

## So, Where's the Boat Now?

A series of reports on the latest known location of Rene and his boat



**Kiss of the Wolf** was built in 2008 in a Nazareth PA backyard. She is a fifteen and a half foot, out-board-powered, flat-bottomed skiff in the Sharpy style to lines drawn by Jim Michalak (AF4b).

Although designed as a day sailor and occasional over-nighter, KOTW has logged in excess of 8000 miles ranging as far South as the Gulf of Mexico, as far West as Chicago and as far North as Lake Huron's North Passage- all on her own flat bottom.



**Stage 1:** Relunched April 29, in Tarrytown on the Hudson, where I pulled her for a refit last August. Had a lovely run up the Hudson, the Champlain Canal, and Lake Champlain to Burlington VT. No problems, and no other boats either. I had the nine 18 foot locks all to myself. I'm not sure opening and closing massive steel gates, letting in hundreds of thousands of gallons of water in order to raise one fifteen foot skiff eighteen feet is a wise expenditure of the taxpayers money, but what -the-hell. Have laid the boat up in Burlington, a marvelous little city, because of the sudden onslaught of rain, snow and cold temps. Will continue North when things warm up a bit.



The refit. After 3500 miles, good as new.



The route so far



I put a bid in on this, but it was rejected



Muybridge



Not having a mast can be a definite advantage at times.



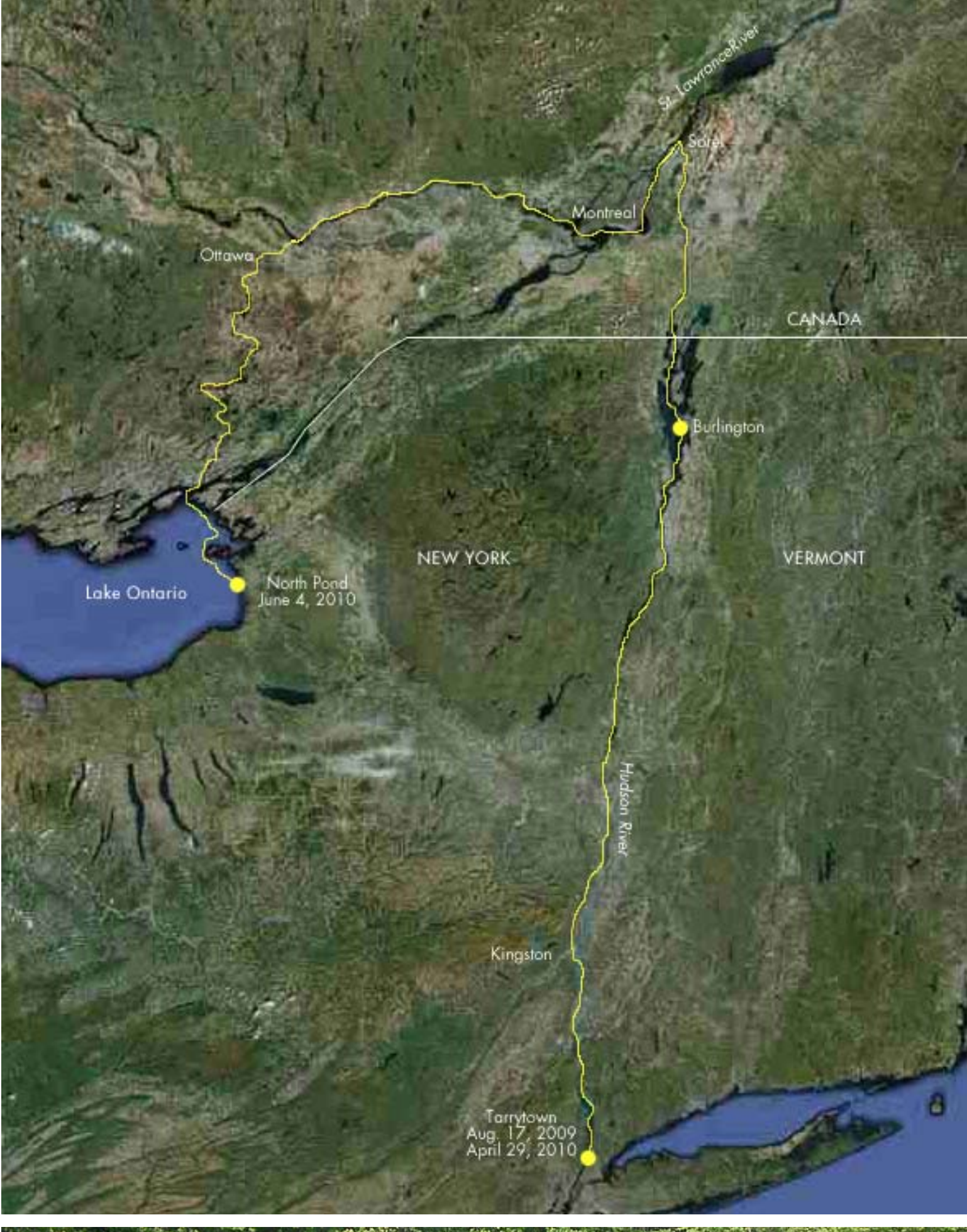
**Stage 2:** Had spectacularly good weather on this leg. Almost every day was comparable to my best day on the Southbound legs last year. With the exception of one day on Lake Champlain where it blew 30k and had me really having to concentrate to maintain control of the boat while surfing quartering seas, the many and various waters gave me a smooth ride. I crossed into Canada at the top of Lake Champlain and was astonished to find myself so immediately back in France. Quebec is a culture rooted in the European tradition: European architecture, European shops, European signage (Not a Walmart, Burger King, Gap, or Dunkin Donuts in sight. No billboards, Malls, or Big Box stores anywhere. It is like all of Quebec is one gigantic National Park, and a good deal of it actually is.

