

Here is an interesting article about Sandspur Island – also called Beer Can Island – at Haulover. For the colorful images in this article go to the following site and see my book presentations and signings at the end of the article.

http://biscayne-times.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1543%3Aits-a-shoal-thing&catid=50%3Acommunity-news&Itemid=223

It's a Shoal Thing

Written By Harriette Yahr – Special To The BT

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FOR DECADES BOATERS HAVE GATHERED AT THE HAULOVER SANDBAR FOR FUN AND RELAXATION -- PLUS A LITTLE ROWDINESS

Fun and sun on the Haulover Sandbar, with Collins Avenue and Bal Harbour in the background. Courtesy of Coast Guard Auxiliary Summer in Miami. Crowded beaches, crowded malls, and crowded... shoals.

Look west over the Collins Avenue bridge that spans the Haulover Inlet, or glance north while traversing Broad Causeway, and you can't miss the sea of boats that gather in Biscayne Bay. South Florida has a bevy of hangouts at islands and shoals. Think Nixon Beach or Stiltsville Flats near Key Biscayne, or Nest Key in Key Largo.

The Haulover Sandbar, sandwiched between the ocean inlet and Sandspur Island (also called Beer Can Island), draws weekend crowds in the hundreds. At low tide the exposed sand can stretch out long enough to toss a Frisbee. It's knee and waist deep for a huge swath, which makes it perfect for lounging the day away.

David Templer: "There's no need to blast home amplifiers and have triple train-horn contests. It's obnoxious." Courtesy of David Templer

When nature builds shoals, boaters come out to play. But sometimes they'll have different agendas.

Staci Lurie, a Miami Beach native and Bay Harbor Islands resident who heads out on the water any chance she gets, has been frequenting the Haulover Sandbar for years, when she's not diving and spearfishing. "It's always been a place to relax and enjoy time with friends. But I can't say it's the same place as it's always been."

Today the current has shifted, bringing more than just sand from Bal Harbour's beach to form the sandbar. Crowds have increased. Decibels have escalated. As a result, a mutiny is in progress.

"It's turned into a zoo," complains David Templer, a North Miami Beach resident and Aventura attorney, who says "friendly boater etiquette has all but disappeared at the Haulover Sandbar." He echoes the sentiment of several old-timers who want the culture of the sandbar to return to the days of respect-thy-neighbor. "There's no need to blast home amplifiers and have triple train-horn contests," says Templer. "It's obnoxious."

What about those boaters who may want to mount loudspeakers on their transoms or dance topless on their bows? Don't they have rights too? Are the folks who complain about noise just a bunch of curmudgeons?

A few years back, Templer, a former North Miami Beach city councilman, thought about starting a coalition to bring civility back to the sandbar. His kids, he says, weren't enjoying themselves there any longer. So he spoke to friends, created a Facebook page, and contacted law enforcement.

With so many boats so close together, an inexperienced or impaired skipper can cause trouble.

Multiple public agencies have jurisdiction in Biscayne Bay. Templer says his concerns, and those of a few others, sometimes "fell on deaf ears," but some agencies were receptive, such as the Miami-Dade County Marine Patrol. But when the economy tanked, Templer said he was told budget cuts meant less manpower -- and they are the ones with the jet skis to get into the shallow depths.

Miami-Dade Marine Patrol Lt. John Ramos also talks about relativity and priorities. These days, out at Virginia Key, there's a sea of blaring noise complaints from boaters blasting DJ equipment using home generators. At the same time, Ramos says they take every complaint they get seriously and have two marine officers dedicated to the Haulover area on the weekend. Jet skis are now back, assigned to the Intracoastal district, he says, and they patrol the area randomly.

Perhaps there isn't anything too unusual going on. Jorge Pino, a Florida Fish and Wildlife marine officer, says it doesn't appear there is anything out of the ordinary at the sandbar. "We always have boaters that go out to enjoy themselves and abide by rules, and we have a select few that will be intoxicated," Pino explains. "It is no different than any other location with hundreds of people gathering where there is alcohol."

Aerial view of Haulover Inlet in 1947, with massive sandbar clearly evident. Courtesy of Martha Saconchik-Pytel and Miami-Dade County

Pino adds that, although FWC has jurisdiction in the Haulover area, they concern themselves with conservation, safety, and watercraft issues -- and not noise. Ramos says patrols at Haulover have also increased with the addition of the Joint Marine Protection Act, which "provides municipal law enforcement agencies on the water jurisdiction to enforce the laws in that area," he explains.

Maybe it's really a matter of boaters learning how to share the bay.

At TheHullTruth.com, rants about general sandbar etiquette are posted. On the Haulover thread, you'll find references to "idiots" who don't know how to boat. "Just keep an eye on Fu#%ing stupid boaters that ran over your anchor line. Those kind of idiots have put my boat adrift on 2 or 3 different occasions," opines JoseG.

RedSlayer069's advice for a good time at Haulover? "Go during the week if possible, it's usually a little more tolerable. On teacher work days the place is almost deserted, that's when I bring my kids and their friends."

So must you love it or leave it?

Jenna Williams is a huge fan. In the running for Queen of the Sandbar, Williams heads out early -- with her crew of regulars and floating lounge chairs -- to claim her coveted spot on the sand, as she's been doing for the past 13 years. "The scenery is breathtaking, the water is beautiful," she says. "Living in Florida, there's no other place I want to be on the weekends except there." To Williams, the scene is actually "more under control today than in the past." The music, she agrees, can be obnoxious, but she focuses on having a good time: "We try not to let other people influence what our day is going to be like."

