

The Great Loop

Photographs by John Guider

In the fall of 2008, I decided to start a new adventure, rowing and sailing the Great Loop. The Great loop is a popular year long cruise for yachters who motor down the Mississippi to the Gulf, round Florida, go up the East Coast



to the Hudson River in New York, make their way to the Great Lakes, find the Illinois River around Chicago and then re-enter the Mississippi. The circumnavigation is roughly 5500 miles.

Because I wanted to take as much direct control over this project as possible, I decided to build my own boat. Ever since I left my career as a commercial photographer in 2003, I have relished the idea of doing things I have never done before. I definitely had little carpentry experience, so this was a real challenge. Thoreau would have been proud. The boat complete with sails ended up costing less than the canoe purchased for my previous adventures. Additionally all of the production craft I researched were too heavy. Most of the smaller sailboats I looked at still weighed around 300 pounds and I was afraid of getting stranded on the banks of the ever-fluctuating Mississippi and not being able to push myself away. The diminutive craft I desired would also give me access to even the most secluded reaches of the river, places not experienced by many.



So I contacted the owner of Chesapeake Light Craft, John Harris and he agreed to design a boat to fit my needs. We decided to call it an Expedition Skerry, part rowboat, part sailboat. The boat arrived in Nashville around my 60th birthday in March in kit form and for the next 3 months I intently put it together at my friend Sherby Green's workshop. Daunted by the process,



for three months I thought of little else. I finished my construction on June 5th, the day before I was scheduled to leave.

The boat was 14 1/2 ' long, two feet shorter than my canoe. Unloaded, it weighed about 120 pounds. The hull was painted bright red with the deck adorned with graphics painted by my good friend and noted artist, Paul Harmon. Not waiting for a test run, I put the motor less

boat into the Cumberland River at Shelby Park in Nashville on June 6, 2009 and began my journey to the Gulf of Mexico. Until I made the Pontchartrain, I followed the same course as I had in the canoe six years prior. My plan was to make the Great Loop in sections, spending two months of every year on the water surviving the elements and then spending the other ten months of the year trying to figure out how to survive the economy. This year's goal was the Gulf.

My journey was bitter sweet. I thought I would be able to reconnect with people I had met in 2003. Sorrowfully, I was not able to find a single person. Many of the marine facilities I had remembered, no longer existed either. That is the river's way. What did remain was the water's ethereal beauty and I rejoiced in its presence, daily. The river is a wonderful companion, and as before, generous people continued to come to my aid, helping to keep me out of harms way. The passage

was hard with its threatening storms and unrelenting heat. The whirlpools, snakes and even an upset alligator tried to prohibit my passing and unfortunately, I noticed my body didn't grow stronger as it had seven years ago. Sometimes it felt like it was barely able to maintain. Nevertheless, the experience was enthralling, and after almost two months to the day, I entered the Gulf of Mexico about 1200 miles from my start.

As part of my learning experience, I decided to photograph digitally. Stacey Irvin, my studio partner, helped me with the logistics and despite the inconveniences of the expedition; I only lost a small section of images. Since I had already photographed the river before, I was looking forward to developing a new perspective to my work. The digital format helped me achieve that goal, allowing me to make images I hadn't seen on the previous journey. This is a sampling of what I discovered.











































