

## HOW TO GO TO HATTERAS (1890).<sup>1 2</sup>

### THE WAY ONE MAN GOT THERE.

*Information of Value to Tourists to the Queerest Section of the Atlantic Coast.*

To reach Hatteras Island the tourist who does not own a yacht and must therefore travel in hired conveyances should go by rail either to Norfolk, Va., or to Morehead City, N.C. From Morehead there is a mail route to Beaufort, and from Beaufort another in an open boat to Smyrna and thence by the way of Ocracoke Island to Hatteras Island. The more comfortable route is by the way of Norfolk, for a line of well-fitted steamers runs twice a week from Norfolk to Roanoke Island, which lies between Albemarle and Pamlico Sounds; one must travel only forty-five miles thence in an open boat. It was by this route that I came to Hatteras Island.

The steamer *Manteo* left her pier at Norfolk at 6 o'clock on a Monday morning. The course was up the south branch of the Elizabeth River, through the Chesapeake and Albemarle Canal, down the North Landing River and so across Currituck Sound and through sundry ditches and dredging made by Uncle Sam to Albemarle Sound. The Chesapeake and Albemarle Canal is fourteen miles long and eight feet deep. The two rivers it connects are but tidal ditches made by natural forces, and they serve to drain (perhaps rather to moisten) the eastern side of the Dismal Swamp.

The tourist on his first trip hither finds every inch of this inland navigation interesting. At this time of the year, the swamp with its dense green shades, broken at intervals with stretches of glade and prairie, its great variety of flowers and plants, its fragrant odors, its black, sparkling waters, and its variegated snakes is anything but dismal. The steamer, because of the great traffic in fish and garden truck at certain seasons of the year, is just as large as it can be and squeeze through the canal. Mark Twain in all his glory as a Mississippi pilot never saw such navigation as this. When the steamer rounds the sharper bends in the river, she must needs shave the points to keep her nose out of the opposite banks, and when another steamer is met coming up, both

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<sup>2</sup> The original article was unsigned; however, its writing style, subject matter and date suggest that the *Sun's* long-term correspondent John R. Spears was its author.

must hug the banks till their bilges are on the mud, and the brush and boughs that overhang the banks are sweeping across the houses on deck, dropping, now and then, a few wood ticks, a lizard, or a serpent to enliven the occasion for the timid. The swamp steamers themselves, little black imps, with a severe cough, very appropriately manned by the most reckless, rollicking lot of negroes ever seen afloat, are interesting to look upon, while the rafts of pine logs, 1,800 to 2,000 feet long, which are met at frequent intervals, serve to set the stranger wondering where the woods lie that furnish such immense quantities of timber as must be taken through the canal every year.

Even were it a rainy day, the tourist would be entertained, for the Captain and his mate are storytellers of powers that would make the fame of less isolated men. Such yarns of snakes gathering in balls as large as an oil barrel; of the peach tree on the line between Virginia and Carolina, one side only of which bears fruit, and that according to whether the county adjoining goes wet or dry; of the logs that get adrift from the raft and float with one end awash and the other on the bottom, ready to punch a hole through the bottom of the steamer commanded by any skipper less cautious than the one who is telling the tale; of the bears that usually appear at certain points to beg for bacon as the *Manteo* goes by, but fail, somehow, to connect this time, and others, are enough to relieve the tedium, even when the steamer meets a raft or two, with a flat boat or two and a small schooner or two, in such a complication as prevents progress for twenty-four hours.

At intervals along the route there are high spots—*islands in the swamp*—and about all of them are under cultivation. Sawmills, stacks of lumber, railroad ties, and cordwood are to be seen, while the only really dismal thing from one side of the swamp to the other is the deserted old mill site called Roper City in the map.

Along in the afternoon we reached Currituck Sound, and the skipper pointed out the deserted duck blinds and certain spots where flocks of wildfowl ten miles long and a quarter of a mile wide were commonly seen feeding in the season.

*"The ducks rise all over Currituck,"* said he in the country dialect. *"I don't reckon a stranger would believe me if I was to tell how many are killed every year and shipped North."*

The sail through the canal between Currituck and Albemarle Sounds is monotonous but not unpleasant, and the tourist who could not dream away the afternoon over a good cigar there ought to stay at home. It was a lazy, comfortable sail we had of it the whole day through, and at 9:30 we sighted the dim little lantern that hung above the pier at Roanoke Island, and the whistle on the *Manteo* let everyone within ten miles know she was coming.

