

Legislation requiring the Corps to maintain records that recorded commercial tonnage carried by barges in the waterway was passed somewhere around 1920. The downslide began in the 1990's when a decision was made by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to reduce the Corps maintenance budget for the AICW. Shortly thereafter, the Corps was required to prioritize projects based on the tonnage data they collected and OMB based

Taylor Creek. That's what I call "economic impact!" And the same is true for all AICW ports of call from Norfolk, VA to Key West, FL.

Fortunately, by the turn of the century, the collective voice of the cruising community was being heard in Washington, and, perhaps most importantly, an organization known as the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway Association (<http://www.atlintracoastal.org>) sprang into being. Originally

suddenly occurred to me, "Hey, you already have a website. Why not begin posting this cruiser-to-cruiser information here for all to see and use?" So it was with partner/webmaster Eddie Jones that Salty Southwest Cruisers' Net was formed. To get things rolling we solicited info from the cruising community, and it was only a few days before data was streaming into our computers via e-mail.

By February of 2006, the Cruisers'

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their budgets on which waterways had the most ton-miles. They totally dis-regarded any other users of the waterway, including the commercial fishing industry, construction vessels that moved their equipment from port to port via the waterway, cruise ships, passenger vessels and recreational boaters. It was a descending spiral, which, if left unchecked, would have led to the utter abandonment of the incredible natural resource known as the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway.

Of course, this philosophy blithely ignored the fact that, at least since 1970, the real impact of the AICW has been cruisers like you and me. All one need do is walk out any given evening during the spring or fall transient season to the Beaufort, NC boardwalk (for instance) and look at all the boats moored to the docks and anchored on

founded by tow operators, the association's ranks have now been swelled by hundreds of cruisers. While the AIWA has not been successful in restoring all the funds needed to properly maintain the AICW, they have pried loose enough monies to keep the Waterway largely navigable. However, there are still problem sections to worry about.

As the AICW's problems mounted, they became a real concern for me as an author of five (and co-author of a sixth) cruising guides covering the waters of the Southeastern USA. I had grown used to changes coming about by the time the ink was dry on the paper, but now significant shoals began to appear within a few months. How to get this sort of critical info out to the cruising community was a question with which I wrestled daily.

In November of 2005, a thought

Net, with a new URL, www.Cruisersnet.net, had clearly filled a void in the cruising community with its free exchange of information between those voyaging on the waters of the Southeastern USA. At that time, the site was expanded to incorporate reference data, including directories of every bridge, anchorage and marina from North Carolina to the Florida Panhandle. In a continuing effort to enhance the Net's usefulness, this fall we will introduce various ways to view messages from your fellow cruisers regionally as well as chronologically. Returning to the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway, let's take a look at the rouge's gallery of trouble spots that have been identified on the Salty Southeast Cruisers' Net. These problem stretches are listed geographically, moving north to south.



Northern Mouth of Alligator River

(Statute Mile 81, North Carolina ICW)

The problem: The charted shoal west of flashing daybeacon #8 has been building farther to the south and east. The markers have been moved accordingly. Some electronic charts will take you too far west as you approach the gap between #7 and #8.

The solution: Download the latest version of chart 11553 from NOAA. Cruise from unlighted daybeacon #9 directly to a point about 50 yards west of flashing daybeacon #7. Do NOT blindly follow your chartplotter.

Intersection of AICW and Lockwoods Folly Inlet

(Statute Mile 321, North Carolina ICW)

The problem: The Waterway is shoaling along its southern flank between markers #47 and #47A.

The solution: Traverse this section

at mid to high tide, and favor the northern side of the Waterway slightly between #47 and #47A.

Intersection of ICW and Shallotte Inlet Folly Inlet

(Statute Mile 330, North Carolina ICW)

The problem: The Waterway is shoaling between unlighted daybeacon #80 and flashing daybeacon #83.

The solution: Traverse this section of the Waterway at mid to high tide, and watch carefully for temporary markers.

Waterway Northeast of Ben Sawyer Bridge

(Near Statute Mile 459.5, South Carolina ICW)

The problem: The ICW is shoaling severely along its southern flank between the Ben Sawyer Bridge and flashing daybeacon #118.

The solution: Cruise this section of the Waterway as near to high tide as possible.

Ashepoo Coosaw Cutoff into Coosaw River

(Statute Mile 515, South Carolina ICW)

The problem: Shoaling has encroached on the southeastern side of the Waterway channel, at the southwestern tip of the Ashepoo – Coosaw Cutoff, just before the ICW flows out into the wide waters of Coosaw River.

The solution: Traverse this section of the Waterway at mid to high tide. Favor the northwestern side of the channel, marked by flashing daybeacon #184.

Fields Cut

(Statute Mile 575, South Carolina ICW)

The problem: Severe shoaling has shelved out from the southern and

BOTTOM: THE NEUSE RIVER IN NORTH CAROLINA OFFER SPECTACULAR VIEWS OF THE COAST BUT CONTAINS SEVERAL PROBLEM AREAS. [©ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/JAMES BOSSERT]



southeastern banks, just north of the Fields Cut/ICW's intersection with Savannah River.

The solution: Favor the northern and northwestern banks as you cruise south and round the last turn to the south, north of Savannah River.

Hell Gate

(Statute Mile 602, Georgia ICW)

The problem: The ICW – Hell Gate passage has generally shoaled, and significant shallows are found along the channel's easterly flank near #89.

The solution: Traverse Hell Gate at mid to high tide and favor the western side of the channel slightly as you approach and pass #89. There are hopes that Hell Gate will be dredged by the latter part of 2008.

Little Mud River

(Statute Mile 655, Georgia ICW)

The problem: The Little Mud River

section of the ICW, particularly the section just north of the Waterway's intersection with Altamaha Sound, is universally considered to be the WORST single stretch of the AICW.

The solution: Time your passage through Little Mud River for high tide – NO FOOLING!

Jekyll Creek

(Statute Mile 683, Georgia ICW)

The problem: Severe shoaling has taken place north of the Jekyll Island bridge near flashing daybeacon #19

The solution: Traverse this section of the Waterway at mid to high tide.

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We cordially invite every member of

the cruising community to peruse the Salty Southeast Cruisers' Net and learn more about the problem stretches listed above, as well as where to find some of the very best anchorages, marinas and ports of call offered by the AICW. In spite of its difficulties, cruising the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway is still an experience like no other. I highly recommend this storied passage to my fellow cruisers. Just watch out for those shallow spots. See you on the Waterway! ❖

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 Claiborne Young, co-founder and editorial director for Cruisersnet.net, is a full-time writer and speaker. He grew up in a boating family and has spent his life on the water. He is the publisher of several successful cruising guides for the Carolinas, Georgia and Florida. For more information visit: www.cruisersnet.net

ABOVE: A DOG WAITS FOR ITS OWNER OUTSIDE OF A BOAT RUN AGROUND ON THE ICW..