

Roatan 2008  
Week 1

The job of getting a big trip off is always tough. You think everything is on schedule but then as the time to leave draws near projects slow down. The original plan was to leave on Friday. The tides weren't going to cooperate for this though. With the diurnal tides running, low tide would be at 2:30am, of course. I had hoped to have the boat ready so we could just leave on the tide but there were still chores that had to be done so it didn't happen. I got to the boat at 2:30, after getting stopped by the Highway Patrol for having my taillights out, and prepared to get the boat under the Cape Coral Bridge. As I left the slip there was a light breeze behind me. Motoring at 7 knots I got to the bridge in plenty of time to slip under hitting only the radio antennae.

I got to the Bradley's house at 4:30 tied the boat up and went to sleep. Randy called at 7:00am as planned to pick me up. We went to the dock in town and met Mark. From there it was off to complete the assorted tasks at hand so we could leave.

One of my tasks was to complete an official bid for the 2.4 World Championships. The form was on the internet and I was asked to fill it out and snail mail it to the VP of the class. After completing the form I called him for his address. He wanted to know why I would snail mail it when it was in a word form that could be completed and emailed to him. OK, fine, send me the word doc. So I fill in the new form, again. Time just keeps on ticking away.

While I worked on that, Mark and Randy were getting some projects completed on the boat. Fill the water tank; put some last minute gear away. Wait a minute; it looks like ALL the gear was last minute! Finally about 1:30 I get back to the boat and we finish up with the chores to leave. At 2:30 we shove off from the dock to head out.

The plan now is for Randy to drive us out of the river while Mark and I stow gear. As we're coming out of the canals it dawned on me that I had forgotten something. I was shocked and appalled! How could I forget anything??!! I had gone through my checklist, in fact, I'd gone through 6 or 8 checklists and all were checked off. Oh no, it didn't get on the list. I really hate it when that happens! Two years ago it was my passport that didn't make the list and Nancy and Jim Givens flew the passport to Marathon for me. Anyway, the item in question for this trip was the frying pan. I had thrown the old pans out months ago in cleaning out the boat but because I was using the pan intended for the trip at home had not brought it to the boat.

A quick call to Eric who was home for the day with Trenton not feeling well saved the day. He loaded his pan and the baby into the truck and off to the Yacht Club he drove to meet up. We just throttled back and got to the YC just after he did. I can now cook for all. I was going to have a really hard time flipping those pancakes in a sauce pan!

We got out of the river and headed for Marker #2. We had been looking at the wind going out to see if we could motor sail out. The problem was that as soon as we cleared

the Sanibel Bridge, we'd have to drop the sails so we just kept motoring. The forecast was for easterly wind the whole way so the gear was stowed accordingly. As we cleared the bridge we were greeted by a nice westerly. In fact, it looks as though the wind will be right on the nose! We set the sails on Starboard tack and secured the gear down below. The afternoon sea breeze was throwing things off but I knew that in the evening we'd see the wind back to the east so we went into the shift.

Friday night the wind shifted back to the east and stayed there for the remainder of the trip. As we approached the Tortugas Bank we were seeing 10-15 knots from the east and reaching right along at 6-7 knots. Saturday night we passed the fort and headed for Cuba. The forecast was for the wind to go to the southeast so we stayed high of the lay line to the western end of Cuba. Sunday the seas got bigger as we got into the current going east against the wind. Earlier we had thought we'd see the end of Cuba by late afternoon, now the wind was dying and the current picked up and the new forecast was for us to get around Cuba in the middle of the night.

While running the engine to charge the batteries we noticed that she was running hot. We checked the raw water supply and it was fine. We checked the fresh water level and it was alright and yet we're still getting hot. The last time this happened we had to replace the fresh water pump. When I bought the last fresh water pump I got 2 so we changed the pump out. After that she ran cool as a cucumber.

The cruising guides all warn to be aware that the lights along the Cuban Coast are often not working. We found that they all worked. That was good since we were running about 3-4 miles from the outer islands of Cuba to get into a favorable current. It was about 3:00am Monday that we rounded the western end of Cuba, Cabo San Antonia. There was a lot of boat traffic as we neared the point of Cuba but no signs of any gunboats. That put us in the Caribbean Sea with light NE-E winds.

Monday morning we put up the kite and motor sailed at about 5 kt. The forecast had the wind going to the SE so again we stayed east of the lay line and waited for the shift. Well, guess what??? NO shift. The wind stayed light and shifted from NE-E and then back again for the next 3 days. Once in awhile the wind would come up enough to let us shut down the engine for 3-8 hours but the closer we got to Roatan the more we had to run the engine.

Monday afternoon we got our first visitors. It was just 2 to start with, then 3 then 6. We became the resting place for small birds migrating back to the states from Central America. They looked like a swallow of some kind. They were unafraid of us and would land on our legs, feet, heads, where ever they wanted. We've seen this before on other trips. About half of the birds would die on deck or down below. At night a group of them would huddle together on deck. For the rest of the trip we'd have at least 6-7 birds on the boat with us. Just yesterday, Saturday, I found a dead one down below. There's no telling how many more we'll find.



Fishing birds discussing the drag setting.



Bird on a line.



Some of the smarter birds catching up on their reading.



In looking at these pictures you can see how light the wind is by the flat seas.