On the pier I had the luck to meet Capt. Spence Daniels. Capt. Spence is a fisherman and market shooter, according to the season. I asked Capt. Spence when and how I could get to Hatteras Island. He reckoned I could go on the mail boat on Thursday from Manteo, and meantime, if I wanted to go to see after bluefish, I had only to go to his house and stay with him. I agreed to that, but I began to realize that no man in a hurry could hope to enjoy a trip to my destination, for this was on Monday night. Capt. Spence is one of the nabobs of Roanoke Island. He owns the island's only carriage and forty-two tamed wild geese used for decoys. I had one of the largest feather beds I ever saw to sleep on that night, but how I was routed out and went fishing next morning with Uncle Tom Fillett and Nigger Tom to assist the Captain, must be told at another time.

On Wednesday I went to Manteo to engage passage to Hatteras Island. Manteo is the Court House of Dare county. It is noted as being somewhere near the site of the first white colony that settled in what is now the United States, for its aged Scuppermong grape vines, and the Scuppermong wine that needs only a half lemon to the goblet to be a very pleasant drink, and for being the home of Capt. J. Clifford Bowser. Capt. Bowser has the contract for carrying the mail to Chicamcomico and Kinnakeet. He is a broad-shouldered, deep-chested, strong-limbed negro, black as night, with a new-moon mouth, keen eyes, and a most genial temper. Capt. Bowser owns and commands the clipper dugout *Pilot Shad*, a boat that was made by fashioning two great cypress logs into the shape of the halves of a boat and then placing the halves together and securing them so with proper beams. This sort of a boat is known here as a cunner, that being the pronunciation of canoe. The *Pilot Shad* is a mighty dugout, being twenty-seven feet long, seven feet wide, and three and one-half deep. She draws about eighteen inches of water, and will compare as a sea boat and in beauty and speed with the dugouts which travelers in the South tell about.

Would Capt. Bowser carry a passenger with two grip packs and a bundle to Kinnakeet? He reckoned that he would. For how much? "*Seventy-five cents, sah.*" It is a sail of forty-five miles.

The *Pilot Shad* cast off her lines at 6 o'clock on Thursday morning. She had on board fourteen 56-pound bags of ballast and a mail bag. Capt. Bowser carried a crew of one, a boy of 17 named Joe. Among the ship's stores was a big keg of water, a big tin pail full of bread, pork, and cheese, a bag of coffee, a coffee pot, and a small stove on which to boil the coffee.

*"I'se made the trip in tree hours, but sometimes Ise out clus to two days. I certainly has to carry perwisions for a long voyage foh du wind sometimes dead ahead an' none of hit, sah,"* said Capt. Bowser.

On this trip, having a SUN correspondent on board, the wind was fair, and there was a plenty of it. We went driving down past Duck Island with the waves fairly whooping after us, and now and then overtaking us in a way that wet and disgusted Capt. Bowser.

*"I don't min' a-turnin' the old cunner over, sah,"* he said, *"but I des naterally hates to upset[?] to windud."*

We reached Chicamicomico at 1:30, a run of 25 miles, in 7½ hours. After bringing the boat to anchor in two feet of water, Capt. Bowser drew a pair of long-legged rubber boots from under his seat in the cockpit and pulled them on. There were holes in the toes of both boots, and at intervals up the legs, but Capt. Bowser was particular to draw the long legs up as far as they would go. Then he took the mail bag and waded ashore. I pulled off my shoes and followed him barefooted. Joe looked at me with suppressed satisfaction until I started across the beach toward the Post Office, and had stepped on three sand burrs at once. Then he sat down suddenly on a thwart and snorted, while I sat down and clawed at the burrs. The boy undoubtedly laughs every time he thinks about my motions even yet.

After getting rid of the burrs I kept in the path which Capt. Bowser had followed, and so had little trouble with burrs, and soon reached the lone, weather-beaten shanty that is put down on the map as the village of Chicamicomico, because it is the Post Office for a scattered settlement that exists in the shade of a rapidly disappearing fringe of trees on the westerly side of the upper end of this island.

