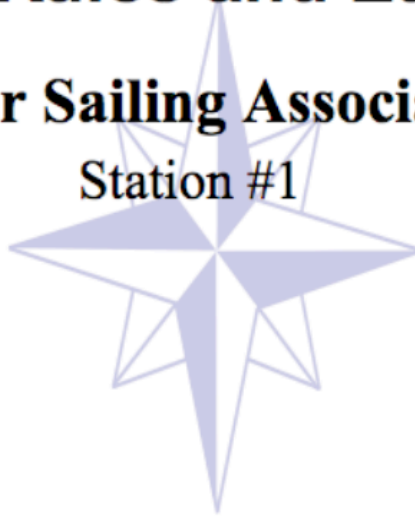




Rafting Rules and Etiquette

Hunter Sailing Association

Station #1



Prepared by Captain Will Dennehy
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HSA#1

A Rafter's Guide to the Chesapeake – How and Why to be a Raft Captain

Rafting is the most important social activity of The Hunter Sailing Association. So to encourage more of our members to join in the fun, we prepared this guide to share common practices and suggest a few techniques for this great experience. It is organized into four parts: How to Build a Raft, What the Raft Captain Should Do, Fire Drills and Things That Go Bump in the Night, and a few general Rules of Etiquette

How to Build A Raft

The first rule is that captains must decide for themselves whether it is safe to join the raft.

The second rule of rafting is that if there is any threat of unfavorable weather, the raft should be broken up well before the front comes through or before sunset if the front is expected later that night or, perhaps, never started.

The thought of breaking a raft and re-anchoring in a crowded anchorage in high winds and rain and in the dark should help keep the first and second rule in mind.

A good third rule is five boats to a raft. With a little planning the smaller rafts can be pulled together for the social hours and then broken. There are many in the club who know how to do this and they will be happy to help you organize the smaller rafts into one big one.

Larger rafts can put an enormous strain on the single anchor securing the raft and even a modest wind accompanied by a shift can lead to late night fire drills.

There are a lot of different opinions on how to form a raft and which lines should go over first. Arthur Chase in Precision Cruising sets out some good reasons for the following approach.

The anchor boat is one of the larger boats with one of the largest anchors. A 7:1 scope with a good flat entry is the minimum. If there is room, use 10:1. The anchor should be back downed on until water squeezes from the rode.

If possible the next two largest vessels should raft on either side of the anchor boat and then the two smaller boats on the outside. This isn't always possible with boats of

different sizes arriving at different times. However, it is better to reorganize the raft than to have a 30-footer between two 45-foot boats.

Once the anchor boat is secure the raft captain should direct the first rafting boat to either the port or starboard side of the anchor boat. I'll use a port (side of the anchor boat) approach for this explanation. Reverse the direction for starboard approach.

Come in slowly with two big fenders on your starboard side at the widest part of your boat and with four mooring lines rigged: bow line, aft spring, forward spring and stern line. Try to time your approach so you are along side just as the anchor boat is about to complete its swing to port and hand over your aft spring line.

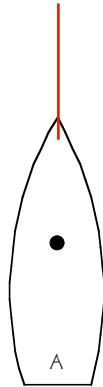
It is important to get the aft spring line over quickly so you have control and can stop your boat running up and locking spreaders if the engine fails or the wind shifts. Once the aft spring is secured to the aft cleat of the anchor boat you can power very slowly ahead with right rudder and the spring will bring your boat gently along side. Tell the person you are handing the aft spring line to you want them to take a turn around their aft cleat and stop your forward progress if necessary. Remember, it may be their first raft or they may have other ideas on where that line should go. Make sure you both know what you intend.

The forward spring should be handed over and secured to keep your boat from dropping back in the breeze. The bow and stern line can then be gotten over and adjusted to make the keels of the boats parallel.

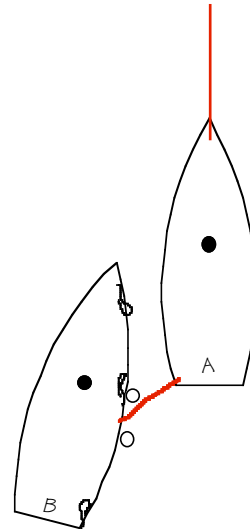
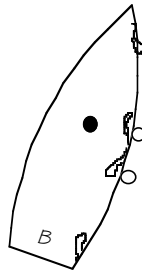
The fenders are then adjusted and additional fenders added if necessary.

Chase suggests that the looped end of each mooring line be secured to the cleats of the rafting boat then lead around the cleat horns of the anchor or inside boat and back to the rafting boat, so that if the need arose, each outside boat could get underway without assistance from the boat to their inside. Seems like a good idea.