No English. I don't mean they prefer French; most people speak little or no English in Quebec. Once you leave Montreal and Quebec for Ottawa and Ontario, you experience a rather sudden shift into English, with French coming in a poor second.

I stopped for gas at a little rickety dock a few miles North of the US/Canada border and noticed a small sign: "déjeuner", on a small shack at the end of the dock. Inside the shack was a light, airy, and spotless room, with a small kitchen at one end and a few aluminum and plastic tables neatly arranged at the other. There were fresh flowers on each table. The cook-hostess-waitress was the dock owners' wife. She spoke no English, but managed to order a breakfast of scrambled eggs, and bacon and freshly made bread. It arrived with diced and sautéed potatoes, and a slice of home grown tomato on a bed of lettuce. The silver was silver, the china- china. A simple meal, but elegant. French Canada, I was discovering, embodied not just the look of France, but its' sense of style.

In the photos below you will see no other boats, because there weren't any; I had the rivers, lakes, locks, and canals pretty much to myself.

For the record, I ran Lake Champlain North to the Chambly Canal and Richelieu River to the St Lawrence River at Sorel. Thence, Southwest to Montreal and NorthWest via the Ottawa River to Ottawa, and South via the Rideau Lakes and channels to Kingston, Ontario, and a bit further South to North Pond in NY State.



Preferred mode of transportation in the North Country



A lock on the Rideau. 100 foot drop. One of the worlds largest about to open just for me.



Right in the heart of the city, this is the Ottawa Canal. Like the Seine running through the center of Paris.



Hand operated lock just beyond Ottawa City



Dawn on the Rideau



**Stage 4:** Mackinac Island MI to Grafton IL

The Northern half of Lake Michigan, for hundreds of miles, is magnificent, panoramic, and totally unspoiled. The only sign of human impact revealed itself one day while running close inshore; I spotted ahead the rotting pilings of a long ago dock. Surprising, since there is no protection on this windward shore from the prevailing West winds, and I had seen no other boats, big or small, for several days. As I drew closer, I was even more surprised to see some of the pilings seem to shift positions as much as a foot or so. Finally, all was revealed as the pilings turned out to be not pilings at all but dozens of people standing in water up to their chest in more or less a straight line stretching out into the lake. Who they are, where they came from, how they got there, I don't know. The dunes leading down to the bay are hundreds of feet tall, some of the largest in the world, and there are no roads on this part of the coast. As I swung out and around them, not one paid me the slightest bit of attention, but I liked them immediately; I pictured this band of people finding their way to the dunes, climbing or sliding down the hundreds of near vertical feet to the white sand beach, and wading out into the water to just - stand, on a hot day. I projected this image to the early evening when I imagined they would leave the waters, climb back up and over the dunes and disappear leaving behind only footprints in the sand.



Mackinac Island MI to Grafton IL



I just saw one of those pilings move.



The magnificent sand dunes of Lake Michigan



Beached at Aux Sable Point Lake Michigan



Frank Gehry comes to Peoria IL



Why bridge builders need designers.  
These two are within a half mile of each other.



Michigan Granite jetty



Chicago!



This classic Karmahn Ghia has apparently just been pulled from the river. Notice the rapt attention the three guys are paying to the girl.