When I reached the shanty Capt. Bowser had disappeared, and a man of say twenty-four years, with a thin, yellowish face, yellowish white hair, a yellowish white little moustache, and watery blue eyes, stood before the closed door. He wore brown overalls and an unbleached cotton shirt. He looked at me without moving a muscle for a moment, and then said imperatively: "*Howdy?*"

"*How are you sir?*" said I.

"*I'm well. Whar from?*"

"*New York.*"

"*How fur?*"

"*New York City.*"

"*I heard that. How fur?*" (This was in a voice that was not far from insolent.)

"*Oh. Cape Hatteras.*"

"*What fur?*"

"*Just to see the people and the country.*"

"*Hah! They look all right. Come in.*"

He opened the door and walked in. I followed. A young woman in a blue calico dress sat facing one corner knitting a fish net. She did not even turn her head when I entered. A baby of two years or so in a single garment toddled about the floor. The man brought the only whole chair in the room to me and said: "*Sit.*" I sat down. A coffee pot sat on a stove in one corner. He poured out a cup of coffee and brought it to me.

"*Have some coffee,*" he said. I took the coffee and drank it at a gulp. When he saw me do that, the smooth, hard skin about his mouth gathered into sharp-edged corrugations, which I supposed to be a smile of satisfaction, and in a voice that was not imperative he said: "*Fine breeze.*"

I saw that I was getting acquainted, and, winking at the baby, drew out a penny and placed it in the little white hand. The corrugations grew deeper and sharper than before, the young woman was thumped on the back to draw her attention to the baby, and then the young man said to the child: "*What do you say to the gentleman?*"

I had doubted whether this man had any suavity in his make-up, but when he asked that question I saw that, in one respect at least, he was like all other fathers and mothers in the United States. He knew the question invariably asked of a bashful child that has received a present. We were quite sociable after that. The man had had no intention of being discourteous or rude in his speech or bearing; indeed, according to Capt. Bowser, he had been startled by the sudden appearance of a stranger, and was somewhat defiant in manner, only as one dog unexpectedly caught in a corner by a large one snarls and growls until convinced of the pacific character of the big one. He was interesting, because he was the first islander I had seen. After seeing more of them it was plain that he was simply shy and wild and suspicious, and his bearing was due to these characteristics.

The breeze had freshened, and by 5 o'clock we were coming to anchor off a woody stretch of land which Capt. Bowser said was Kinnakeet. An old windmill that looked as if it would tumble over, the next time the wind blew, stood near the water. Two little fish shanties stood hard by. A small white one-story building stood back a little ways further. It had a covered platform across the front, and some barrels stood on the platform, while empty boxes were piled about it. Plainly, it was a Kinnakeet store. Sandy trails led up from the beach in various directions, and a dozen unpainted houses could be seen scattered about in the low groves called woods.

I waded ashore, carrying my baggage. A barefooted man, who had been in a boat nearby, stopped and glanced at me, and then walked on. Two barefooted boys came along and gazed earnestly while I tied my shoes, and then followed me to the store. Capt. Miller was the storekeeper. Could the Captain tell me whether I could get someone to carry me to Cape Hatteras? He reckoned I could get chances enough. There were boats passing to-and-fro between the cape and Kinnakeet every two or three days, and, come to think, the Ocracoke mail boat sailed tomorrow and stopped there. Was there any hotel here at Kinnakeet? No one keep boarders? No. Could I get anyone to keep me overnight? I was willing

to pay. Yes; anybody would give me accommodations. I could stay with him if I wanted to. I stayed with Capt. Miller.

At daylight the Ocracoke mail carrier, Capt. George L. Fulcher, called me, and with no time for breakfast I hurried to the little sharpie *Maud* and away we went. The speed was not such as to take a man's breath, however, for there was no wind, and the man had to pole the boat six miles to the landing in the bay behind Cape Hatteras.

At this place I found a stout young boy, who said he would carry my valise to Hatteras lighthouse "*by and by*". "*By and by*" is a common expression among the Hatteras people when they promise to do anything. *By and by* meant after he had seen the mail distributed at a little house tucked away in the woods a quarter of a mile from the landing.

I left Norfolk at 6 o'clock on Monday morning. I reached Cape Hatteras lighthouse at 10 o'clock on Friday, and no one using regular modes of travel can do it in less time.