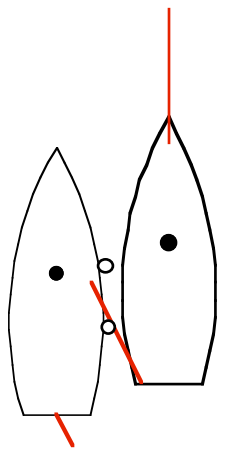
The following diagrams illustrate the idea:



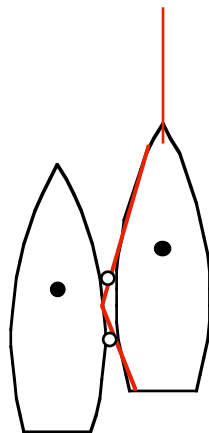
1. Boat B, with 4 mooring lines ready to hand over and two fenders rigged at the most likely point of contact, approaches anchored boat A



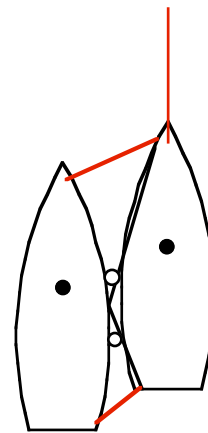
2. Hand over the aft spring first so your forward motion can be stopped before the spreaders get tangled.



3. _____



4. _____



5. _____

3. Power slowly ahead with right rudder and the aft spring will bring you along side the Anchor boat.

4. Pass over the forward spring to keep from dropping back.

5. Finally, pass over the bow and stern line to keep the bow and stern from swinging out and adjust so that boats are parallel

Remember rules one and two. Especially rule two. If you have any doubts about the wisdom of joining the raft then anchor out and dinghy over to the party. Forged the dinghy! Standing on you bow with a pitcher or blender of something good to drink will almost always get you a ride.

Remember to thank the anchor boats. They are the ones who have to lug up their anchors while you just slip your lines and go.

It has been suggested that using the aft spring to stop the approaching yacht could move the entire raft forward. This is a possibility, but not likely if properly carried out. The aft spring should not be thought of as a brake, but as a control. As the approaching yacht you should glide up to the host yacht controlling your speed with your engine. Unfortunately, as your way falls off so does your ability to steer and control your vessel. The aft spring is a safety valve. Captains should decide for themselves if moving the anchored vessel forward a few feet outweighs the possibility of tangling spreaders and rigs. In light winds almost any method will work. In heavy winds the raft shouldn't be formed. It is when the wind is 10 to 15 knots that a plan that is clearly understood by both yachts is necessary. Let the other boat know what you intend.

If moving the raft forward is a real concern for one or both of the yachts, using a forward spring after the approaching yacht has stopped will allow that yacht to drift back and against the host. Using a bow line alone as the first line over could cause the stern of the approaching yacht to swing out requiring further maneuvering and increasing the chance for something to go wrong.

Don't forget to look up! You want to keep the spreaders of each boat well apart – at least four feet apart.

The Raft Captain

You get to pick where we all go! Being a raft captain is a wonderful opportunity to share you favorite anchorage with club members or to explore one of the five star spots in *Cruising the Chesapeake: A Gunkholer's Guide*, by William Shellenberger, or a "Cruise of the Month" from a back issue of *Chesapeake Bay Magazine* or some other spot that you haven't gotten to yet.

"You know more than you think you do." B. Spock

Being a raft captain "is a good thing". M. Stewart

Now that I've stolen from two of the 20th Century's icons, I can only add that they are right. Getting together as sailors is the core activity of our club. We need you help. Besides, it's fun.

Early in the year the Fleet Captain posts the Activities calendar. The suggested raft dates are spread out fairly evenly through the season, about every third weekend.

Pick a date, choose a place and decide on a theme. Or pick one of the club's traditional raft themes like the Shakedown Cruise or the Great Chili Raft.

Then put together a simple flyer. We're not looking for graphic award winning design, but if your creative interests lean that way (it is your free time after all) go for it. We all promise to be suitably impressed. Send the flyer to the Fleet Captain as soon as possible, so others can plan to attend.

Basically, you need to include the name or theme of the raft, where it is going to be, the date, how to get there, and how to reach you. If the approach to the anchorage is interesting, it's a good idea to include sailing directions. Quoting the Coast Pilot or one of the Chesapeake Cruising Guides works. You should also include a go/no-go date. Most raft captains use Thursday evening. Everyone intending to join the raft, if they are following the rule outlined below, will have notified you of their intent to join the raft. If the weather fails to cooperate, let everyone who notified you they were coming that the raft is off by the go/no-go date.

