

Guide for Cruising North Carolina Waters

Including:

**Albemarle Sound, Pamlico Sound,
And Dismal Swamp Canal**

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Cruising in Albemarle and Pamlico Sounds

**By
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If you want a taste of Intracoastal Waterway (ICW) cruising and also want to sample some excellent seafood, take your boat into North Carolina waters to cruise through Albemarle Sound and Pamlico Sound. Good destination ports in the Albemarle are Manteo on Roanoke Island and Edenton. In the Pamlico, visit Ocracoke Island near Cape Hatteras or turn into the Neuse River to visit Oriental.

The most direct way into Outer Banks waters is through Coinjock, NC. Waiting times for bridge and lock openings vary, so remember to expect some delays when planning the trip from Norfolk to Coinjock. Beyond Coinjock, there are several possibilities. You can travel directly to your favorite port, visit a combination of ports or you can make the complete “ICW Mini-Loop”. Your only constraint is time.

If you can’t make the full Mini-Loop, pick a closer destination or a shorter round-robin. In nautical miles (NM), the distances to some ports are:

| | |
|---------------------|----|
| Coinjock to Manteo | 35 |
| Coinjock to Edenton | 53 |
| Manteo to Ocracoke | 58 |
| Manteo to Edenton | 55 |

SOUTHBOUND FROM NORFOLK:

Thimble Shoals Channel, at the bottom of Chesapeake Bay, is Norfolk’s Atlantic Ocean pathway. It turns southward, toward Norfolk, at marker Green 1ER near Fort Wool, one mile south of Fort Monroe and Hampton’s Channel. This deep channel continues south past Norfolk Naval Base. Upon entering the no-wake zone abeam Nauticus and the Naval Hospital, you will pass marker Red 36. This buoy is also the ICW’s “Mile-marker Zero”, the beginning of a continuous 1100 mile waterway from Norfolk to Miami, FL.

Beyond downtown Norfolk and Portsmouth, the Elizabeth River becomes a working waterfront filled with ship, barge and tug traffic. Switch your VHF to Channel 13 to hear uniquely colorful radio calls among them and the bridge operators. If you can’t clear a marked bridge height, ask for an opening on this channel.

The ICW route is denoted by yellow triangles and squares on channel markers. White mile-marker signs (MM), at five statute mile intervals, indicate your distance from Norfolk. As a “south-bounder”, keep yellow triangles to starboard. For this trip, all red marks are to starboard until reaching the Albemarle.

You’ll pass under five movable highway bridges, with height restrictions varying from 4 to 15 feet, and four normally-raised railroad bridges. There is also a low-rise lock at Great Bridge. During morning and evening rush hours, bridges won’t open for pleasure boats, but will open on the hour and half-hour at other times. Commercial traffic gets priority anytime, so you might slip through as they transit. Weekday rush-hour bridge restrictions are 7-9 AM and 4-6 PM. Time your arrival to pass the now-dismantled Jordan Bridge at nine AM and to be through the North Landing Bridge before four PM. Appendix A lists bridge and lock information.

Once clear of Norfolk’s industrial waterfront, the ICW is ever-changing. You’ll pass some homes, but mostly will be alone in natural settings varying from woods to wide expanses of marsh grasses. It’s mostly serene and peaceful. Every curve brings a new vista.

At MM 30, the North Landing River widens to five miles. At Currituck Sound, 18 miles further, you’ll enter a three-mile cut leading to Coinjock - a nice overnight stop with two marinas. Both have fuel, pump-outs, restaurants, and well-stocked stores. Midway Marina has a pool. Coinjock Marina’s restaurant is renowned for its two-pound prime rib, served nightly. Another possible stop beyond Coinjock is an anchorage favored by sail boaters near marker Green 153 (seven miles beyond Coinjock.)

WHICH WAY TO GO?

From Coinjock, the ICW curves through 15 miles of very pretty marshland. At marker Green 173, you will enter the Albemarle. Here you have a choice; visit Edenton by turning westward for about 41 NM, visit Manteo by heading southward for about 22NM or head southwest on the ICW.