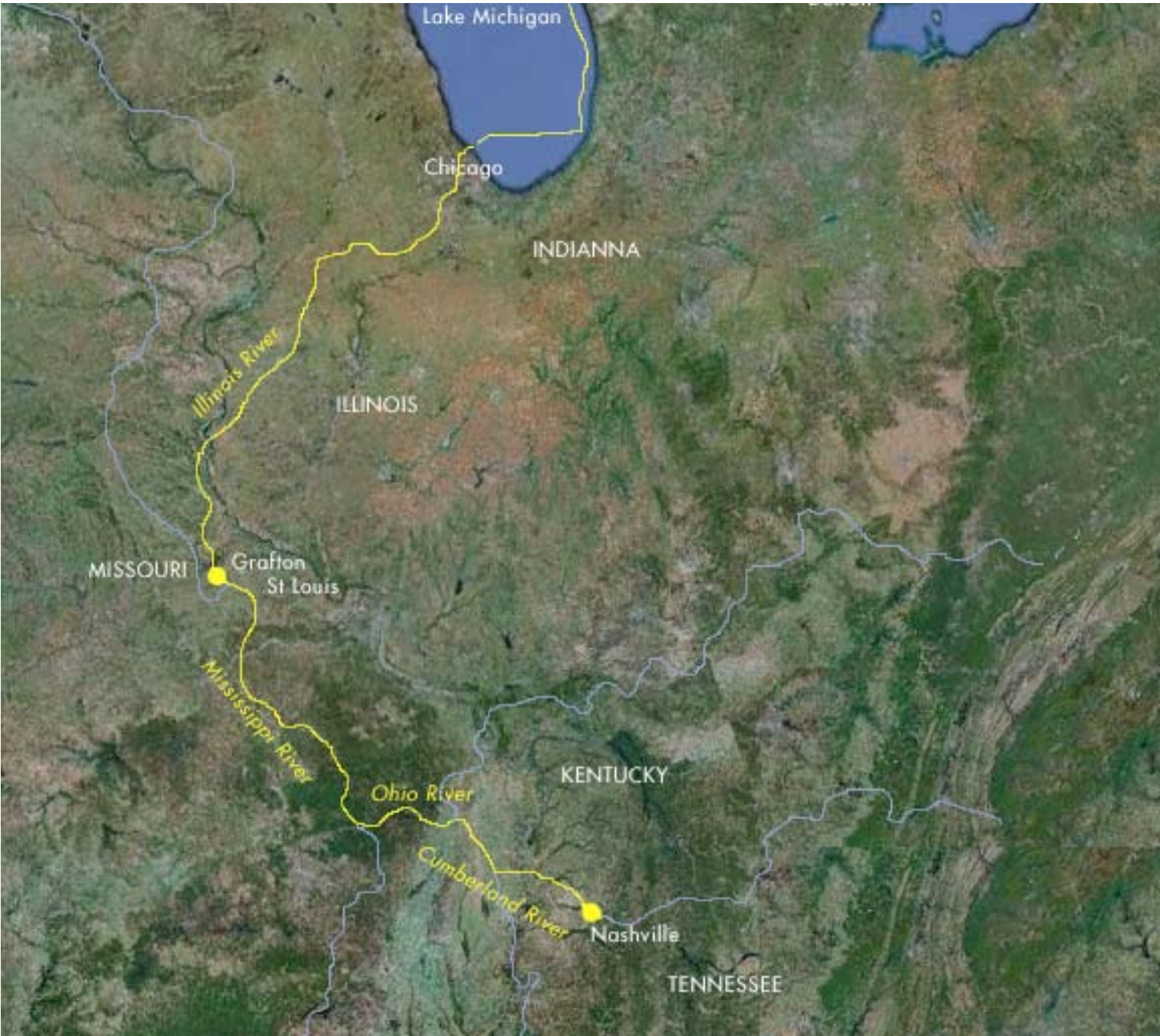


**Stage 5: Grafton IL to Nashville TN**

A short layover in Grafton found me in a nice pickle: I had left the boat in a little lagoon fed by the Illinois, and on returning discovered the water level had dropped by four feet, leaving me high, dry and several hundred feet from the river. However, my luck holds; several people showed up to lend a hand. The first was Kenny, who has a combination Bookstore and Barborshop on Main Street, then Tom Foster, from the Kayak rental place across the flats. His idea was to get a couple more guys, unload the boat to lighten it, and carry it a few feet to firm ground and a trailer he would provide. We were in the process of figuring what this would cost when (my new best friend) Steve, a lineman for the county, shows up with a friend and a Bobcat (the Bobcat is a forklift on tracks). We were back on the river in twenty minutes and they wouldn't take a penny for their efforts. I'll have fond memories of Grafton.

The Illinois joins the Mississippi just below Grafton. The current kicks up to four plus knots and it can get quite turbulent at times with eddies, whirlpools, and rapids. These are not a problem, but not particularly comfortable either.

