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The Art of the Raft-up

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12-20-2009

#1



Faster Just another Moderator

Join Date: Sep 2005
 Location: New Westminster, BC
 Posts: 14,604
 Thanks: 67
 Thanked 178 Times in 174 Posts
 Rep Power: 10

The Art of the Raft-up

One of the most social things you can do cruising is to sail with a group as a flotilla. Plenty of socializing, casual impromptu racing, kayaking, swimming, hiking etc are all things that work well with groups large and small.

(Note: this post has been edited based on some great suggestions in subsequent posts. Thanks all...)

We do a lot of this as we often sail with friends, in groups of 4 - 6 boats, and with our very active cruising club with up to 16-18 boats at times.

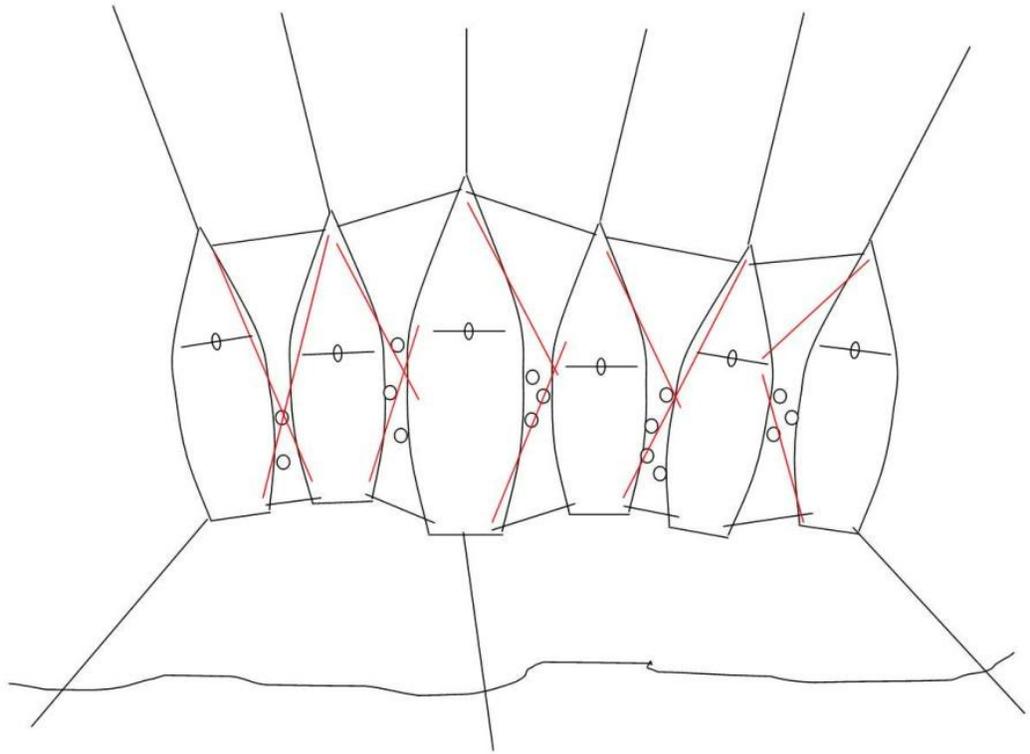
Rafting is not for everyone, some will consistently choose to find their own spot, but in a properly selected location this is a very social way to end the day or even to spend a layday or two to enjoy boat hopping and other off-the-boat activities like picnics, happy hours ashore, hikes and so forth.

Here are some things we consider and do to make rafting as trouble-free as possible.

Pick the right location... minimal breeze and current, especially across the boats, is best. If some breeze is inevitable, then try to orient the raft to that it's either on the bow or the stern. If over the stern you'll obviously be in a shore-tie situation in which case the lines ashore will take most of the load. If over the bow then you're going to be in a bit of a lee-shore situation, but with the many anchors out this should not be a big problem, and in any event if big breezes are likely than rafting should be abandoned - in daylight rather than 3 am in that big breeze.