EDENTON:

After passing Green 173, follow a heading of 264 magnetic (M) for 27NM. After transiting the restricted areas on both sides of your course, the Albemarle narrows at Red 6AS. When abeam, take 258M to go under the 65’ high Route 37 Bridge. After the bridge, turn to 282M. Edenton is nine miles ahead. You’ll go under the cross-

sound power lines, 4.3NM away, between markers Red 8AS and Green 9AS. Approach Edenton's channel entrance by heading 340M for 3.2NM. At Red 2, follow the 1.5NM channel. The marks will lead directly to the bulkheaded Colonial Edenton Downtown Harbor. Enter on the bulkhead's open left side.

The marina, with clean heads and nice showers, offers two nights of free dockage, then charges \$1/foot for up to seven nights. Daily electricity fee is \$3 for 30 amps and \$6 for 50 amps. Ten slips have power, water and cable TV. Slips are first-come, first-served or you can make reservations at www.townofedenton.com. A Dockmaster works from 8AM to 8 PM. Office/cell phones are 252-482-2832 or 252-377-4488.

When the Rockefeller family wanted to restore an 18th century colonial town, they had two choices: Edenton or Williamsburg. Wisely, Edenton's residents rejected the Rockefeller's idea. Edenton is a laid-back, friendly southern town with tall trees, a compact main street and many well-kept 18th and 19th century homes.

Take the guided trolley tour from the Visitors Center on Main Street. You'll be amazed at the number of beautiful colonial and ante-bellum homes. These homes are within walking distance of the marina, so return after dark to enjoy their functioning gaslights. Be sure to visit the fully restored 1767 Chowan County Courthouse. It looks like a miniature of Independence Hall and is often used for public events. We attended an evening lecture by a diver who explored WWII submarine wrecks off Hatteras. From the marina, the first three blocks of nearby Main Street offer shopping and several nice restaurants (Sean's and Waterman's were very good).

MANTEO:

At Green 173, take a heading of 165 degrees magnetic for about 13 NM. Follow the 15 foot-high marks; Red 4PP, Red 2PP, white-lighted MG and Red 3CS to Roanoke Island. They are spaced 3-4 miles apart. At Red 3CS, turn to 120 magnetic for Red 42 and follow the marks around the island's upper part. Turn right at Red 30A to enter Manteo's mile-long channel.

At Red 10 turn right toward the red-roofed lighthouse, continuing around the point to Manteo Municipal Marina. If you want to be close to everything, the Municipal Marina in the heart of Manteo is the best place to stay. All it lacks is a pool. Call the Harbor Master, Carl Jordan, at 252-473-3320 or 252-305-4800. Carl prefers a cell call rather than VHF. The marina is a popular cruising club destination, so reservations are a good idea but, if you just drop in, Carl always finds a way to accommodate a single boat.

Nearby Marshes Light Marina is currently being developed from a failed waterfront condo development. Years ago it was the Salty Dog Marina. Currently it lacks showers and floating piers, but both are being built. Water and power are available. If you can't get into the Municipal marina, call Joe Chambliss, the Harbor Master, at 252- 327-9803.

Nearby Shallowbag Condo community has the best fuel prices. Two excellent restaurants are next to Shallowbag; Weeping Radish (on-site microbrewery and German food), and Darrel's (local seafood).

Manteo, on the northern end of Roanoke Island, should be a multi- night stop. We toured the town; spent a half day at the museum in nearby Festival Park (don't miss the movie), visited the re-created encampment of the original colonists and their 16th century ship, and attended the three-hour Lost Colony play. Buy your tickets in the premium section before the trip; pick up at will-call, and have Manteo Cab (252-473-6500) take you to/from the play (6 miles away) or to visit the impressive North Carolina Aquarium. Some bug spray is a good idea if the wind dies down!

Manteo is a delightfully uncrowded town – a cross between Key West and New England. Around the docks, within an area the size of a football field, you'll find an inn, restaurants, pubs, cafes, a coffee house, a tiny movie theater, and many shops, varying from upscale to hand-made items, antiques and tourist goods. Tour the reconstructed lighthouse and boat-building exhibits. At night, small lights in the trees make the place glow for outdoor diners. It's so small, that the Harbor Master is also Parking Warden. He might be writing a ticket while you're calling. Harbor-based boats offer parasailing, dolphin watches and windjammer cruises.