The inlet today, with sandbar, Intracoastal boat channel, and Sandspur Island. Courtesy of Google Earth
Check Facebook and Yelp for Haulover Sandbar devotees of all persuasions. "Kayaked our way over from Oleta, tied up to a friend's

boat and had a great time. This is what South Florida is all about. Picture perfect," writes Monika K. Crowds, beer, manatees, inflatable canoes delivering hot dogs, the chance see a topless woman, and sometimes even the music are the draws for some.

David Templer, on the other hand, has cast off and charted a new course. He is still enjoying weekends on the water. That part hasn't changed. But now he anchors south of the Haulover Sandbar at a place called the Shallows. Several friends have joined the defection. "There's no exposed sand for the dogs to run," he concedes, "but it's less crowded and quieter. We're not getting blared out or run over by a rogue boater."

Legend has it that Haulover got its name from a fisherman named Baker who, in the early 1800s, would "haul" his boat and others over a narrow stretch of beach sand between the ocean and Biscayne Bay.

Martha Saconchik-Pytel, who spent a decade researching material for her book *Baker's Haulover: A Maritime Treasure of History and Pioneers*, quashes that idea. "In the absence of in-depth, historic evidence and investigation, the namesake of this place had always remained a mystery," she writes.

April 2009: This shot by an unidentified photographer shows the sandbar in full swing.

The Baker's Haulover Inlet (the official name of the cut) was created in 1925, providing direct access from bay to ocean. Saconchik-Pytel recounts powerboat races in the 1950s around the site of today's sandbar. "Fellows would begin to race up the waterway, out to sea, and back through the Baker's Haulover Inlet," she writes.

Not all memories are fond ones. For one thing, the currents can be treacherous. "It was the only time in my life I really thought I was going to die," says local film producer Adam Rogers, recalling a nighttime swim in the 1990s. "The boat wasn't very far from the sandbar, but the current was so strong I could barely make it back to the boat."

The sandbar can be precarious for other reasons. Mariners entering Biscayne Bay from the Atlantic Ocean through Haulover Inlet need to steer clear. And persistent shoaling -- from the sandbar encroaching on the Intracoastal Waterway's boat channel -- is an ongoing problem. A recent Coast Guard alert reported depths of less than four feet during low tide near the center of the channel. Several vessels have run aground in the area.

Kids welcome -- at least when the partying is not too risqué.

To alleviate this navigational hazard, the United States Army Corps of Engineers periodically dredges the channel. Brian Flynn of the Miami-Dade County Department of Regulatory and Economic Resources says the next dredge is scheduled for October.

The Army Corps won't touch the sandbar, which they did back in 1999, Flynn says, because of an endangered species of seagrass that is protected by federal law. And there is another reason. The thousands of cubic yards of sand that will be scooped out of the channel will be dumped onto Bal Harbour beach, which is desperate for sand in some parts. Regulations limit the level of silt allowed in beach sand, Flynn explains, and the sandbar's level exceeds that.

Even if the beloved party sandbar ends up dredged one day, everything will be fine in the end, says David Halpryn, a Miami Beach native and avid fisherman who has enjoyed Biscayne Bay since he was a kid. He's watched the ebb and the flow of the Haulover scene for close to 40 years. "The sands will find their way back in through the inlet," he says. "Mother Nature always wins."

Sometimes the sandbar is for the birds, and the birds alone. Courtesy of Jenna Williams

Today Halpryn has defected with Templer to the Shallows, "where the water is calm, as are the few others looking to escape the madness of the main sandbar."

So what is to come of the Haulover Sandbar culture? Will the boaters with the biggest speakers prevail? Will inexperienced or impaired boaters one day run over too many anchors, igniting a high-seas brawl? Or worse, triggering a ban on alcohol? Or will the party-lovers keep their activity -- and volume -- to a low din and not stir the pot?

While the great debate over rules of conduct plays itself out in the middle of Biscayne Bay, perhaps everyone can agree to let the folks who'd like to enjoy a peaceful day on the water have their space, and listen to their own music, a few buoys south.

Martha Saconchik-Pytel will reveal her efforts over the past ten years to publish her historical book, Baker's Haulover: A Maritime Treasure of History and Pioneers and will share accounts of the pioneers contained within its pages at the following presentations:

Sunday, September 8, 2013, at 2:00 p. m: – Presentation and book signing for the Miami Pioneers and Natives of Dade and anyone interested, Central Christian Church, 222 Menores Avenue, Coral Gables, FL 33134
For information: Robert A. Burr, Rob@QuantumLeap.net

Tuesday, September 10, 2013, at 2:00 p. m. – Presentation and book signing for the North Miami Beach Public Library and anyone interested, North Miami Beach Public Library, 1601 N. E. 164th Street, North Miami Beach, FL 33162-4099
For information: Susan Sandness, Library Manager, susan.sandness@citynmb.com 305-787-6048

Thursday, September 12, 2013, at 6:00 p. m.: - Presentation and book signing at the Brockway Memorial Library, 10021 NE 2nd Avenue, Miami Shores, FL 33138

For information: Michelle Brown, Adult Services Librarian,
brownm@miamishoresvillage.com 305-758-8107

Thursday, September 26, 2013, at 11:30 – 1:00: Book presentation with slides and signing at the Florida Historic Capitol Museum, Tallahassee, FL, 400 South Monroe Street, Tallahassee, FL 32399-1100

For information: Emily Fee emily@flhistoriccapitol.gov
(850) 487-1902

Signed books may be purchased after the presentations.