Set off on Saturday to arrive at your chosen anchorage by 1500 and monitor VHF channels 16 & 78. Channel 78 is the standard channel for communicating between club members, but some new member may try to contact you on ch. 16. It is a good idea to announce that the raft is on and that you are standing by on ch. 78 at, 1345, 1445 & 1545. The top of the hour can be busy. You can also ask those in route to check in so you have an idea of who is coming and when they might get there.

Get set up to welcome your guests and organize the raft as described in How to Build a Raft.

If you want to sponsor a contest e.g. best drink, best hat etc. contact the Fleet Captain or Social Chair with your idea. They will help with suggestions and explain how the club provides prizes.

Fire Drills and Things That Go Bump in the Night.

Breaking up a raft in the middle of the night in bad weather or in a fire emergency takes a little planning and fore-thought. Many of the following suggestions will already be part of most yacht's Standard Operating Procedures. However, it is always good to review those SOP's, especially if guests are aboard.

- Know how to turn on the running and spreader lights
- Know where the flashlights and fire extinguishers are kept.

- Know how your rafting lines are secured and how to slip them in a hurry without dragging them in the water
- Know where you want to go to re-anchor and how to get there in the dark (set a waypoint, mark down a compass direction.)
- Know where the thin water is.

What to do! A number of studies suggest that shouting “FIRE” or ‘Man Over Board” to an untrained and un-drilled crew is more likely to freeze them than to spur them to action. It is better to give specific instructions such as, “Get your fire extinguisher and come on deck,” or “We need you on deck to break the raft.”

Of course this pre-supposes that the person discovering the emergency is calm and thinking clearly. The more we think about how to respond to a problem and practice that response the more likely we will carry out our plan – hence this section.

In a Fire

- Make a noise – a “long blast” (defined as lasting 10 seconds) every 2 to 4 seconds it the danger signal under the inland rules. Shout or bang a pan if you can’t find the horn.
- Give straightforward and specific instructions
- Get the crew off the involved boat. Have a responsible crewmember from that boat count and account for every crewmember.
- Turn on spreader and other lights.
- If the fire is small and contained – put it out. Determining whether it is save to fight the fire is an individual choice. Be helpful and be safe.
- Isolate the involved boat from the raft. If there is time and opportunity send it downwind attached to a long (100+) line. It is not a good idea to send a flaming boat adrift in an anchorage.
- Send the appropriate distress signal on channel 16 – Mayday if life is in danger, Pan-Pan if not.

With the general switch to diesel engines and propane stoves the threat of fire is far less today than twenty years ago. Even so, we should be prepared.

In deteriorating weather or dramatic wind shifts the procedure is pretty much the same.

- Make a noise
- Give straightforward instructions.
- Turn on lights
- Break up the raft from the outside in.
- Make sure all lines are aboard and not where they can wrap a prop.
- Know where you are going.
- Make sure the anchor boat, if it is moving, has adequate crew to get its anchor up and reset in the deteriorating conditions.

Rules of the Raft: a Guide to Good Manners

Let the raft captain know if you are coming by Wednesday. Make sure they know how to contact you.

Each captain decides for him or herself whether it is safe to join the raft.

Monitor VHF channel 78 while in route. If the raft captain asks for a general check-in give your vessel's name and ETA.

Check in with the raft captain when you are about 15 minutes away and again when in sight of the raft. Ask for directions if you can't find the group.

Follow the raft captain's direction on where to raft up, or let them know you will anchor out.

Follow the guidelines in How to Build a Raft.

Turn off your generator and engine while rafted.

Don't smoke on other boats without permission.

Keep pets on your boat unless invited on to other boats.

Use the foredeck for crossing other boats.

Use cloth covers on your fenders to reduce the squeaking of rubber on fiberglass when the boats rock.

Tell the raft captain if you intend to leave early. He will put you on the outside so you can slip your lines without bothering adjacent boats.

If the raft captain or the captain of the anchor boat decides it is prudent to break up the raft, follow their direction and move out smartly. Before you join the raft think about where you might go and how you might get there, if the raft has to break up in a hurry after dark.

Remember to thank the raft captain and the anchor boat captain. They are the last to leave and have to haul in their ground tackle while you just have to slip your lines.

Gather up your goodies and libations and head for the party boat about 1630.

Forgot Mr. Dinghy. Standing on the bow with a pitcher of something good to drink will usually get someone's attention. If not, try 78 for a ride to the party boat.

Most of all have a great time.

See you on the water.

I'd like to thank Carl, Linda, Hank and Phil for their support, thoughts and encouragement.