OCRACOCKE:

The trip from Manteo to Ocracoke Island down the east side of Roanoke Island is interesting. Wanchese, near the island's southern end, is a commercial fisherman's port. As you pass Oregon Inlet, honor the temporary buoys. They are moved often due to shifting shoals. Once in Pamlico Sound, you'll have to dogleg around the extensive Long Point Shoal and the bombing target's towers. From there, it's a straight course to approach Ocracoke's channel. From the entrance, well out in Pamlico Sound (20 foot tall, Red 14BF), it's a three-mile run between marked shoals until you make a nearly 180 degree port turn to follow a short, twisting channel into Ocracoke's perfectly circular Silverlake Harbor.

Ocracoke should be a multi-night stay too. We stayed at the Anchorage Inn Marina (make prior reservations @ 252-928-6661). It has a pool, cable TV, a bar and an outdoor pier-side restaurant. Slip holders get a daily continental breakfast at the motel. The first come, first served, low-cost state park moorings along the ferry terminal's piers and seawall are another option, but are more open.

Ocracoke is a delightful little town with a picturesque, protected harbor. We took our bikes and rode around, but you can walk to everything. Don't miss the Village Craftsmen store, lighthouse or ferry dock museum and enjoy a fresh seafood dinner in any of the many restaurants. There is a well-stocked mom & pop grocery near the marina plus many little shops, eateries and seafood stores to visit and savor. I enjoyed watching the marina-based charter boats unload their Gulf Stream catches every evening.

ORIENTAL:

If you push on to Oriental, it is about 35NM southwest of Ocracoke. Off the Neuse River and protected by a stone jetty, Oriental is a very unpretentious town with friendly folks. It is also known as the sailing capitol of North Carolina. Town-center is about three blocks square. Among the many marinas, Oriental Marina and Inn on Hodges Street (252-249-1818), has 15 slips, is in the heart of town and takes only transient boaters. It has a pool, bar and restaurant. The Bean, a coffee shop across the street, is a local's hangout. Its nice porch is a hub of town activity and invites lingering. Next to the marina, The Inland Waterway Provision Shop is an extensive ship chandlery with clothing and other items. A West Marine store is a few blocks away. Several nice restaurants too! We had a good meal at Steamers.

ICW MINI-LOOP:

The ICW Mini-Loop covers 474 statute miles (412 NM)). ICW mile-markers use statute miles for distance, while navigation charts measure nautical miles. It can get confusing ... to make it easier, just add 15% to a nautical mile distance and you'll be very close to statute mileage.

For the Mini-Loop, follow the ICW southward from Norfolk to Coinjock. After crossing the Albemarle; go through the Alligator River-Pungo River Canal, past Belhaven, into the Neuse River to Oriental. From there go east to Ocracoke, maybe visit Hatteras Village, then go northeast to Manteo. After Manteo, turn west toward Edenton. After Edenton, head east into the Pasquotank River, following it northward into Elizabeth City. From there, take the Dismal Swamp Canal back into Norfolk.

NAVIGATION CHARTS AND AIDS:

There is no tide in Albemarle and Pamlico Sounds or in this portion of the ICW. All currents and waves are wind-driven. Like Chesapeake Bay, shallow Outer Banks waters can kick-up quickly in strong winds, so check your weather forecasts. VHF Channel 3 covers the Outer Banks.

Even with a chartplotter, we carry an ICW Chartbook and backup paper charts. Maptech's chart, Albemarle and Pamlico Sounds (Number 89), is all you'll need for those waters. For Oriental and New Bern visits, you'll need an additional chart, Maptech's #90, Pamlico and Neuse Rivers.

For travel on the ICW, we use *The Intracoastal Waterway Chartbook* by John and Leslie Kettlewell for navigation. You will also need a cruising handbook. Two good choices are *Managing the Waterway* by Mark and Diana Doyle or *The Intracoastal Waterway* by Jan and Bill Moeller. The chartbook contains a series of strip charts giving mile-by-mile coverage of the entire waterway. The handbook details waterway features including; marinas, anchorages, ranges, bridge heights and schedules, navigation hints and, most importantly, tells whether to honor Red and Green markers to port or starboard (it changes).

