

## *sails on the beach august 19 2007*

I have spent time every summer of my life as a member of a remarkable community. Originated by five families in the 1870's, it is now about a hundred households. We share a breathtakingly beautiful environment, family connections often spanning several generations, and the support of a community in which older non-family members are often known as aunts or uncles.

Sailing is a major activity. In 1939 community members commissioned a design from which thirty-five daysailers have been built. These are twenty-foot sloops, with main, jib and spinnaker, able to carry a large family for a picnic or two or three for a race. Like the working craft whose construction inspired them, the hulls were built to last ten or fifteen years, but they are so well-suited to their purpose that love and yankee thrift has kept all but two or three of the thirty-five in service. When I was ten my family bought a boat that was built the year I was born, and ever since I have been sailing and maintaining what is now a wooden antique.

Each Wednesday and Saturday in July and August, races are hotly contested by skippers and crews ranging in age from teenager to octogenarian, in ability from novice to America's Cup professional. Staying competitive requires the purchase of new sails every five or ten years. Once canvas gave way to dacron as the primary material, old sails began to accumulate in attics and barns around town.

The concept for Sails on the Beach was born full-fledged, with multiple goals aligning gracefully. The installation would celebrate this fleet of lovely one-design boats and their owners over the generations, highlight the beauty of the place, engage as many community members as possible in a joyful and aesthetically pleasing activity, and reuse a valuable resource – the sails themselves.

Planning consisted of a few sketches, requests to the boat owners for the loan of their sails, and scouring the land for cheap materials. Field-testing confirmed the viability of the concept, as long as the wind stayed under ten knots. The week before the event was spent collecting sails and materials and cajoling friends and family into long sessions of preparation. Each of twenty-five masts (23-foot sections of aluminum handrail) had three rope stays tied to a u-bolt mounted at two-thirds height. The sails were fastened to the masts with plastic cable ties, with coat hangers fixing them at the head and foot. The stays would be anchored to five-foot pieces of rebar, driven into the sand at an angle.

The day before the event a line of volunteers snaked across the inlet, bringing materials to the site. The layout began at dawn, the line was laid out by seven and the first sail went up ten minutes later. By nine all twenty-five were up, lined up with their numbers in the order in which the boats were built, with red survey flags taped to the mastheads at the last minute. The process was simple enough that anyone wandering by could help, and when clean-up was complete at noon, one hundred fifty people had taken part.

The sails were returned to their owners for possible later installations. The rebar will be used in local construction projects, the rope around the docks. Sales of the poster will benefit a community day camp.

