

## **Nyack Boat Club SOP**

### **THE ART OF GRAPPLING FOR A MOORING November 2012 DRAFT**

This Standard Operating Procedure addresses the art and science of recovering mooring tackle from the river bottom. It focuses on finding and marking chains and pennants; not on raising mushroom anchors. While the immediate need for this document is to help members who lost boats in Hurricane Sandy, hopefully, it will serve to add to the knowledge base of the Club Mooring Committee.

#### **BACKGROUND**

Until relatively recent times, it was standard practice for the Mooring Committee to tie off groups of moorings each Fall, affix winter sticks and call it a Season. The notion of hauling all moorings was originally intended to be a one-time effort to redesign the mooring field.

A number of members still remove their pennants and tie off their moorings with neighbors at the end of the boating season. Lengths of weighted polypropylene line are secured between 3 or 5 adjacent moorings and dropped to the bottom. This practice eliminates the biannual exercises with the cows to place and recover tackle each Spring and Fall. It also leaves the mooring nestled in low-oxygen mud instead of rusting on shore and cluttering up the Club.

Recovering the moorings becomes a 1 to 2 hour Rite of Spring instead of a day of heavy lifting. Other benefits included reducing the transport of mud to the dock area and allowing mushrooms to sink further into the mud. It is important, however, that moorings be lifted, inspected and repaired on a routine basis. This can be done on a sunny Summer day, from an anchored cow, without bringing the whole rig ashore.

#### **GRAPPLING GEAR**

The trick is to think of this exercise as running your fingers through sand in search of a large lost set of keys. Properly used, the grappling gear transmits signals back to your hand as it pulls through the mud. However, unlike your hand, you cannot PUSH on the line if the grapple gets stuck. This is why a 30-ft recovery line and buoy is an essential part of the gear. Also, like any ground tackle, a grappling hook should be fitted with about 5-feet of chain to keep the hooks digging in and to avoid abrasion of the ½-inch primary line.

Another simple but essential piece of gear is a reference buoy tied to a weight with about 20-ft of line. Realize that you are looking for a fixed object in a constantly moving river. Also bring several 20-ft lengths of poly line and floats (detergent bottles) to secure found mooring tackle. Add a magic marker in order to note the name and grid location on the bottles that mark found moorings. Tools, including pliers, wire cutters and a few stout screw drivers are also needed.

#### **TECHNIQUE**

1. Do the best that you can to drop a reference marker where you think that your mooring is located. Recorded sights from land and GPS data make this easy, as do adjacent moorings. Think of real estate: its all about location location location.



2. A major bugaboo in this whole game is to avoid fouling the propeller in the grappling gear. You may find it helpful to have a driver handling the boat while the grappler stands amidships to keep the lines clear of the outboard and the driver. Communication between the driver and the grappler has to be instant: mainly: STOP!
3. You will be surprised how much information is transmitted to your hand at the grapple drags through the mud. Our mooring area is 'paved' with broken bricks that create a series of random tugs on the line. What you are looking for is a uniform series of quick tugs indicating that the grapple is sliding along a chain.
4. When a chain is felt, immediately stop the boat and carefully haul in the line. If you are lucky and find an upper chain, secure it to the tin boat with a screw driver placed into a rowlock.
5. If you hook a heavy lower chain, try to walk it along to the upper lighter chain.
6. If you are really lucky, you may hook a pennant. This won't feel like a chain and does not have any weight in water ---- so it is a tough target to find.
7. Having found a chain, even if it is not yours, mark it with a 20-ft length of poly line and some sort of notation on the bottle. Notify the Mooring Committee of your findings.
8. I always carry a notebook to record what I have found and marked.
9. Safety is, of course, important. Wear a pfd, have a knife ready, don't go out alone, watch fingers and be alert to exposure. It also helps to have a VHF to hail the launch in case you need help.

#### SOME ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Realize that your boat is being constantly translated by current and wind. This is the reverse of shooting at a moving target: the target is stuck in the mud and you are being moved by three vectors: wind, current and the outboard. A skilled driver has to integrate all of this in his head in order to make an orderly search pattern. Both Cartesian or Polar coordinates work. That is, back and forth or running around in circles of increasing diameter.

To summarize, there are four elements to this game:

The grappling gear  
Technique  
Patience  
Luck

On a personal note, I probably was a historian-in-training forty years ago when, as the junior member of the mooring committee, I spent many hours tending the mooring field with guys who had joined the Club in the 1930's.

Curt Koster, 9 November 2012