These charts cover the Outer Banks waters:

| | |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|
| MAPTECH #89 (waterproof) | Albemarle and Pamlico Sounds |
| MAPTECH #90 (waterproof) | Pamlico and Neuse Rivers |

| | |
|-------|--|
| 12206 | Norfolk to Albemarle Sound via North Landing River or Great Dismal Swamp |
| 11553 | Albemarle Sound to Neuse River |
| 11541 | Neuse River to Myrtle Grove Sound |

Like the Chesapeake, Albemarle Sound has many crab pots. From marker Green 173 to Manteo, they're clustered around the daymarks. Stay about a half mile off and you'll be clear of most. If you're going to Edenton, another batch can be found west of marker Green 173.

Appendix A

The Bridges of Tidewater

In the first twenty miles after leaving Norfolk, ICW “south-bounders” will pass through several movable highway and railroad bridges and the Great Bridge Lock. Railroad bridges are normally kept open, but will be lowered for trains.

Bridges usually will open on the hour and half-hour weekdays and on request during weekends. During the summer of 2005, the Coast Guard imposed hourly weekday bridge openings and may do so again in 2006. Heavily traveled bridges will only open for commercial traffic during morning and evening rush-hours (7-9 AM and 4-6 PM.)

Contact the bridge and lock tenders on VHF channel 13.

| Mile Marker | Bridge Name | Type | Vertical Clearance |
|------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------|
| 2.6 | Norfolk & Portsmouth Railroad | Lift | 6' down, 142' up |
| 2.8 | Jordan Highway | Lift span removed | Unlimited |
| 3.6 | Norfolk Southern Railroad | Lift | 9' down, 135' up |
| 5.8 | Gilmerton Highway * | Double Bascule | 11' down |
| 5.8 | Norfolk Southern Railroad | Single Bascule | 7' down |
| 7.1 | I-64 Highway (High Rise Bridge) | Double Bascule | 65' down |
| 8.7 | Dominion Blvd (Steel Bridge) * | Double Bascule | 12' down |
| 11.5 | Great Bridge Lock | Lock | 1' rise/lower |
| 12 | Great Bridge Bridge | Double Pivot Swing | 6' down |
| 12.6 | Great Bridge Highway | Fixed | 65' |
| 13.7 | Norfolk Southern Railroad | Single Bascule | 7' down |
| 15.2 | Centerville Turnpike * | Single Pivot Swing | 4' down |
| 20.2 | North Landing Highway * | Double Pivot Swing | 6' down |
| 28.6 | Route 726 Highway | Fixed | 65' |
| 50.1 | Coinjock Highway | Fixed | 65' |

* Has Rush-Hour restriction

Alternate Route Southbound from Norfolk
By
Captain Jerry Friedman, USCG Licensed Master

Below Norfolk, at ICW mile 7.1, you pass under the 65' high I-64 Highway Bridge. Just beyond the bridge, on the right, a large in-water sign indicates the junction of the ICW's Dismal Swamp Canal route. This route is a very nice alternative for a "south-bounder", as long as you are not in a hurry.

DISMAL SWAMP CANAL:

Operated and managed by the US Army Corps of Engineers, the 22-mile canal has a depth of 6.3 feet. About 2000 recreational boaters pass through annually. Sometimes it is closed for maintenance or low water. Call the Corp's Norfolk office at 757-201-7606 to check its status.

After turning right at the Dismal Swamp Canal sign, you will enter 3.4 mile-long Deep Creek. It winds around to Deep Creek Lock, at MM 10.6, the first of the canal's two locks. If needed, there are two places to anchor before reaching the lock.

Deep Creek Lock opens four times per day; at 0830, 1100, 1330, and 1530 hours, so timing is everything! Do not enter until the Lock Keeper waves you on, calls you on the radio, or turns the lock's signal light to green. Once in the lock, the Lock Keeper will direct where to hold onto the lock wall as your boat is raised nine feet into non-tidal waters. After the Lock Keeper's signal, exit the lock and proceed slowly for a half-mile to Deep Creek Bridge. Wait for the same Lock Keeper to drive from the lock to the bridge, and then open it. This bridge has a four-foot clearance, so waiting for it to open is a necessity.

