

Gloucester Schooner Festival

Photo Shooting Guide

Each year, on the Labor Day Weekend, the City of Gloucester holds its Annual Schooner Festival. Schooners from a wide area come to Gloucester for the event. The boats arrive on Friday and are berthed around the harbor. Many are open to visitors when they are tied up. On Saturday evening, starting around 7:30pm is the lighted boat parade, along Stacy Boulevard. There may be some interesting photo opportunities during this event. The lighted boat parade will be followed by fireworks over the harbor at about 9:30 pm.

The main event is on Sunday when the schooners will race for the Mayor's Cup. The starting line for the race is just outside the harbor beyond the breakwater at Eastern Point. There will be a parade of sail starting around 10:30 AM, when the boats will once again sail along Stacy Boulevard to be introduced to the crowd along the shore and then head down the harbor and past the breakwater. Once outside they will jockey for position for the start of the race. It is during this time that you have the best opportunity to get photographs of the sailing schooners from shore.

There are other options for photographing the boats during the race. Many of the schooners take passengers. And Yankee Fleet may have a chase boat. If you go this route, the size of the boat will govern how much room you have to move around to get a good photo angle.

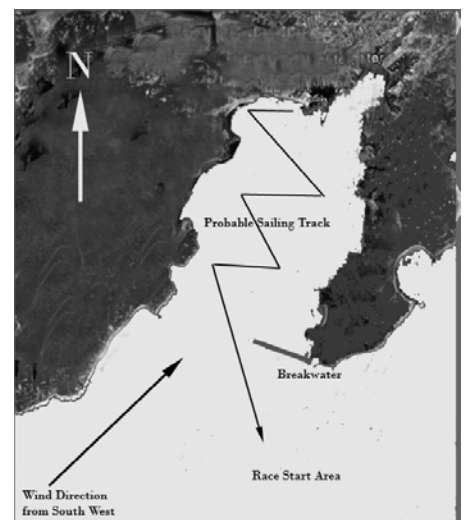
This guide covers only the shore based option. A really good location for photographing the boats from shore is on the Eastern Point Breakwater. The breakwater is approximately 2000 feet long and is just under two miles from Stacy Boulevard where the boats will parade. The Audubon Society has a small parking lot at Eastern Point that holds about 15 cars. I had a hard time finding this spot the first time I went there. Probably the best way is to use a GPS and get directions to the Eastern Point Yacht Club, which is right next door. On the race day the road to Eastern point will be closed some time after nine o'clock and the city provides shuttle bus rides to the point starting at 11 AM. Plan to arrive around 8 or 8:30 AM so you can get to the parking lot. There is a small fee to park. You can kill time waiting for the schooners by photographing the surrounding area.

The time to get the best photos will be from about 10:45 am when the first boat in the parade is coming toward the breakwater. You will be pretty busy until just about noon as all of the boats leave the harbor.

To get the most from your day you should understand how the wind direction affects the sailing problems for the boats, how the position of the sun will affect your shots and what lenses will give you the best results.

Wind Direction and Sailing

Gloucester Harbor is open to the South-South-West. That is the heading a boat would take to go directly out of the harbor after the parade of sail. Pretty easy for a power boat. But for a sailboat it all depends on the direction of the wind. In fair weather in New England the prevailing wind is from the South-West. These winds present a problem to the sailboats as they cannot sail directly into the wind and will have to "tack," that is go back and forth heading either South or West to reach the slot at the end of the breakwater to get out of the harbor. Winds from any southern direction will present this type of problem. For the photographer it means that the boat will be spending more time inside the breakwater and will be presenting head on and full side profiles for shooting.



On a fair day we could also get winds from the West to the North. These will present a different picture because the boats could take a more direct heading to get out of the harbor. They will be coming faster and will present a more head on, or slightly off head presentation. Still good pictures but the action will be faster. If the winds have a North-East component the points of sail will be pretty much the same as for the West to North winds. However, if the winds are from the Northeast, it will probably be bad weather and the race probably postponed..

In all wind directions, once the boats get past the breakwater all of the winds will present good boat position opportunities as the boats head for the starting area and jockey for position.

