photo | Michael E. Palmer

- [Click here to enlarge.](#)
- [Buy a copy of this picture!](#)

"Before the Tenn-Tom opened, the only way to get to the Gulf from the Great Lakes area was to go down the Mississippi, which is really not very hospitable to pleasure boats," says Bill Russell of Wickford, R.I. Russell and his wife, Mary, are docking their 37-foot trawler at Eagle Cove Marina above Holt Lock and Dam on the Black Warrior River.

"The Tenn-Tom cut about 2,000 miles off the loop and gave a big boost to loopers," he said.

Looping has become so popular there is now an organization devoted to it. America's Great Loop Cruising Association has hundreds of members, quarterly newsletters and several sponsored rendezvous on lakes and marinas across the country every year.

All that was made possible by the 234-mile waterway that connected the Tennessee River with the Tombigbee in Demopolis. A 12-year project of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Tenn-Tom, which provides access to Mobile Bay, remains the largest project the Corps has ever undertaken.

Bill, 66, and Mary, 63, are both retired college professors and although they still maintain a home in Rhode Island, they spend several months a year on their boat navigating the rivers, lakes and waterways of the eastern part of the continent.

"When we were still working, we'd only spend the summer months on our boat and then, in 2005, we spent from July to November on the boat and since then, we've been on the boat about 10 months," Mary Russell said. "We've sailed about 18,000 miles overall."

Bill Russell said they first became aware of the "Great Loop" in 1967, before the idea of looping was well known and certainly before the activity became organized.

"There were people who made the Great Loop, but they had to go down the Mississippi all the way to New Orleans," he said. "But because it has so many bends and turns in it as you get further south, just one stretch of it is almost 2,000 river miles. The problem is there are only two places where pleasure boaters can buy fuel all the way from where the Ohio River joins the Mississippi to New Orleans. So that means that most pleasure boaters couldn't realistically do it."

He added that the southern part of the Mississippi is not very scenic. "About all you see is levees from the water," he said.

While the Black Warrior River is not technically part of the "Great Loop," which still includes the Mississippi as an



Staff graphic | Anthony Bratina

- [Click here to enlarge.](#)
- [Buy a copy of this picture!](#)

Advertisement

**HUDSON POOLE**  
Fine Jewelers

**Diamonds,  
Gifts and  
Bridal Registry**

Local businesses

[Tuscaloosa Toyota](#)  
 3325 Skyland Blvd E, Tuscaloosa, AL 35405  
 (205) 553-3325

[Hudson Poole Fine Jewelers](#)  
 1111 Greensboro Ave, Tuscaloosa, AL 35401  
 (205) 752-5535

TOP JOBS

> [View All Top Jobs](#)  
 > [Search Jobs](#)

TOP PROPERTIES

> [View All Top Properties](#)  
 > [Search All Homes](#)

TOP WHEELS

> [View All Top Wheels](#)

TOP YARD SALES

> [View All Top Yard Sales](#)

TOP PETS

> [View All Top Pets](#)

Advertisement

**THE CUTEST  
BABY  
CONTEST**

Prizes totalling  
over \$1,000 in value!

alternative to the Tenn-Tom, loopers take many side trips. After they heard about Eagle Cove Marina from people they met at a rendezvous on Wheeler Lake on the Tennessee River (also not part of the official loop), the Russells made their way up the Black Warrior. They plan to use the marina as their departure point for future voyages.

Eagle Point owner Quinn Stewart said he has had several loopers stay at his 80-slip marina for various lengths of time and is intrigued by their tales of sailing the entire continent.

"Most of them are retirees who can take months to stay on the water," he said. "But they are all adventurous and self-reliant people."

Clifford Foster, whose 53-foot Platinum Plus yacht is anchored right next to the Russells', has yet to sail the loop but is eagerly awaiting what he expects to be a 12-month voyage beginning next year. He has already hired someone to help him with the trip.

"The Great Loop starts anywhere on the loop," he said as he spread out a laminated map in his boat's cabin. "I plan to take my boat down to Mobile, where I practice law, in the next couple of weeks, and on Jan. 2, head to south Florida, go over to some of the islands until about March, then come back to Jacksonville [Fla.] and go up the coast to Savannah, Charleston and North Carolina."

From there, Foster plans to take a route that goes from Chesapeake Bay to New York harbor, up the Hudson River, through the locks of the various canals and then to the Great Lakes. "I'll come down the east shore of Lake Michigan to Chicago, take the Chicago River to the Illinois, to the Mississippi and then to the Tennessee," he said.

While he does not have a set schedule, Foster does have a goal: "My plan is to go up the Tennessee River to Knoxville, where I plan to be the third Saturday of October, for the Alabama-Tennessee football game," he said.

Then he plans to be back at Eagle Cove six weeks later for the Alabama-Auburn game.

"Can't miss those two games," said the avid Crimson Tide fan. "Even while you are looping."

Reach Tommy Stevenson at [tommy.stevenson@tuscaloosanews.com](mailto:tommy.stevenson@tuscaloosanews.com) or 205-722-0194.



Advertisement

#### Sponsored Links

##### [Alabama Preps Football](#)

Rankings, Scores, Stats, Schedules, Standings, Videos, Pics and More!

##### [Alabama Fight Song Tone](#)

Get the Alabama Crimson Tide fight song ringtone on your cell.

#### Last 20 messages

- General forum » [Students give gift to jail's librar...](#) - LadyEsquire
- General forum » [Warren Buffett Right On](#) - Compass Rose (7)
- General forum » [Piano Lessons in Tuscaloosa / North...](#) - Buckeye (2)
- General forum » [Townsend BMW](#) - LadyEsquire (164)
- General forum » [Now that we've taken care of the ri...](#) - Buckeye (8)
- General forum » [There's talk of Bonds going to jail...](#) - Other Brother Darrell (1)
- General forum » [December M&G, Set for the 15th at W...](#) - Buckeye (120)
- General forum » [No WAY](#) - Buckeye (137)
- General forum » [sofi, Shame On You](#) - sofi (17)
- General forum » [\\*\\*\\* The Official National Novel Wri...](#) - Buddha\_ (188)
- General forum » [I'm dead now you know.](#) - Buddha\_ (4)
- General forum » [Ghosts of Forum's Past](#) - sweetpea (14)
- General forum » [Remember to truly give thanks](#) - sweetpea (1)
- General forum » [Puppy Name](#) - webslinginpete (30)
- General forum » [Tell Us Something We Don't Know.](#) - sweetpea (34)
- General forum » [HELP!! Someone run](#) - RipsGracie (4)
- General forum » [Two Truths & A Lie](#) - Quick Draw (75)
- General forum » [Higher gas tax would not be welcome...](#) - Quick Draw (1)
- General forum » [The song..](#) - BamaRedneck (5101)
- General forum » [It Was The Night Before Christmas](#) - RipsGracie (1)

[ABOUT THE TUSCALOOSA NEWS](#) [STAFF DIRECTORY](#) [SUBSCRIBE](#) [JOBS WITH US](#) [ADVERTISE](#) [RSS](#)

Now Monster works  
with [tuscaloosanews.com](http://tuscaloosanews.com)



[Post Resume](#)

The Tuscaloosa News **monster**

[tuscaloosa.monster.com](http://tuscaloosa.monster.com)

Other New York Times Regional Media Group Alabama sites:  
[TimesDaily](#) | [The Gadsden Times](#) | [Tide Sports](#)