

Arachnephobia

OK, I admit it. I have a problem. I don't like spiders. I'm afraid of spiders. You can be sure I didn't see Spiderman –ever! What's the problem? Its not that a spider bite can lead to a serious life threatening infection, but it can. Its not that some spiders are poisonous which can lead to a premature case of rigor mortis, but they are. Its that they are creepy. Yes they creep but I mean they're creepy. For one thing there are all those legs. They can go fast. They crawl. That's what the sight of one does to my skin, makes it crawl.

I think they can tell what you are thinking. Its like when you see one in the bathtub and you both freeze. You never know when they're going to shoot a ray of web at you and start wrapping you in his web. Then, while your fighting the confinement like a swaddled Russian baby, they inject you with their venom. Do you know how spiders feed? They inject their victims with digestive enzymes and then poke a straw in and suck out the milkshake of the victims innards. Ahhhhhhhhh! Ahhhhhhh! Ahhhhhhhh!

So, that is why I must confess mixed feelings about the 2008 PBSA Cruise to Essex Connecticut, which must be the spider capital of the world. On one hand it was full of the usual pluses – fun times and people. On the other there were the little critters.

So, we enjoyed a sail to Plum Gut where we were greeted with a foul tide and no wind. It's not really accurate to say there was no wind. There were very light zepher's from the North. Our intended couse? North. So we fired up the cruising power and pointed the bows to Old Saybrook, the mouth of the Connecticut River.

It was a beautiful day with clear skis, dry air and gleaming water. And a bit later the southwest wind began to build and we could sail some more. Unfortunately, Old Saybrook isn't that far and soon we were at the river and bucking an even more foul tide. Most of us put the pedal to the metal and were rewarded with between two and three knots of progress. Sometimes less. So we inched our way up the River five miles to our destination – Essex, where the spiders were awaiting our arrival. Also awaiting us were the helpful and courteous staff of the Essex Island Marina . We were soon tied up and duly welcomed for the

weekend. Shortly, many of us were off to the pool facility for a much anticipated cooling down period and some Molitos and other beverages were seen. The shadows were growing longer and we returned to our boats to prepare for the Pot Luck-Barbecue under the Pavilion that had been reserved for us. A flurry of various smoked meats, hamburgers, salads, cheeses, dips, sausage and peppers followed. Soon we were sated and seated and we lingered at the pavilion for most of the evening.

That is when I noticed the “Problem.” Dangling menacingly over Helen C’s head was a large black spider heading for her coiffure. Alerted to the attack by calls of “Helen move your head”, Your Commodore took decisive action and smashed the marauding insect between his hands. That’s one for us. However, looking up at where he came from, as darkness approached, I saw hundreds of his kin starting to build their webs for the evening’s meals. “We’re not going to win this war,” I thought to myself and made a note to head back to the boat.

When I got back to the boat Lois passed an innocent comment. “Wow, I can’t believe these spiders! I’ve been cleaning up webs and as soon as I do there’s another.”

“ Uhhmmm. So they’re on the boat! Have you ever walked inadvertently into a spider web so it wraps around your face? You feel the web and paw at it helplessly knowing that the spider is on your body somewhere. You call for someone to kill it and they say “No, it’s too big!” Its crawling on you heading for your eyes ... Ahhhhhhhh, Ahhhhhhhh, Ahhhhhhhh!

The next morning we all made plans for the day. For a contingent of the ladies checking out the local shopping scene was the order of the day. Some of the men formed up for a walk through of the local yacht yard and visit to the Essex Boatbuilding Museum. Speaking for the men’s side, we found an interesting place chronicling the history of the Connecticut River including the British Raid of 1814, during the War of 1812. The Brits couldn’t bring their warships over the bar at the entrance of the river, so they sent a risky and daring party of oar powered boats up the river (Lucky they didn’t buck the current we did) and attacked the town of Essex. Lest you think they were aggressors you have to note that the Essexians were building privateers to attack the British shipping industry. American interests even advertised investment consortiums for the privateers in the media. That was too much for the British. The raid was very

successful and almost all of the ships being built in Essex were burned – and a bit of the town as well.

Also featured in the museum was the early version of submarine warfare. In a home built “Sub” with a design first drawn by DeVinci, which was basically a barrel with a bomb strapped to it and a hand cranked prop, the submariner was to approach a enemy ship and screw the bomb into it and escape thereby activating the fuse. This was actually done in the Revolutionary War in New York Harbor with very little success. I think they would have had more success swimming the bomb out to the ship with a snorkel. But maybe they didn’t think of that. The submariner fled the scene after getting back to the Battery City Park area and was not officially caught. Nevertheless, the age of submarine warfare was begun. The actual “Sub” survived until the 20th century in someone’s backyard.

The ladies returned with yet more shoes.

Around lunchtime the guys received news from the ladies that severe thunderstorms were approaching. We scurried off to close off the boats and prepare for the bad weather. We weren’t disappointed as an hour later a moderate but still scary T-Storm rolled through. In contrast to previous PBSA events we waited this one out under the pavilion (which was reserved by some other group) until it seemed safe and we retired to our boats to nap and await the clearing. We emerged like, well, spiders after the storm and prepared for our PBSA Summer Cruise Dinner at Griswalds (No relation that I know to Clarke W.).

This was a perfect venue for our group dinner. The place is as yachty as possible with rooms and sub rooms to accommodate parties of varying sizes. Ours was around 30 people so it took 3 tables in one room. But we enjoyed a very good menu including a decorative Lobster Stew and retired to the Black Seal for after dinner drinks. This is a fun place where you can hardly turn without meeting someone who sails.

Alas, all reveling must end and so it was time to head back to the boats. I have to say Essex is different than the North Fork. Most notably, I have to point out that you walk by architecturally authentic homes and looking inside, you see portraits hanging in the formal parlor of some important relative. Now if that relative left me with a big hunk of money I guess I could get used to looking at

his mug until the end of time; but, I'd rather have a big screen TV and a couch with a cooler in it. Hey, that's just me.

Anyway, on the walk home I must have walked through about 20 spider webs and when I got back to the boat the area between the lifeline and the bimini was a solid wall of web. Total face full. Ahhhhhhhhh, Ahhhhhhhhh, Ahhhhhhhhh!

The spiders are on board. There's no getting rid of them. They come out at night and we can't do very much about it. They live on boat and we only visit. I see them lurking waiting to entangle me in their webs and to suck my innards out while I'm immobilized by their chemically stronger than steel webs Ahhhhhhhhhhh, Ahhhhhhhhhhh, Ahhhhhhhhhhhhh!

"Hunter 356 for sail. Very clean. Loaded. First offer accepted."