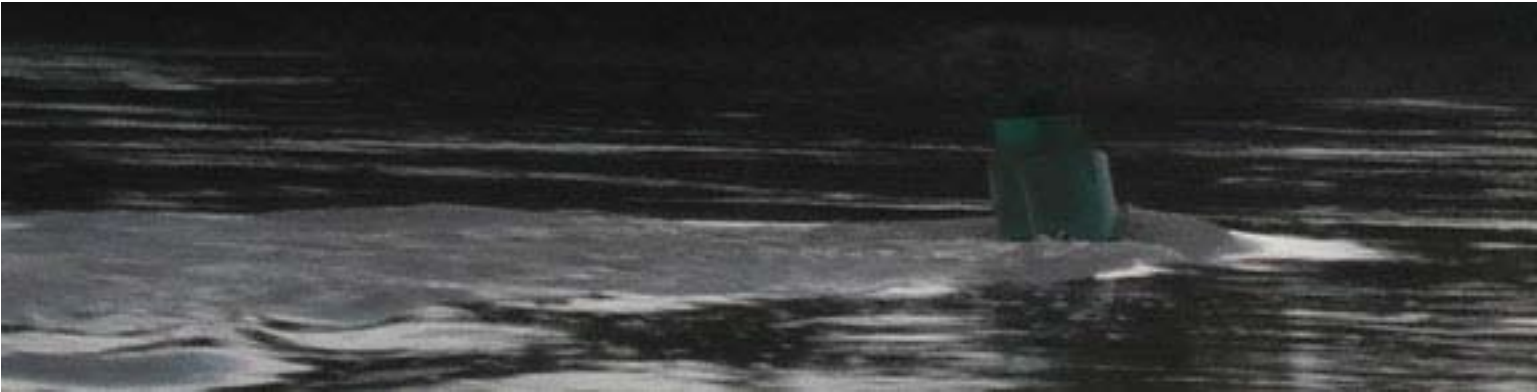
Leaving the Mississippi for the Ohio saw my speed over the ground drop abruptly from 10k to 5.5k at half throttle, but the weather was near perfect, and I was in no hurry.



Where the boat was



The Mississippi current



The St. Louis Arch. Quite impressive.





**Stage 6: Nashville TN - Pensacola FL**

An interesting incident happened on the Tennessee River:  
It was just another lovely day, when I happened to glance in the cabin and saw 1/4 inch of water covering the cabin sole. LEAK! Luckily I was in a not too wide section of the river, and beached her in minutes.

I thought this could only be a failure of a join at the waterline, and potentially very difficult to find and even more difficult to fix. Plus it meant that I could no longer trust the integrity of the boat I'd built. These thoughts were well back in my mind as I had shifted into automatic mode and was busy hauling everything including the furniture out of the cabin, and mopping up the standing water to try and locate the leak.

Nothing - once dry, it stayed dry. I waited. I hung out the linens to dry in the sun and waited some more. Still nothing. I climbed out of the boat and inspected it from the outside. There was a ragged hole in the hull about the size of a silver dollar about an inch above the waterline up in the bow where the battery compartment is. What partially submerged object I had struck and never felt, I don't know and never will, but I was elated; this was very good news indeed! If you're going to hole your boat, this is where you want it.

A little MarineTex to fill it, masking tape and a block of wood to fair the MarineTex, and I was on my merry way again: down to where the pelicans play, Spanish Moss drips from dead trees, snow-white egrets stand transfixed at the water's edge, and dolphins gambol in my miniscule wake.



Down the Cumberland, Tennessee, Tenn-Tom, Black Warrior, Alabama, and Mobile Rivers to the Gulf



Hole patched over.



Well, I was warned.



Wildlife on the Tennessee.



Big River, little boat.



What the heck is this?



The ubiquitous Herron



On the hard in Bayou Chica...awhhh, look at that little thing.

