



JAKE DILLON PHOTOGRAPH

Pungo

Making the most of a river

Story by Melinda Harrell

Though the Pungo River is not nearly as large as the Pamlico River, its history and importance to the rural communities of northeastern Beaufort and Hyde counties make it grand in the eyes of the people who live there today and an integral part of survival for the people who lived there long ago.

The Pungo River is a 30-mile long body of water that also serves as the dividing line between Beaufort and Hyde counties. The river serves as a tributary to the Pamlico River, ultimately flowing southeast into the Pamlico Sound.

The Pungo River is named after the Matchapungo Indian village

of the Acquasogoc tribe, which had Algonquian blood lines. The Matchapungoan village was located where the town of Belhaven is located today.

Explorers ultimately destroyed the Indian village after a dispute over a stolen cup. As is the story of all Native American cultures in North America, if the people of the Matchapungo village did not succumb to small pox, they eventually succumbed to the ravaging forces of European settlers or explorers.

As time went on, the Pungo River became a fantastic place for commercial fishing, shipping and mercantile trade.

Belhaven and the surrounding communities in Hyde County blossomed because of the burgeoning trades and fishing.

Crab houses were built on nearly every corner in Belhaven, making it a hub for commercial fishermen. The Pungo River was the contributing factor in Belhaven's creation and success.

The shores (along with the adjoining Pamlico River) were utilized in the late 1800s and early 1900s for the transport of large supplies of lumber that were produced at area lumber mills.

It was not until the railroads reached the eastern Beaufort County area that the river was no



Above and Opposite: Pirates on the Pungo has become a popular event for sailors from far and near and is held during the month of May on the Pungo Creek area of the river.

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to the banks of the river – the tourist industry.

Courting interested people from around the world, the Pungo River offers beautiful scenery, excellent fishing and is a contributor to building a vast and interesting wild ecosystem. The river also showcases small town river life.

Long-time residents, as well as those who have moved to the area, often take up sailing or boating as the winds off the river provide excellent conditions for a good and adventurous time.

Recreational fishing trips offer an opportunity to catch an array of fish, including puppy drum and speckled trout.

The town of Belhaven now courts boaters coming in from the Intracoastal Waterway thanks to the completion of two new docks; one in Wynn's Gut and the other at the Cooperage property, just off the river in Pantego Creek.

The Pungo River has been the driving force in the area through which it flows, dating back to when Native Americans settled on its banks hundreds and hundreds of years ago.

Even though industry and commercial fishing have faded, something else emerged on the banks of the Pungo. The river offers an economic pulse to the area and is the regenerative heart beat to surrounding communities. This, in turn, ensures life and vitality to all that are touched by the waters of the Pungo River.

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longer used for lumber transport.

The lumber industry came to a complete standstill in the area once the Great Depression weighed on the nation, stopping the industry in its tracks.

By the late 1980s, commercial fishing and crabbing on the Pungo

began to decline and each crab house in Belhaven closed, one by one.

Though industry seemed to die along the banks of the Pungo, something else was born anew and an exciting and completely different enterprise was introduced