The Tide

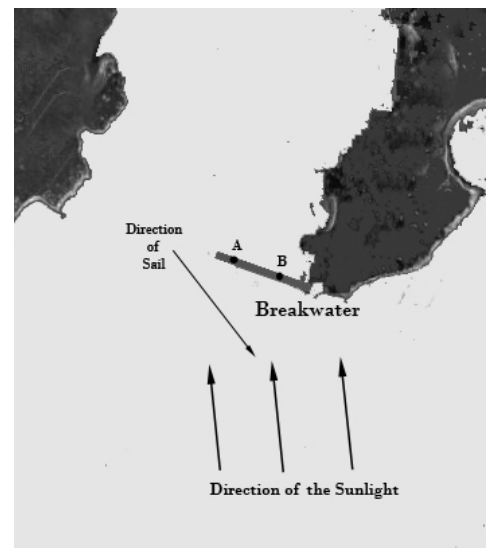
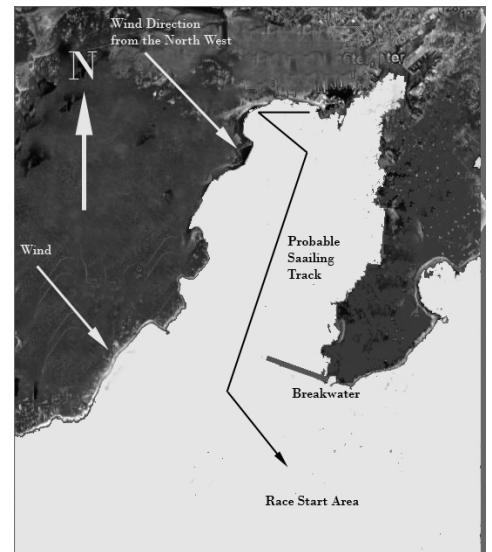
It is a good idea to be aware of the tide on the day of the race. When the tide is high the water surface is only a few feet below the top of the breakwater. If the wind is coming from a southerly direction and the wind speed is in the order of 10 to 12 knots, there will be spray and some splash over the top of the breakwater. Winds of 15 knots or more could be dangerous at high tide. If the winds are from the northerly direction, i.e., down the harbor, the sea condition could be moderated somewhat by the land. The worst time could be from two hours before the peak high to two hours after. In these conditions it would be best to shoot from the shore at the beginning of the breakwater.

The Sun

At the time the schooners are sailing down the harbor, passing the breakwater and sailing out to the starting area, the sun is almost directly to the South. When you are shooting the boats in the inner harbor the sun will be in back of you over your right shoulder, and perfect for photography. You can position yourself anywhere on the breakwater for these shots without any detrimental effect on the light. However, once the boats pass the breakwater and head out to the starting area they will eventually be right in the sun. If you are out toward the end of the breakwater (Position A) and tracking a boat, you will quickly be swinging your camera into the sun. For these shots you are better to be on the inner part of the breakwater (Position B), which will give you much more time to work the boat before the sun becomes a problem. The sample photos in this guide were taken near Position A and you can see that the sun was a problem.

Lenses

For portrait type images of the schooners a longer lens will be most effective. A 70 to 300mm zoom lens is the most practical. On my first trip I used a 400mm fixed focal length lens. This was fine when the boats were at some distance, but as they got closer to the breakwater I was limited to close-up shots of the boats. The parade of sail in the inner harbor is two miles from the breakwater. The longer lenses will be good for working the boats as they come up the harbor. Outside the breakwater the boats will be moving away so longer focal lengths are better. See the sample images.



General

Photographs of the boats as they come down the harbor will always have the land in the background. In some cases this may detract from the photo. You may want to take multiple frames of the boat so that you get different backgrounds as the boat moves along and you can later select the image with the least distracting background. Outside the breakwater there is only the horizon and on a clear day the fuzzy outline of the Boston skyline. The only other obstacle is other boats close to your target boat and that becomes a composition issue.

Sample Photos

All of the sample photos were taken using a 400mm lens.



Looking all the way up to the parade of sail and at a schooner quite far up the harbor.



Five shots of boats as they proceed down the harbor.



Schooner coming back into the harbor just off the end of the breakwater (taken from Point A).



More off the end of the breakwater from Point A.



Outside the breakwater, heading for the starting area.



More examples of boats outside the breakwater.