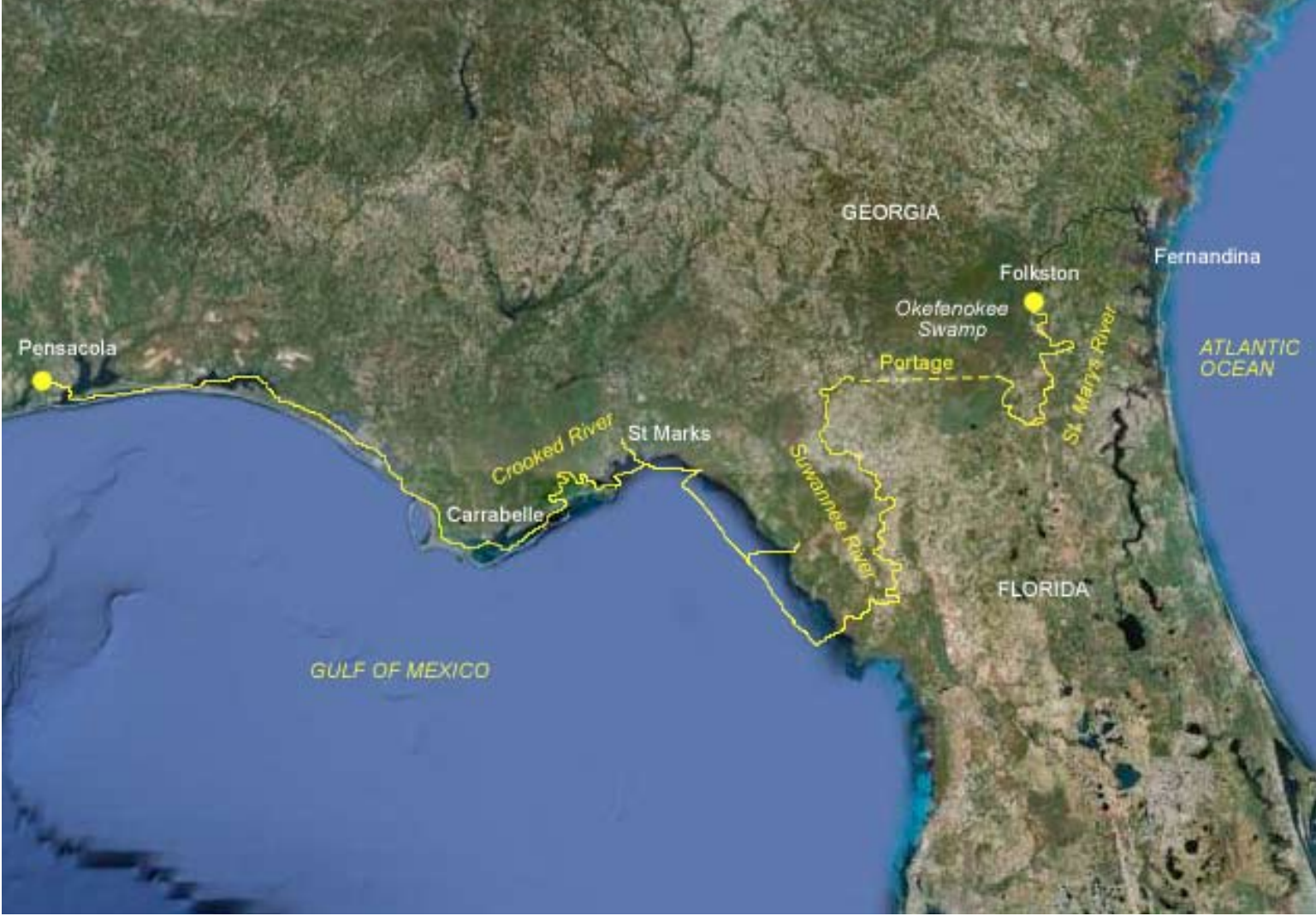


**Stage 7: Pensacola FL - Folkston Georgia** When last seen the boat was on the hard at Pelicans Perch on Bayou Chico in Pensacola, FL. I flew in March 1st and spent 4 days cleaning her up and refitting (paint, varnish).

Leaving Pensacola on the fifth, I had easy water up to Carrabelle and the terminus of the Crooked River which is a popular canoe route to Ochlockonee Bay to the East. From there it was mostly open water to the Suwannee River Entrance with stops at St. Marks and Steinhatchee. The Suwannee proved navigable 2/3rds of the way up to its source at the Okefenokee Swamp. I had the boat taken out and trailered to St George, GA and put into the St. Marys River there. The St. Marys has its source on the East side of the Okefenokee and flows to the Atlantic. The idea was to ride it down to Fernandina FL. and head North on the East coast.

This proved to be far more arduous than I had anticipated: the St. Marys had very little water in it up around St. George, where I put in, and was laced with snags, stumps, floating branches and whole trees fallen across its width. Clearing a path through this debris would take me anywhere from one-half to two hours, so my progress downstream would often be no more than 4 miles a day. I did run into a large half submerged tree that I couldn't pull the boat over, but as luck would have it, was rescued by a fellow (Alton Conner) who showed up on an ATV and pulled the boat over with it. Alton said he had heard at the gas station in St. George I was going to attempt the St. Marys and he figured he better come check on me. Glad he did, or I might still be stuck there. Alton gave me an old but serviceable arbor saw and I used that to cut my way through on numerous occasions. I finally came a cropper on a huge fallen tree four foot across at its base and too big by far to saw through. Once again, I was rescued by two young guys in a canoe who took an axe to the narrower end of the tree and its branches and sprung me free. These two guys, Joe Nicks and Jonathan Henderson, and Alton Conner were the only human beings I saw my first four days on the St. Marys. Very few people live in the woods along the river, but those that do are both resourceful and generous.

As luck would have it, both the motor and my cell phone died at the same time a day later and I had to resort to drifting, poling, paddling and getting out and pulling for several days 'til I reached Murrays Landing and some semblance of civilization several miles South of Folkston. This is a private little beach along the river owned by FL Murray who is my new best friend because he has gone out of his way to help me find a new motor and a new cell phone. Am waiting on the delivery of the motor before I continue on.



