



# Beaufort *and* Morehead City

NORTH CAROLINA'S COASTAL  
CRUISING HUB BY CLAIBORNE YOUNG

As a young boy, I spent many a summer aboard my parent's wooden hulled, "Harkers Island" 48-foot vessel, more often than not, docked along the Morehead City, North Carolina waterfront. One time, I actually got lost on the street just in front of our dock because the two restaurants along the adjacent street looked so much alike. That's right, in those days, there were just two dining choices. Oh, how times have changed.



I CAN ALSO RECALL a fine fall Sunday afternoon in 1979, when my first-rate, first-mate, Karen Ann, and I sailed into Taylor Creek, and along the downtown Beaufort, North Carolina waterfront. There was not a person to be seen. My oh my, how times have changed!

## HISTORY

Beaufort received a grant in the 1980's and used the money to build city docks along Taylor Creek. Then, a big sign was erected which said "Free Dockage." Let me hasten to add that the dockage here is no longer free, but back in the 80's, cruisers wending their way north or south along the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway were just as conscious of a good deal as mariners are today. It wasn't long before a host of craft began spending time on Taylor Creek. Then the town leaders rounded up a group of developers, pointed at all the boats along their waterfront, and probably said something like, "Don't you want to build some restaurants and shops to serve all those people." The short answer was "yes, we do."

Then Beaufort did something really smart. They declared their entire downtown business district a historic area, and were able to minutely control what sort of construction went forward. The result is a community today whose large historic district has been enhanced rather than destroyed by all the development that has taken place here over the last two decades.

Not to be outdone, Morehead City, lying on the opposite side of the Newport River/Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway from its neighbor, rebuilt its waterfront during the late 1980's.

LEFT TO RIGHT: The Beaufort boardwalk along Taylor's Creek offers visitors the opportunity to dine and shop while enjoying views of boats from all over the world at the Beaufort Docks. The tree-lined streets of Beaufort's historic neighborhoods include homes from the 18th century. A view of the Grayden Paul Bridge, a 13-foot bascule bridge. A dog looks out from a dinghy as they row on Taylor's Creek.

Since that project's completion, a host of new businesses, retail shops and some very nice restaurants have sprung into being.

Courtesy of the "Outer Banks" there are only three "all weather" inlets along the entire North Carolina coastline. Arguably the best of these for cruising purposes is, you guessed it, Beaufort Inlet. This seaward cut leads almost directly from the briny blue, into the Morehead City Turning Basin. When you consider the double accessibility of these waters, courtesy of the both the AICW and Beaufort Inlet, it's easy to see why pleasure craft and large ocean going commercial freighters funneled into the twin towns. We strongly suggest that you too heed the siren's call of Beaufort and Morehead City. Your treasure chest of cruising experiences will be ever so much richer for the effort.

## APPROACHES

Northbound AICW cruisers, or those coming in from the briny blue by way of Beaufort Inlet, can take advantage of a charted and well-marked channel that runs directly from the inlet to Taylor Creek and the Beaufort waterfront. This passage twists and turns a bit, and you must pay close attention to all markers, but otherwise most mariners can find their way safely

## “the historic homes here are dream like”

to Taylor Creek via this route. Southbound AICW mariners are not so lucky. For time out of mind, captains could turn into the Gallant Channel at marker #35, and follow this passage through the Grayden Paul Bridge to Taylor Creek. Some years ago, the northwestern part of Gallant Channel shoaled, and a canoe might well find the bottom now if the operator took a turn to the southeast at #35. Southbound skippers piloting vessels drawing 4 ½ feet or less might choose to follow a more complicated passage by way of charted Russell Slue Channel, which leads in turn to the deeper portion of the Gallants Channel.

Those piloting deeper draft vessels, or those who just want to play it safe, might choose to continue tracking their way along the AICW under the high-rise Newport River Bridge. You can then swing into the seaward track of Beaufort Inlet,



and soon cut off the inlet channel into the marked track to Taylor Creek, as discussed above.

Mariners bound for Morehead City can simply continue following the well-defined track of the AICW. Just north of the high-rise Newport River Bridge, you might choose to turn west and visit impressive Morehead City Yacht Basin (see below). Or, you can cruise under the bridge, follow the Waterway's turn to the west through the Turning Basin, and cut north into a marked channel that parallels the downtown Morehead City waterfront.