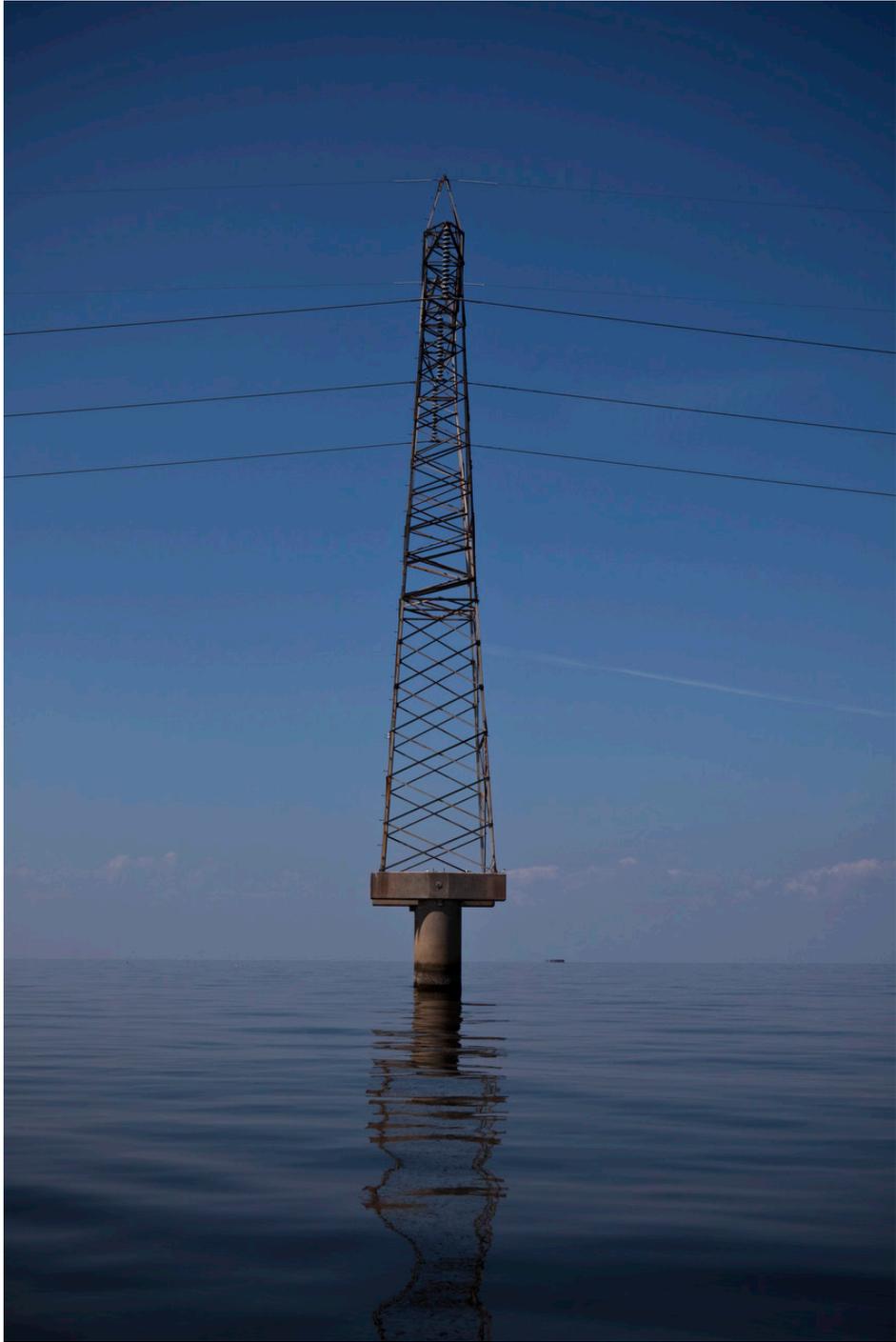














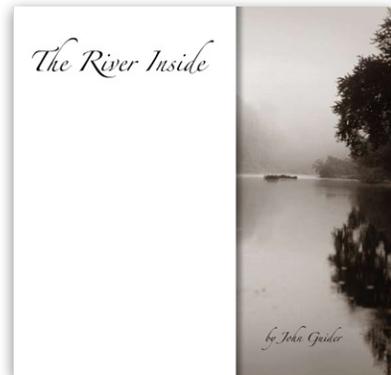




John Guider is a nationally recognized award winning photographer and author who lives in Nashville TN. His work has appeared in major publications such as Print, Communication Arts and Graphis. He is the recipient of many awards including a national Addy Award, the Cancer Society's Excalibur Award, and the Nashville Advertising Federation's highest award, the Silver Medalist in the year 2000.

His work and his adventures have been the feature of numerous magazine, television, and newspaper articles and broadcasts. In 2009, Guider was a guest author on renowned journalist John Seigenthaler's television program, "A Word on Words". John has been a guest speaker at such functions as The Southern Festival of Books, PhotoArts Santa Fe, and the National Waterways Commission convention.

John's underlying passion is his art and his work has been shown in museums and galleries across the country. His largest project, The River Inside, is the subject of a book by the same name and a popular traveling museum exhibition.



The River Inside is a national touring exhibition organized by the Tennessee State Museum, Nashville, Tennessee, and presented in conjunction with the National Mississippi River Museum and Aquarium, Dubuque, Iowa. Initial support for the exhibition was provided by the Ingram Barge Company. The companion book is published by FRP, Nashville, with editorial and design assistance from McNeely, Pigott, and Fox.

Book sales: www.frpbooks.com

Lois Riggins-Ezzell, Executive Director, Tennessee State Museum
Jerry Enzler, Executive Director, National Mississippi River Museum and Aquarium
Susan W. Knowles, Exhibition Guest Curator
Lynn Vincent, book graphic design, McNeely, Pigott, and Fox
Stacey Irvin, pdf design

Contact:

John Guider
615.496.3499
guiderstudio@comcast.net
www.johnguider.com
www.theriverinside.com

606 Fatherland Street
Nashville, TN 37206