March 1 to March 30, 2011



Relaunching



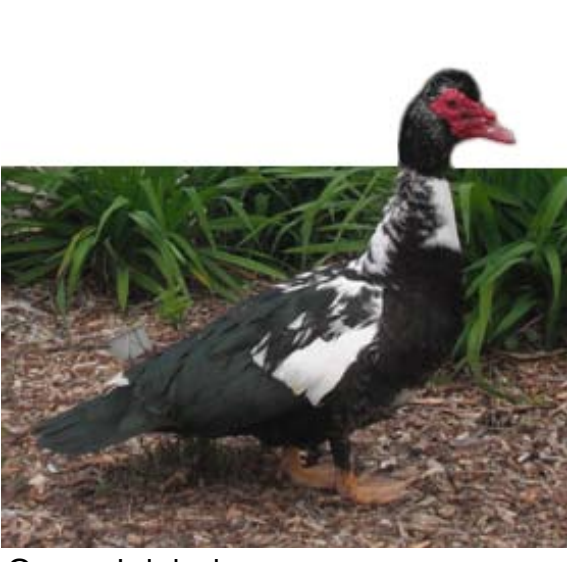
Yes, I do cook on the boat.



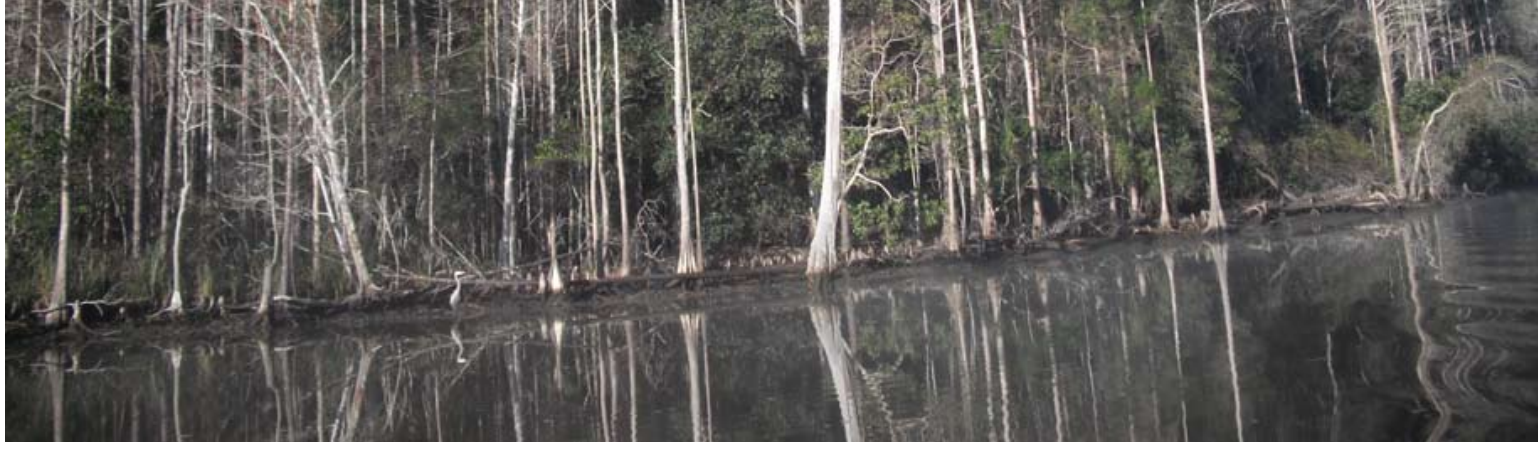
This marker was discovered several miles offshore in the Gulf of Mexico. Although kind of comforting, since there was nothing else visible on the horizon, I have no idea why it was there; it was not on my chart.



Gum trees on the Suwannee



One weird duck



Cyprus on the Suwannee



Typical blockage on the St. Marys River. This one took less than 1/2 hour to clear.