### FACILITIES AND ANCHORAGES

Many cruisers choose to coil their lines at the Beaufort City Docks (252-728-2503) on Taylor Creek. The slip space here has expanded greatly over the past decade with 100 slips accommodating boats up to 250 feet (offering gas and diesel fuel). Located right on the boardwalk in downtown Beaufort, the marina is convenient to restaurants and lodging, and it offers a courtesy car to use for supply runs.

A third alternative is to berth at Town Creek Marina (252-728-6111). This full service marina and repair yard is located on Town Creek, off the Gallant Channel. The dockage and repair facilities here are impressive, and there is an on-site restaurant. It is a long walk to the historic district, or a quick taxi ride.

Cruisers visiting Morehead could do no better than to coil their lines at Morehead City Yacht Basin (MCYB). This marina is accessed off the AICW channel as the Waterway approaches the high-rise bridge between Morehead and Radio Island. MCYB is one of the most impressive facilities I have ever reviewed in almost thirty years as a cruising guide author. All the local restaurants and shops are within easy walking distance, though you will have to cross busy Highway 70 to reach the main downtown waterfront.

### BEAUFORT ASHORE

If you don't do anything else ashore in Beaufort, take a stroll along Ann Street, one block from the waterfront. The historic homes here are dreamlike, and some of the backyard gardens have to be seen to be believed. Don't miss the North Carolina Mariners Museum, and their across-the-street wooden boat building center. This is a superb attraction that demands the attention of every visiting cruiser. Also on Ann Street is the “Old Burying Ground.” The cemetery dates back to the 1700's. The old oak trees, shaped by the winds over many years, impart an air of somber mystery as they lean over the

View through the tree lined streets to one of Beaufort's historic houses



The Harvey W. Smith Watercraft Center is a working boatbuilding facility that also keeps alive the art of wooden boatbuilding through classes in carpentry, oar making, lofting, tool making and half modeling.

seemingly ancient headstones. You can also take a town tour on a double decker bus, thoughtfully provided by the Beaufort Historical Association. There is perhaps no quicker way to get in touch with this historic community's past!

When it comes time to slake a healthy appetite, Beaufort is ready for you. Among a host of fine choices, be SURE to check out the Spouter Inn (252-728 5190) and Beaufort Grocery Company (252-728-3899). This latter dining attraction is often noisy and serves its delectable cuisine in a high energy atmosphere. Spouter Inn offers both inside and dockside dining. In the evenings, the Scallop Parmigiana has to be experienced to understand just how fabulous seafood can be!

Once you have strolled around and dined in Beaufort, it will no longer be a mystery why this town is often considered to be the #1 success story of the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway.

### MOREHEAD ASHORE

Seafood is king in Morehead City. There must be a good dozen restaurants along the waterfront where you can try out fish or shellfish in more ways than this writer could possibly enumerate. Floyds 1921 (252-727-1921) restaurant, housed in an old Morehead home place, is one of this writer's favorite. It resides just next door to Morehead City Yacht Harbor.

### AND FINALLY

Wherever you berth or anchor, whatever restaurants you choose to please your palate, and wherever your wanderings ashore take you, Beaufort and Morehead City will not fail to reward. These twin ports of call are the sorts of places that cruisers dream about. I suggest you join the happy throng of those mariners who visit here time and time again. See you on the docks! **ml**

*Claiborne S. Young has been a cruising guide writer for the past thirty years. He moderates The Salty Southeast Cruisers' Net ([www.cruisersnet.net](http://www.cruisersnet.net)), a free, moderated forum for the exchange of information between those cruising the waters of the Southeastern USA, from North Carolina to New Orleans. The Cruisers' Net also provides extensive reference content, including marina, anchorage and bridge directories. Claiborne has authored guides for North Carolina, South Carolina, Eastern Florida, and Western Florida and also co-authors "Cruising the Florida" keys with Morgan Stinemetz.*

*View this article on the web for more information about the places mentioned at [www.marinalife.com/magazine/fall\\_2009/north\\_carolina](http://www.marinalife.com/magazine/fall_2009/north_carolina)*