

Spring Break *My family's first trip to the Outer Banks*

By Kevin Johns

It was six months before we were set to leave for the Outer Banks, and I was getting an earful from my wife Gail about how the Outer Banks would be a great vacation for me, but not one for our family. I was going to do my best to prove her wrong.

I had been renting at Island Creek in Avon for the past three years with my sailing buddies, and the last week in April of '04 brought warm 75-degree temperatures every day with a strong SW wind. It dawned on me after our 2004 trip that I should bring my family to the Outer Banks.

Island Creek has large reasonably-priced rental homes with pools. I booked a house within a week of my return. Thus began my plan to make the last week of April 2005 the Johns' Family Vacation to Cape Hatteras.

Now, I don't think Gail took me too seriously about booking a vacation home a year in advance. But after spending our kids' spring break at our beach house in Long Beach Island, NJ, having back-to-back years of lousy weather, Gail thought that a 10-hour drive south to the Outer Banks may not be such a bad idea, "Did you say they have a heated pool?" she asked. "Oh yes honey," I replied. "We'll have a great time, and you should see the dunes on the Outer Banks before they overbuild it like the Jersey Shore."

Now, my boys, Chris (15), Patrick (13), Matt (10), and Kevin (we call him Squishy, 8), were already sold on the idea of the Outer Banks when they heard about the heated pool. But the water sport activities definitely closed the deal in their minds. Christopher and Matthew were already surfers, and beginning the journey into windsurfing. Patrick and Kevin were also water rats with their boogie and skim boarding.

My boys have picked up on my sense of outdoor adventure, so it is true that the family that plays together stays together. True for the boys, but I had to work on Gail. Although in tip-top shape, she was not a heavy duty water rat. She is a beach person. There is a difference.

A water person likes to be in the water and feels 100% comfortable being on the water, in the water, or under the water. A beach person only takes water visits. In order to make this family vacation successful, I knew that I had to plan activities for the kids, but I really had to come up with a plan to make Gail a satisfied vacationer.

One month to go before the trip, the final balance for the house at Island Creek was mailed to Hatteras Realty. Winter sports activities were beginning to come to a close. Skis and snowboards were put away. It was time to really put my plan into action.

One part of my plan that I had no control over was the weather. Some friends who went down to Hatteras at the beginning of April had a miserable week of cold and rainy weather with 35 plus NE winds. Certainly this was not the expected weather compared to April of 2004.

Gail was all over the weather conditions. To the north of DC was warm 70-degree weather from an unusually warm Canadian high pressure that pushed all the nasty weather to the South, from DC all the way to Florida. I just prayed for the weather to change.

Finally, the last week of April arrived. Spring break was here. The weather in New Jersey started to crap out, so what better incentive to hit the road. I drove to our LBI beach house and loaded up the top Thule bin and rack with things from my happy list of fun toys to bring on vacation.

- 1 skim board
- 2 boogie boards
- 1 complete set of sand toys (including football, Frisbee, shovels)
- 6 wetsuits (even had one for Gail)
- 1 beach chair
- 1 surfboard
- 2 sailboards (92 and 150 liter boards should cover the wind range)
- 4 sails (8.0, 7.0, 6.0 and 5.0)
- 3 booms and 3 masts
- 1 kids' rig

We arrived at Island Creek at night so no one had a real chance to see what the Outer Banks had to

offer until the morning. I had to turn the heat on inside the house, which wasn't a good sign. The wind was howling between 25 and 30 mph, the house shook, and no one got a good night's sleep.

The next day was beautiful, but cool. First thing up for the kids was the hot tub. God bless the hot tub. It is the next best thing to our heated swimming pool, which was on hold until the heat was turned on.

I spent the morning unloading the rest of the minivan and rigging. I even got in an hour sailing session in that morning on my 5.0. The cool wind had swung around to the South with fair skies. Forecast for the week was partly cloudy skies, possible rain here and there, with southerly winds, and air temperature in the mid 60's. Not Hawaii, but I'd take it.

After lunch, Chris and I rented a two-person kayak for the week. The ocean kayak was a real big hit with the family. We launched it in the Pamlico Sound. We went in every canal, and found you could really get up close to the birds and other wildlife. It gave me a completely different view of Pamlico Sound compared to what I saw from windsurfing.

We spent the mornings and evenings in the hot tub. Gail took morning jogs on the beach and later we all took family walks to collect seashells. The waves had quieted down a bit that week, so Chris and Matt didn't get a chance to surf, but both of them had a blast windsurfing. At first Chris didn't want to venture out into the Sound because of all the sailors. But after a bit of coaxing, he used the 6.0 and really had a chance to feel the 150-liter board plane under his feet. Matthew used the kids rig and just played around out there. Just like a typical 10-year-old, it took him about 5 seconds to do a beach start, and he came out of the water with the biggest smile. Patrick was probably the first kid at Island Creek who blasted his skim board across the sandbars in the Sound at low tide. For Kevin, it was the hot tub, hot tub and more hot tub. There were water pistol fights in the hot tub, chips and dip festivities in the hot

tub and swimming races across the hot tub. Later in the week, we all graduated to playing football in the pool when the heater finally kicked in.

The kids got a real kick out of all the Canadians who visit the Outer Banks in spring. When the wind died down in the middle of the day, we would launch the kayak and paddle around all the canals watching the Canadians hanging around the bulkheads praying for wind. The boys called their mobile homes and vans Canadian hobo mobiles. Counting the hobo vans at Canadian Hole was a real treat every time we drove by.

The Outer Banks offered something for everyone in the family. Gail's birthday was in the middle of the week so we packed the kids in the car and spent most of the day at Ocracoke island. Another day, we spent at the Cape Hatteras lighthouse, and the kids finally got to see the most famous candy striped beacon in the US. Despite being a bit chilly from the strong wind when we climbed to the top, the clear view of Diamond Shoals was well worth the effort. And everyone, including Kevin, made that climb. Toward the end of the week, we took the kids to Kitty Hawk to see where aviation first took flight.

To top off the vacation, we spent a day at Frisco Woods and participated in Windfest 2005. Matt and Chris had the chance to take windsurfing lessons, pick up some free stickers and sail on those big Starboard sailboards. Matt called them flying saucers. Patrick couldn't get enough of watching the kite boarders do flips and 20-foot jumps off of flat water.

Overall, windsurfing didn't become the biggest activity. Sure, I got my time in because the wind blew every morning and late afternoon—perfect timing for me. The rest of the day was spent either kayaking with Gail or the kids, walking the big wide open beaches, or doing whatever idea popped into our heads at the time—hot tub!

To me the ultimate compliment from Gail and the kids is that they want to come back next year. The deposit for Spring break 2006 is already in the mail. 