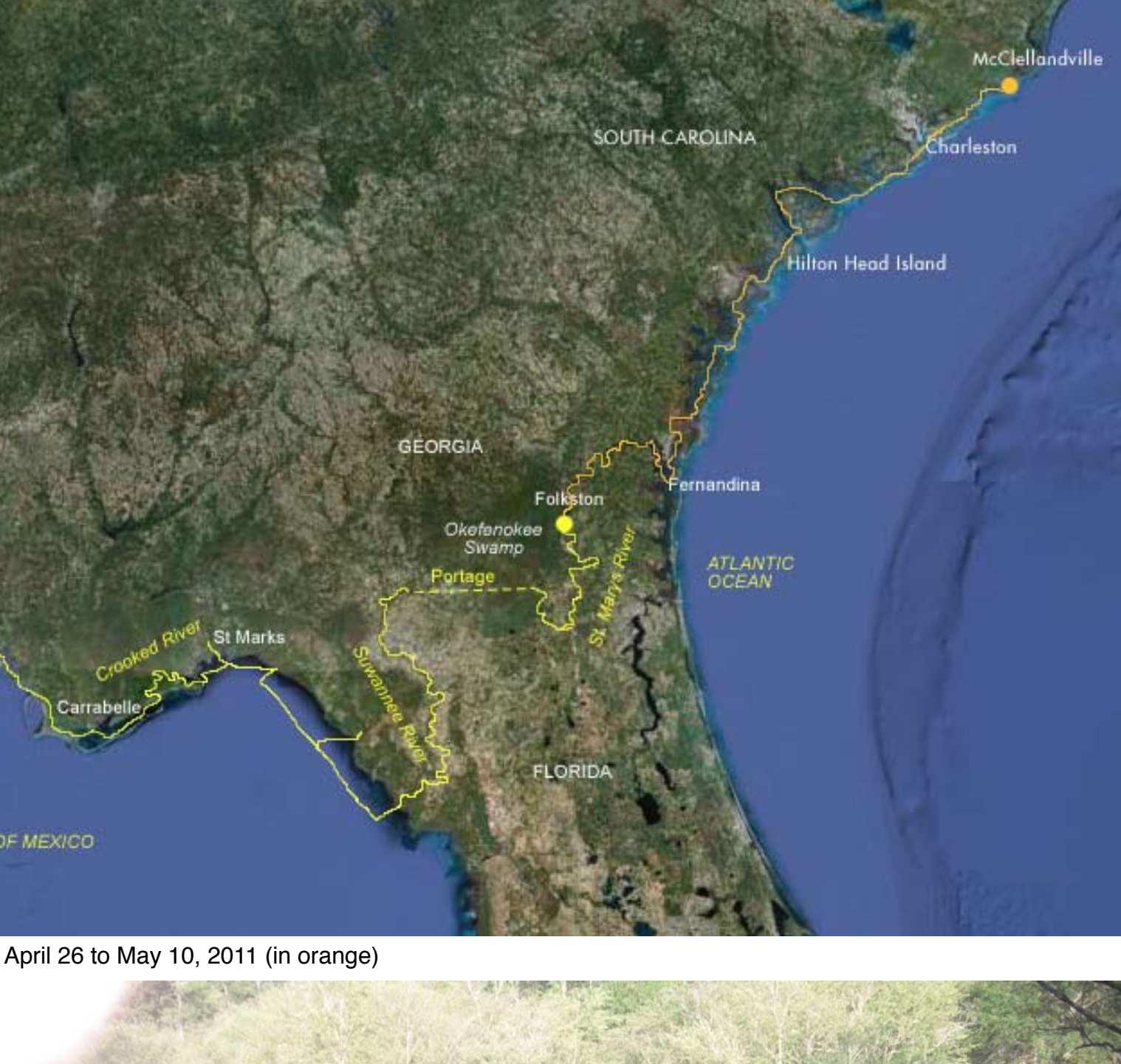
The Axe Men



The little beach at Murrays Landing; the sand on this river is finer than tablesalt. Those two patches on the hull are where I got holed again by snags in the river.



**Stage 8: Folkston Georgia - McClellanville S. Carolina** After several hours of more-of-the-same on the St. Marys River, the river finally widened enough for me to get around the fallen trees and branches using my brand new motor. Sand bars however, would now become a problem as they often had no more than an inch or two over them, so it was get out and pull. As it snaked its way toward the East Coast and the Atlantic Ocean the river grew increasingly wider and deeper, the towering pines and cypress gave way to lowland marsh and sawgrass, and the going got easier and easier. The last fifty miles or so to the coast saw cottages starting to appear on the river banks, and bustling Fernandina Beach (the Northern-most town in Florida) not far up ahead. After a month in "Deliverance" country, I was approaching at least some semblance of civilization again. The run up the coast to Hilton Head, Charleston and McClellanville was uneventful, easy going, under fair skies. Very civilised. McClellanville is a return to the 1940s. Dirt roads lined with magnificent oaks and dripping moss, handsome houses with wraparound porches, and a populace whose laid-back attitude barely conceals a truly generous spirit.



April 26 to May 10, 2011 (in orange)



St. Marys River; finally free of obstacles.



You see that? What is that? Is that a croc or a log?



Low water table = exposed roots



I suppose this isn't the worst example of architectural mayhem that have exploded on the waterways in the past few years, but it's up there. Needless to say, they're all sporting For Sale signs.



Fernandina's (Florida) Shrimp Festival brings out a parade of sorts.



Leland Oil docks, McClellanville S.C.



Leland Oil docks, McClellanville S.C.



Church in McClellanville.



**Stage 9: McClellanville SC. - Baltimore MD.**

There are many open roadsteads, inlets, sounds and bays on this coast, and the going can get pretty hairy at times. The strong Northerly winds I feared never materialized- light Southerlys giving me smoothish waters instead. So, except for a thunderstorm or two, this was an unevenful leg.



Square-Rigger in Hampton Roads (North of Norfolk)



The lifting fog reveals an eery labyrinth of dead reeds and stumps in Pamlico Sound.



Sometimes there is nothing but a thin strip of sand between you and the ocean; and sometimes not even that.



