

Sailing – A Fun Outdoor Activity That Counts

Now that it's finally warm enough to take our brass monkeys outdoors (ask your father), it's time to start having some fun outside. No, gardening does not count.

One of the things that does count is sailing - there's something intrinsically organic and elemental about it. Skimming over the water at speeds that can be both exhilarating and alarming - without having to endure the roar of an engine or the smell of gasoline – is addictive.

You may not be aware that the University of Iowa has a Sailing Club and a racing team. I first became involved with them in the mid-70's during my supposed university education, mostly because there were pretty girls and a certain amount of beer involved. They taught me how to sail, and eventually I had a brief but arguably successful racing career that resulted in small trophies and large hangovers.

After I graduated from the U of I somehow, I became immersed in making a living while staring wistfully out the window where I work during warm, sunny, breezy afternoons. A couple of years ago after taking 35 years off from regular sailing, I finally rejoined the club. The girls are just as pretty although young enough to be my daughters (granddaughters?), and there's a lot less beer than I remember.

The lake where this all happens is MacBride, which would be the perfect sailing medium (due to powerboat restrictions) if it weren't for the fluky winds. They say if you can learn to sail on MacBride you can sail anywhere, because practically everywhere else has winds that aren't famous for shifting every ten seconds.

I was out in a single handed Laser last year, hiked (leaning) out as far as I could in a stiff breeze when a wind shift suddenly luffed my sail and I was in danger of capsizing backwards. As I scrambled back into the cockpit, the boom (heavy metal base of the sail) came flying in from the other direction, banged me in the forehead and knocked my cap into the water. Before I could get my favorite swear words out of my mouth, the boom caught a gust from the opposite

direction, banged me in the back of the head and knocked my prescription sunglasses into the water.

Despite minor setbacks like this, sailing may be the most fun you can have with your wetsuit on (although those aren't necessary during the summer semester). I don't dwell on the Zen of it all too much, but there aren't many other activities that so tangibly reward your physical efforts when they are in harmony with the natural world.

If you've never sailed, there's really not all that much to it. Briefly, you rig and launch your boat and the wind pushes you around. If you take some lessons (literally, "learn the ropes") you can become good enough to eventually sail on your own. Hopefully you'll be able to avoid joining the rookie sailors blown onto the lee (downwind) shore of the lake because they can't figure out how to sail upwind.

The UI Sailing Club has over 30 sailboats, so you don't need your own. That's great because any kind of boat can be described as "a hole in the water into which you pour money." A summer's (June-August) membership fee requires little more cash than it takes to rent a sailboat for an hour at an overpriced beachside resort. Volunteers (possibly pretty - both male and female) will teach you how to sail and make sure you don't drown.

To get started, visit the "Contact Us" tab at the club's web site at www.iowasailing.org. The email listserv option is the Internet's answer to the chisel and stone tablet, but it's surprisingly effective.

Quit kidding yourself that gardening is fun. Start sailing today, and if nothing else you'll learn phrases to impress your friends with on "Talk like a Pirate Day", September 19th. Arrr!

Dave Parsons cannot be found at the business he co-owns on the Coralville Strip on sunny, breezy afternoons.