We also generally only raft if there's opportunity to tie ashore.. a free swinging raft is problematic if more than one anchor is down if/when the breeze clocks or tide turns. Stern anchors help here, but you may end up with all the load on stern anchor(s) that are usually not anyone's primary ground tackle. One thing we have yet to try is a "Sunflower" raft.. generally our bays are too small and deep to make this practical.

Laying out the raft properly will go a long way towards everyone's peace of mind and sound sleep. Anchor lines and shore lines should be oriented in a way that will tend to pull the boats apart rather than force them together (see drawing below).



All lines between boats should be proper nylon (stretchy) lines to avoid overnight 'gronks' and short fetch-ups in the event of some wave action. If the lines and anchor rodes can be arranged as shown above, fenders actually become almost redundant, you can adjust the distance between boats to make it a reasonable step across, but the fenders should not be squeezed at all (also minimizes noise)

If there is to be some rolling among the boats, then tying fenders on horizontally between the boats will quiet things down, the fenders will roll rather than slide on the hull if they do touch, better for your paint/wax job too.

Use long spring lines between each boat too, to make sure that the boats remain in the same relative positions at all times, ensuring that fenders are in the right place when they're needed, and to help keep gates and cockpits aligned for easy crossing and communication.
EDIT: It's also important to ensure that if the boats roll the rigs cannot collide... boats should be arranged with that in mind too.

Use the most substantial boat as the 'anchor' in the middle and try to build the raft out equally on either side. We don't always drop an anchor from every boat, but certainly every other one. Same with stern ties... it's not generally necessary to put lines ashore from each boat, again alternate or even fewer if conditions are settled.

Rafting large powerboats and sailboats can be a bugger... the flare and freeboard of many powerboats tends to put their decks at mid-stanchion height making fendering off a problem (and avoiding stress on said stanchions) EDIT: paying attention to rig clearances against high houses is another issue here...

EDIT: Raft etiquette... generally we don't cross through a cockpit without an invitation to do so. And like any good neighbour anywhere you should be mindful of your music and noise level, esp with cockpit speakers. Should you need to leave the raft, be sure that doing so will not compromise its integrity, if so be sure there are others around to reconnect the remaining boats.

Some of our rafts get so big that if you want to visit another boat at the other end it's much easier to use the dinghy!

Here are some examples of rafts we've built over the years.. some small, others not.

Nothing like a Father/Son raftup!



From 2 boats to 4! 😊 (kinda)



Larger examples:



Interesting comparisons of stern sections/transoms....



And the largest so far... I think at one time we were up to 31 boats..



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Ron

1984 Fast/Nicholson 345 "FastForward"

*".. there is much you could do at sea with common sense.. and very little you could do without it.."
Capt G E Ericson (from "The Cruel Sea" by Nicholas Monsarrat)*

Last edited by Faster; 12-20-2009 at 07:31 PM.

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12-20-2009

#2



DwayneSpeer
Old Fart

Join Date: Oct 2003
Location: Pasco, WA, USA
Posts: 514
Thanks: 0
Thanked 0 Times in 0 Posts
Rep Power: 11

Huge

Now that is one huge raft up. How did all of you really get to visit. The largest raft I've personally been in is seven but that was in a really protected place and we were anchored with the two middle boats bow and stern anchored.

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Hey, can one of you guys pass me a crab?

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12-20-2009

#3



wwilson
Chesapeake Sailor

Join Date: Jul 2000
Location: Herrington Harbor, MD
Posts: 579
Thanks: 0
Thanked 0 Times in 0 Posts
Rep Power: 15

Interesting topic - I am also a fan of the raft-up.

One that I've never been able to copy (skeptical and/or timid friends) is a raft technique that I watched off Dobbins Island on the Chesapeake a few seasons ago.

Seven boats sized 32 to 42 feet: the first boat anchors normally bow to wind, the second boat anchors 2 to 3 boat lengths downwind of the first then

backs into position and ties to the first. Each subsequent boat anchors oppositely to the prior boat. At the end, the raft had 4 anchors into the wind and three downwind. The raft was locked down against wind or current (though our currents are lame compared to the PNW).