Patching up, and refitting in McClellanville, SC



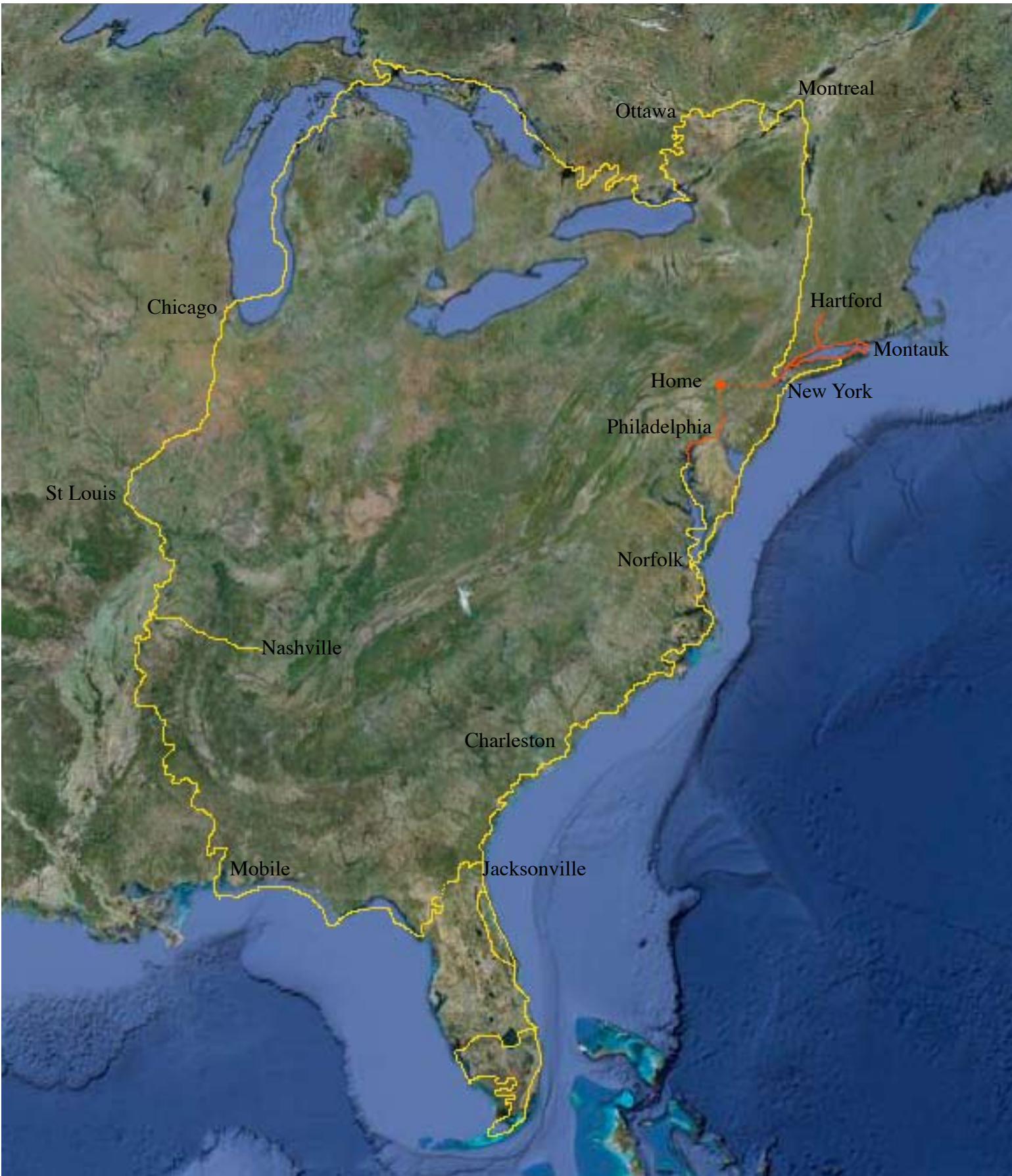
In S.C. all boats come complete with dog.





**Stage 10:** Philadelphia, The Raritan River, NY Harbor, Montauk L.I., Watch Hill R.I., Hartford Ct., New York, Home. This trip is done.

The map below shows stage 10 in red, the previous year and a half in yellow. 8000 plus miles, 25 U.S. States and two Canadian Provinces, more than a hundred different bodies of water. I won't insist that it was all a cakewalk, but I do think it within the capabilities of a reasonably intelligent thirteen year old. It was never boring, often quite beautiful, and I'd do it again in a heartbeat.



I put into this basin on the Brooklyn side of NY Harbor, and dropped the hook. Although very deep, it looked like excellent protection from a particularly violent thunderstorm predicted to be passing through in a couple of hours. It was the end of the day and I had the basin all to myself, so I tucked myself in with a book to wait it out in the cabin. A short time later I was roused by a Police boat bullhorn. The Police boat accompanied by a Fire boat, a Coast Guard Cutter, and two (2) ambulances.

Apparently someone on shore had phoned 911 and reported a man overboard in the basin. My guess is someone saw me at anchor in the cockpit, and when they looked again, I was no longer there (having gone inside). It is not readily apparent that the boat has a cabin. None of the responders seemed at all put out by the false alarm; it must have been a slow day.