We were looking to get in by Wednesday morning, now it was looking more like late in the afternoon. Then the breeze laid down some more and we're motoring again. Now we have to start monitoring the fuel level. We started with 115 gallons of diesel, and we're past the half-way mark and it appears we have about 50 gallons of fuel left. At 1 gallon an hour will we have enough to get in if we motor-sail the whole way? I have decreed that the 25 gallon mark is the shut-off point. Until we're close to the island, if we get to the 25 gallon mark we'll shut her down and just sail.

Early afternoon Wednesday we see the island of Guanaja. The mountains are very visible from about 30-35 miles away. Of course at home, if you see land you would expect to get in shortly. Here it's an entirely different story! We're 35 miles out and at 5 knots we're still 6-7 hours away from shore. It does take a little to get used to! As we approach the pass between Guanaja and Roatan the breeze picks up a little. We're still motor-sailing under kite and main and now doing 6-6.5 knots. We shut down the engine for several hours to conserve fuel. We also slow down to 4.5-5 knots. We revise our arrival to about 2:00am. After we round the eastern end of Roatan at Barareta, we still have about 15-20 miles to go before reaching French Harbour.

At dusk I did another fuel check. We're about an hour from the pass and then another 4-5 hours from French Harbour. We're just below the 25 gallon mark. Should we continue to motor-sail or shut down for awhile? If we continue to keep the RPMs down and the consumption to about 1 gallon an hour, we should be able to arrive with about 15-18 gallons. I decide that the safety margin is enough to continue motor-sailing.

An hour after dark we're coming to the point to round the island and head west. There are several small islands, the Pigeon Cays and the shoals around them that we have to be cautious of. We're coming in several days before the new moon so it's dark out, real dark! We had to gybe to fall off to our new course and rather go through the gybe in the dark we drop the kite. After getting her stuffed into the bag we gybed and went to our new course of 260 degrees. We had about 4 hours to go so I let the crew catch a nap because we'll be up for awhile getting the boat anchored and secured upon our arrival. The breeze shifted on the way down to the southeast, finally, and started to build.

We arrived off of French Harbour at 1:30 Thursday morning. I had saved the path to the anchorage on the GPS from last year so we throttled down and entered the Harbour. There is a pipe sticking out of the water about 2 feet that has to be left to starboard. The trick is finding it sometimes. Our path took us right to the pipe and we started in to the anchorage. We could make out 4-5 boats in the anchorage so we had to pick a spot between them. By 2:00 we were anchored up and ready to hit the racks.

Good news. Just before we left Ft Myers we installed a new wind generator for charging the batteries instead of running the engine. We had watched it the whole trip down but the wind was too light for it to put out any juice. Now that we're anchored and the wind has come up it's merrily charging away! No engine charging for awhile!

Thursday morning we get up to find the wind blowing 15-20 out of the southeast. The wind generator is spinning away and we start to get the dinks unloaded. We had brought our 12' and a 10' for Joe since his was falling apart. As we worked on unloading boats Joe came around the corner from the lagoon to see if we had arrived. He helped us offload the dinks and took a load of stuff we had brought for his family. We got everything squared away and were ready to go get checked into the country when it was noted that it was May 1<sup>st</sup>, Labor Day here. That means that all the government offices will be closed. We mentioned it to Joe and he told us that the Captain of the Port was open today and we could get checked in.

We went up to the Iguana Farm to see if Sherman was around. He was of but we talked with his daughter Gail who told us that Sherman would be back shortly. Of course shortly in this neighborhood means something entirely different than in our neighborhood! That's OK, we have things to do. After stopping to see Joe, Berthy and Dory we returned to the boat to get some things done now that we're anchored.

Early in the afternoon we caught up with Sherman who offered to take us to the Captain of the Port. We collected another sailor from Ft Myers, Bob Henderson, who lives on his boat at the Yacht Basin. Bob had checked in with Immigration in La Cieba but not the Port Captain. When checking into a country by boat you have to get the Immigration stuff done for each passenger and then you have to get a cruising permit for the boat. Bob had done the first part but not the second.

We found the Port Captain but the Immigration people were not in office. I can't get my cruising permit before the Immigration so we have to come back tomorrow. Sherman took us the long way back to show us some of the island.

Friday morning we return to the Immigration office and get checked in with them. We then went to the Captain of the Port and he said we needed an exit letter. That is a letter from the last country we were in. Well, the US doesn't give an exit letter. I explained this to him and he said they must. NO, they don't. Then he said a letter from any official would do. I tried to explain to him that this wasn't the policy in the States. We finally settled on a letter from the marina that we keep the boat that said we left on a certain day.

So, on our second shot at checking in we still don't have everything we need to be legal. It's Friday afternoon by the time I return to the boat. I called my brother who would be joining me the next day to see if he could bring a letter. No problem he says.

We rented motor scooters for the rest of the day to explore the island. Six hours on one of those things on these roads will kill your butt! We went from one end of the island to the other and played Hell's Angels for the day. It was a busy last day for Randy and Mark but they got to see a lot of the island.

Saturday morning early Sherman took the guys to the airport and then he and I stopped to get some fuel for the boat. We grabbed all of my jugs and a couple of his and got 40 gallons for Seaquest and another 10 gallons for Joe. I ferried the fuel out to the boat and

Joe helped me get it into the boat. When we went to pick up my brother Jim at the airport we got another 35 gallons in jugs.

A little over a week has gone by and it seems like we just left Ft Myers!