Boats that had the more difficult task of the "back-down" against the wind would purposely overshoot the raft - letting out lots of rode - then power forward gently under better control in forward to secure the raft lines, then bring in the excess rode.

Anyway - I was quite impressed and it produced a very secure raft. Seen it on the W-coast - or anywhere else?

Wayne

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12-20-2009

#4

TejasSailer
Senior Member

Join Date: Mar 2004
Location: Austin, TX
Posts: 362
Thanks: 1
Thanked 7 Times in 6 Posts
Rep Power: 11

Faster,

Good description I thought. You mention spring-lines, and you might want to include those in the graphic. Other considerations include avoiding aligning spreaders that might clash and etiquette when moving among the boats.

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12-20-2009

#5



Faster
Just another Moderator

Join Date: Sep 2005
Location: New Westminster, BC
Posts: 14,604
Thanks: 67
Thanked 178 Times in 174 Posts
Rep Power: 10

Quote:

Originally Posted by **DwayneSpeer**
Now that is one huge raft up. How did all of you really get to visit.

Ashore!! 😊



Quote:

Originally Posted by **TejasSailer**
Faster,

Good description I thought. You mention spring-lines, and you might want to include those in the graphic. Other considerations include avoiding aligning spreaders that might clash and etiquette when moving among the boats.

Good points, Tejas... I'd meant to mention the rig alignment.. very important. I thought about springs but wanted to keep the drawing from getting too 'busy'. Thanks..

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Ron

1984 Fast/Nicholson 345 "FastForward"

*".. there is much you could do at sea with common sense.. and very little you could do without it.."
Capt G E Ericson (from "The Cruel Sea" by Nicholas Monsarrat)*

Last edited by Faster; 12-20-2009 at 04:36 PM.

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12-20-2009

#6



T37Chef
Senior Member

Join Date: Oct 2006
Location: Maryland
Posts: 4,027
Thanks: 49
Thanked 24 Times in 23 Posts
Rep Power: 8

Maybe you could color code the sketch? I think an emphasis on the spring lines and rigging would be important.

I would also like to hear more comments on etiquette?

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Shawn

Tartan 37 - S/V Windgeist
Sailing the Chesapeake Bay

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Photo by Joe McCary

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12-20-2009

#7



danielgoldberg
Senior Member

Join Date: Feb 2008
Location: New York
Posts: 679
Thanks: 0
Thanked 2 Times in 2 Posts
Rep Power: 7

Good topic. We raft relatively often, anywhere from 2 boats to 9 or 10. A few points to add:

1. I actually have never rafted with stern lines led to shore. We always are rafted in a harbor where we can swing, and have our bows into the wind. With this setup, we don't put out a second anchor unless we know the wind is going to remain steady from a particular direction and it will be enough to overcome the current. If the raft swings around and twists the rodes, it is a major hassle to undue the situation. We find that if the boat with the largest most substantial ground tackle (usually the largest boat, but not always) sets the anchor really well and puts out lots of scope, we don't have a problem. We raft with mutiple boats only in protected harbors with good holding and sufficient swing room, and with a benign forecast. If we don't have all of the above, we don't raft overnight.
2. We leave the bow lines a little slack so that the bows fall off. Hard to describe in words w/o a pic, but you want the wind to blow the bows apart. In this setup, there's a lot less pressure on the fenders (usually keeps the boats apart on their own accord), and it keeps the sterns closer together so that it's easier to cross.
3. Make sure you are rafting with people who are compatible. If you've got kids who wake up early and play loudly, don't raft with heavy partiers who are up until 3:00 hootin' and hollerin' and like to sleep in until 11:00. Everyone will be miserable.
4. As a matter of etiquette, when crossing boats on a raft, you should cross forward of the mast so that you are no intruding on the privacy of folks (either by crossing over them in their cockpits, or putting yourself in a position where you can look down the companionway into the cabin).
5. Another etiquette point, the boat rafting up should supply the lines, and if possible, take the tails to their own boat so as not to burden the "host" with the mess of dock lines.
6. When tying up, don't feel like you need to get your boat in perfect position inches off the host boat like you're docking or parallel parking. That just invites disaster and is entirely unnecessary. Pull up so that you are anywhere from 7 to 12 feet away or so, and throw a bow and stern line to the people on the host boat. From there, they pull you in. That way, everything happens nice and gentle, rather than you pulling up at 3 knots and risking a nice insurance claim. You can use the motor to kick the bow/stern in or out if necessary, but the whole procedure is happening sufficiently slow so that people can fend off without risk of losing appendages.
7. The anchor rules. That means the boat with the anchor down makes the rules. If that person becomes uncomfortable with the situation, then you have to agree to drop off the raft. Likewise, when deciding where the boats go on the raft, how to balance, etc., the anchor boat makes the rules.