*andrew st john*



Andrew St John



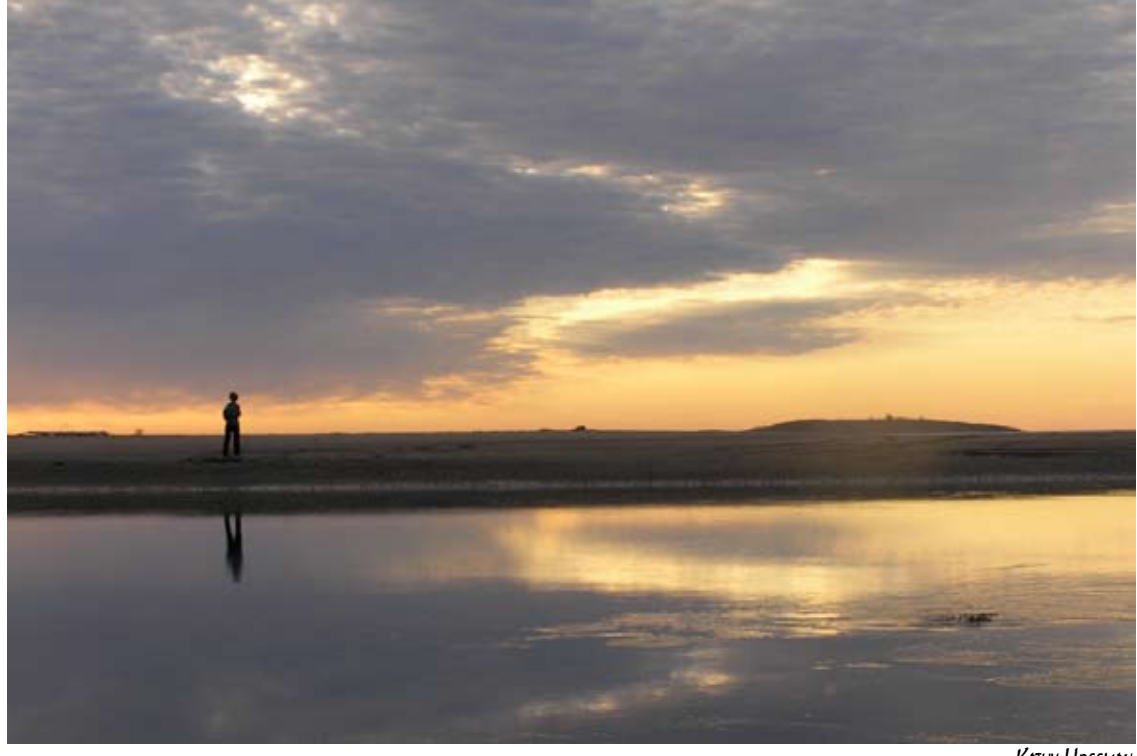
Andrew St John



Andrew St John



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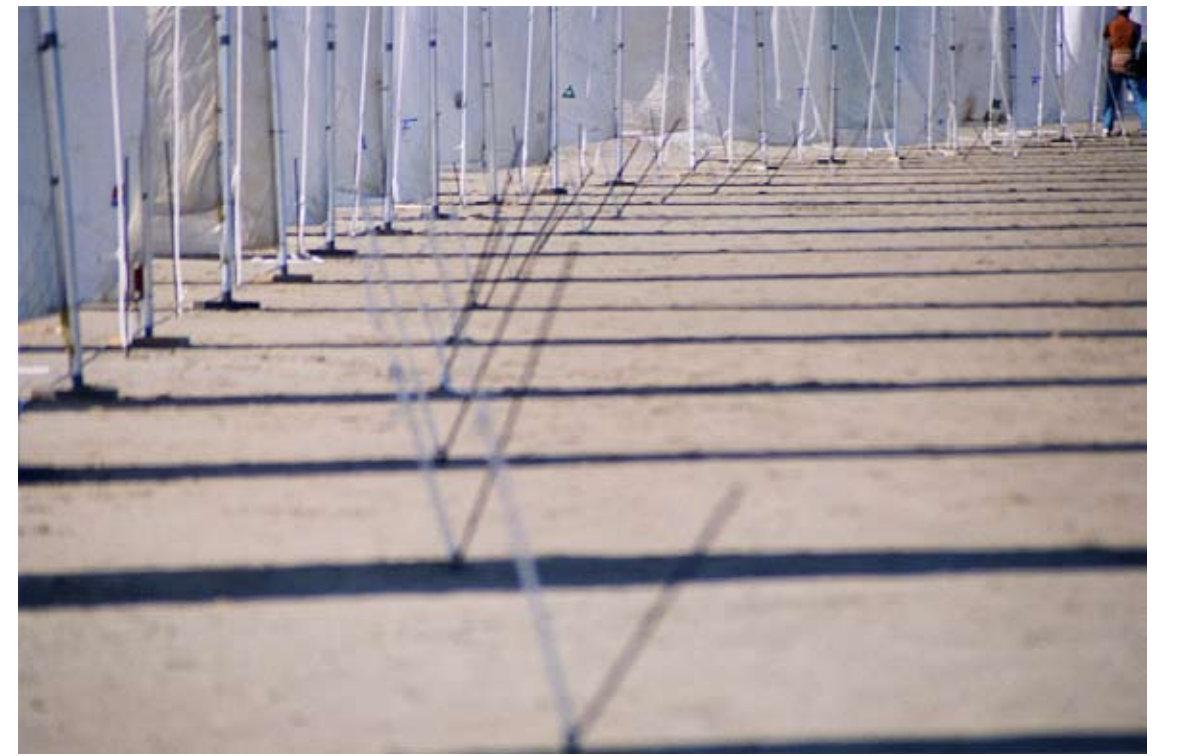
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