After passing the bridge, you have a 21.2 mile trip to South Mills Lock and Bridge, at a no-wake speed of six mph. You will make a nearly arrow-straight run down a narrow ditch, which is just wide enough to allow approaching boats to squeeze past each other. The canal's nominal depth is six feet, but there are snags and rotted pilings along both sides. These old rotted pilings are part of the original canal's sides. Various "hair styles" of grasses, flowers, bushes, vines, and other plants grow out of their tops. You'll probably see different types of wildlife too.

Branches of the trees lining both canal banks almost meet overhead. You have the effect of being in a long, long tunnel with a slot at the top, giving a peek at a strip of

blue sky dotted with white clouds. The overhanging trees cast a perfect reflection onto the quiet, dark brown water; giving an eerie optical illusion at times that the world is upside down ... logs you think are in the water ahead of you, are only reflections of the branches above.

OVERNIGHT MOORING:

The only place to stop in the canal is the North Carolina Welcome Center (MM28.) It is located 17.4 miles from Deep Creek Lock. At a speed of six mph, the trip to reach this “oasis” takes about three hours.

The Welcome Center serves boaters and highway travelers. This good overnight stop is modern, well maintained and has very nice restrooms. The bulkhead dock can hold about five boats. Additional boats must raft up to those moored at the bulkhead. Courtesy and friendliness are needed, since rafted boaters must cross other boat’s decks to get ashore. There is also a hiking and running path through the woods, with one end at the Visitor’s Center. The narrow canal is well-protected from weather and has no current or waves, making this a quiet, restful stop.

At the southern end of the Dismal Swamp Canal, South Mills Bridge and Lock operates on the same schedule as the northern end’s Deep Creek Lock. Boats transiting Deep Creek Lock during the 1100 opening, usually cannot reach South Mills Lock on the same day. Thus, people planning a one-day transit must enter Deep Creek Lock at its 0830 opening. Those planning to stay overnight at the Welcome Center can lock-through later.

LEAVING THE CANAL:

South Mills Highway Bridge (four-foot clearance) is four miles from the Welcome Center at MM 32.3. The South Mill Lock is a half-mile farther. This bridge and lock are opened four times per day; at 0830, 1100, 1330, and 1530. The Bridge Tender, who is also the Lock Keeper, must drive between the bridge and the lock, so patience is needed. After being cleared to enter, follow the Lock Keeper’s directions for holding along the lock wall as your boat is lowered nine feet to the level of Albemarle Sound.

At both Deep Creek and South Mills Locks, either southbound or northbound boats may be locked through first. Your entrance time may vary from the “nominal” time by as much as 45 minutes.

Once you have exited South Mills Lock, you will transit a 3.5 mile land cut and then you are in the incredibly wild, beautiful, narrow, and winding Pasquotank River. The 18 miles of this stretch of river are as close to being primordial as any.

ELIZABETH CITY:

At MM 50.7, you reach Elizabeth City's twin highway bridges which will have to be raised, because of their 12 foot clearance. In downtown Elizabeth City, there is a free town dock adjacent to the town park. From the dock and the park, it is a very short walk to an old-fashioned hardware store and a bakery.

The town dock has a number of slips available for transient boaters, all free. If 6 or more transient boats arrive by mid-afternoon, the "Rose Buddies" will greet the visitors and invite them to a late afternoon wine and cheese party, held adjacent to the dock. Rose Buddies may take visitors on a golf cart tour of the nearby parts of the town

Elizabeth City is a delightful place to stop for a day or two, before continuing about 15 miles down the Pasquotank River, into Albemarle Sound. Once you are in the Albemarle, this very pleasant, alternate route rejoins the ICW southwest of marker Green 173.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS:

Both of us have cruised extensively in Chesapeake and North Carolina waters. Norm is a member of the Old Point Comfort Yacht Club in Hampton, Virginia and has a Duffy37 lobster hull. He has made three transits of the Intracoastal Waterway, traveling as far as Key West, Florida.

Jerry has a Mainship 34 trawler and is the Commodore of the Chesapeake Mainship Group. He is also a member and active lecturer at the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum in St. Michaels, Maryland. He is the lead captain of the museum's 53 foot oyster buyboat.

SIGN-OFF:

This packet, written for our cruising friends, should give enough information to begin planning an Outer Bank's visit. For seasoned Chesapeake Bay boaters, a trip through North Carolina waters will add another dimension to your cruising experience. Take a taste of the Albemarle. Believe us, you'll like it!