Rafts are great, they're tons of fun, and if they are done with some foresight and prudence, they can be safe, relaxing and enjoyable.

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Dan Goldberg

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12-20-2009

#8



Faster
Just another Moderator

Join Date: Sep 2005
Location: New Westminster, BC
Posts: 14,604
Thanks: 67
Thanked 178 Times in 174 Posts
Rep Power: 10

Quote:

Originally Posted by **T37Chef**
Maybe you could color code the sketch? I think an emphasis on the spring lines and rigging would be important.
I would also like to hear more comments on etiquette?

Thanks Chef... done...

Our take on raft etiquette... generally we don't cross through a cockpit without an invitation to do so. And like any good neighbour anywhere you should be mindful of your music and noise level, esp with cockpit speakers. Should you need to leave the raft, be sure that doing so will not compromise its integrity, and if so be sure there are others around to reconnect the remaining boats once you've slipped out. Also, as you're building the raft be mindful of your neighbour's preferences about spring line tie up points and fender location.

Finally, make sure your tender (esp hard dinghies and kayaks) can't drift about on long painters and tap-tap on a neighbouring boat in the middle of the night.

Daniel - our posts crossed - good points! (though we're generally loathe to trust a raft to a single anchor!)

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Ron

1984 Fast/Nicholson 345 "FastForward"

".. there is much you could do at sea with common sense.. and very little you could do without it.."
Capt G E Ericson (from "The Cruel Sea" by Nicholas Monsarrat)

Last edited by Faster; 12-20-2009 at 07:38 PM.



12-20-2009

#9



danielgoldberg
Senior Member

Join Date: Feb 2008
Location: New York
Posts: 679
Thanks: 0
Thanked 2 Times in 2 Posts
Rep Power: 7

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Faster**

though we're generally loathe to trust a raft to a single anchor!

I hear that. That's one of the main reasons why we don't raft overnight unless we're in the right harbor with the right forecast. Likewise, we are usually the ones to drop the hook, and we put down a 60lb CQR, with loads of 3/8" chain (usually 10 or 12 to 1 scope at high tide). Where we are, the wind tends to die at night and the tides are such that we are all but guaranteed to swing through 360 degrees overnight at least once, which means if we put out two or more rodes, they will get wrapped.

We don't really have a place where we can tie off to land at the stern. Likewise, dropping stern anchors have their own problems, not the least of which is making it complicated at the transoms.

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Dan Goldberg

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12-20-2009

#10



T37Chef
Senior Member

Join Date: Oct 2006
Location: Maryland
Posts: 4,027
Thanks: 49
Thanked 24 Times in 23 Posts
Rep Power: 8

Can we get little stick figures crossing the bow forward of the mast 😊

On the Chesapeake you rarely if ever see boats rafted up with stern lines to shore, more often is the single anchor boat like DG refers. That said, its not unusual to see a raft up dragging when the wind pipes up 🙄

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Shawn
Tartan 37 - S/V Windgeist
Sailing the Chesapeake Bay

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Photo by Joe McCary

Last edited by T37Chef; 12-20-2009 at 07:59 PM.

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