

Welcome to Eustis

2018 Train Wreck Reflections by Rob Seidelmann & Becky Ratcliff

Lake Eustis Sailing Club (LESC) is the destination regatta that everyone needs on their bucket list. Sailing is just the beginning of the experience. It's a melting pot for Scow sailors from around the country that come together during the winter months. Upon arrival you'll likely be met by the holler, "Margaritaaaaas" from Mari Johnson of Regatta Girl Photography (RGP) along with many hearty handshakes and hugs. It's a warm welcome.

Train Wreck started Thursday when many trailers began to trickle into the club's lot kicking up dust from all the commotion of arriving competitors. Afternoon practice drew many folks onto the lake with freshly buffed boat bottoms to shake out any unused winter muscles. Sailing back in, tents and motorhomes began to sprinkle the sandy shore, in time to enjoy a cold beer and one of their guaranteed breathtaking sunsets. Following the sunset, sailors began to meander down to the Oyster Troff for some lightly steamed oysters and smoked fish dip (my two personal favorites).

Many people love the Friday races beginning at 1pm, which allows late-comers to have plenty of time to rig and race. The real regatta excitement fired up as Friday afternoon's racing got underway. MCs splashed the lake and stand-by crew on spectator boats charged out to relish in the sporting event. RGP captured the action-packed mark-roundings while onlooker boats cheered on racers. We flew up and down the race course as fast as we could, trying to out maneuver one another. Two races were sailed followed by a pizza social at the club shared with the Wayfair competitor's fleet.

Saturday's four races were sailed with powerful winds, to the delight of the sailors, LOL. The afternoon clouds came in and the wind steadily built throughout the day. Typical lake sailing, with large 30 degree shifts from both edges of the course. The mid-day lunch break, on the water, offered everyone relief from hardcore hiking. It seemed like you had to sail the lifts and get lucky to stay in phase to work up the windward legs. It was nice getting off the water to stretch and recharge our batteries.

We were greeted Saturday night for the annual feast, prepared by Monty Stamper, chef extraordinaire. You are guaranteed soulfully smoked brisket that melts in your mouth should you visit Eustis. Afterwards there's always a good bonfire on the beach to warm up and share the many stories that start out, "if I just went left instead of right..." and "what was I thinking?"

Sunday morning, race seven (the last race), started in a building breeze with crewed boats taking off towards the front of the pack. Jeremy Pape and Dave Helmick sailed hard while staying up with the crewed boats. During leg four the wind built upwards of 22 knots with lots of capsizes, to the point where more boats were over than there were rescue boats. The leaders rounded the last leeward mark to hear the dreaded three horns from the race committee to abandon the race and go to shore, with the regatta ending right there.

After sailing, tents one-by-one began to disappear and the dust began to settle. We broke down and stowed our boats, ate lunch and awards were announced, but the goodbyes weren't as sweet as the elated "hellos". It's the more somber part of the trip to LESG. Lake Eustis is not just lake sailing, it's a hotspot for MC lovers and welcomes the visiting sailors as their own, with proper hospitality. Saying "goodbye" while knowing there are only about six weeks until their MC Scow Midwinters Regatta made the drive home just a little sweeter.

Rob's Keys to Winning Lake Eustis:

1. Get a good start but you don't have to win the start

2. Always, always sail on the lifted tack
3. Constant angle of heel is critical in all wind conditions
4. When in doubt follow Dave Moring
5. When you can't follow Dave Moring go left