

Roatan 2008 week 2

We're still trying to get squared away since arriving last week. The Captain of the Port has decided that we need to have an exit letter, which the US government doesn't give you. Luckily for me the next crew coming in was able to bring just such a letter. As it turns out, a letter from the marina that we left from would do, so my brother Jim arrived with a letter.

Monday morning we arrived at the Port Capitan and present our letter. It's a different guy than we dealt with the week before. I explained what we were told to bring and gave him the letter. He was reading it when a phone call came through. He got up and walked outside to talk on his cell phone. In the meantime another fellow came into the office. After about 10 minutes the Capitain came back in and spoke to the new person. He got out a form and a new carbon paper, put it into his typewriter and filled the form out. I figured this would get us out of here. He completed the form, torn it out of the typewriter and gave it to the new guy! He sat back down in front of me and started to read some other paperwork. I then asked if there was anything else he needed from me. "No", he said, we were done. I asked about the copy of some form I was supposed to take to the Immigration guy and he said no, there was no other form that had to go to Immigration.

OK, if that's what he says, who am I to question it??!! I was certain the Immigration guy wanted something back, but I guess I misunderstood. I'll no doubt find out when I have to go back in 3 weeks to get an extension because the Immigration guy only gave me 30 days instead to the customary 90 days.

Well, at least I think the boat and I are legally in the country. Jim and I went back to the boat and got ready to do our first dive of the trip. We loaded our gear into the dink and head for an easy, fairly shallow dive. Nothing over about 40-50 feet. We drop down off the west end of French Cay.



Joe and his new dink.

It was good to get down again! The water was a little cool, but with a top on it wasn't bad. The water was clear with about 70-80 feet of vis. There is a dive boat on the next mooring ball and we run into some of those divers. It's different here to have 3-6 dive boats all lined up along the reef.

Monday evening we plan the next day. We're planning on go to Guanaja with an early start to try to beat the wind. It's been blowing pretty hard and to go to Guanaja we'll have the wind right on the nose. With a plan, fuel in the boat and plenty of food we're ready.

Tuesday morning dawns early here. They don't do Daylight savings and the sun gets up around 5:00am. We get up and fire the engine up and pick up the 2 hooks that we set on our arrival. Jim gets the hang of managing the windlass and chain by himself and we get the anchors stowed for the trip. Sherman is out with his dory and come by to say having a good trip. We motor out of the harbour and head east.

We're not far when I notice that the engine temp is too high. I have the boat on autopilot and go down to check the temp and see if there is a problem I can see. The engine does show hot so I throttle her down and turn around to return to French harbour. Sherman sees us turn around and comes back to see what's up. I told him about the overheating and he wanted to know if we needed a tow back. No, it looks like the engine is cooling off when I slowed her down. Getting back to the harbour was easy going down wind and down waves!

We anchored up again and opened the engine room to cool off so I could work on it. I make a couple of calls and get Marty on the line. With what I told him he thinks there may be a bubble in the fresh water system, so go the high point in the system and bleed it.

OK, we're stuck here for a day or so and the wind is kicking hard so we decide to get scooters for the afternoon and morning. We hitched a ride to the West End to pick up the scooters with Sherman. On the way we stopped at a farm to pick up some food for the iguanas. These are the best fed iguanas going! It turns out that this farm is a hydroponics farm and they're growing romaine lettuce. It's quite an operation. They supply most of the local restaurants and a couple of the grocery stores with fresh veggies. What doesn't sell they call Sherman to get at a reduced price. When we saw what they were handing out as 'old' romaine we were quite shocked, it looked pretty good to us.

We got to the scooter rental place, got our bikes and off we went. Jim had done some research on places of interest before he came down and wanted to take a dory ride through the mangrove tunnels. Since I hadn't done that yet either we headed for Oakridge to find the dories.

There are two places to pick up dories for this in Oakridge. The first is the Rasta guy in the street as you come down the hill into the village. The other is the local group that pool their resources together. We stopped at the Rasta guy, Emeril, and let him give his schpeal. He told us where we would be going and all the things we'd see. I had heard that

the other guys got about \$20.00 a head and Emeril only wanted \$15.00 for both of us. SO we pulled off the street and got into Emeril's dory.

This isn't your everyday dory! It was Rastaized. He had painted it all different colours. He had written all the names of the local areas and some of the historic dates on the inside of the hull and it had a canopy of different cloth, paper and assorted toys. I didn't have my camera on this trip but I will get pics for a later report.

The dory is driven by a single cylinder 17hp Kohler gas engine. It has direct drive. That means that when the engine is running, the boat is moving forward, no shifter, no transmission. He has a unique throttle that operates with a lever and his big toe. He sets the lever to fast and then has a line that he loops over his toe to slow the boat down with.

We load up and off we go. The first stop is the gas station. He buys a gallon of gas in a whiskey bottle, pours in into his tank, returns the bottle and away we go to find the mangrove tunnel. The trip takes us back to Jonesville and a neat tunnel that goes through a stand of mangroves about a 1/3 of a mile long. They've been using this tunnel since anyone can remember. We come out into a small lake, turn around and then head back to the dock.



Mangrove tunnel

There are a number of 12'-14' skiffs with 15hp outboards buzzing around the place. It seems that a lot of the locals use this rig. They spend most of the time bouncing the boat up and down with the motors tilted up. They race each other, they run by themselves, but they're all trying to see how high they can bounce the boat.

We hop back on our scooters and head west, back to the Iguana Farm. The traffic at this end of the island is light but as we work our way west it picks up. You need to pay very close attention to the traffic as they'll stop in the middle of the road to chat. They'll cross the center line for no apparent reason. They'll jog around bikes and walkers along the road. Another curious thing is that the locals all walk in the same direction of the traffic. I think it's got to do with being prepared to pick up a ride if the opportunity arises.

The next morning we head out early and went to the west end of the island. We pass through Coxen Hole, the capital of the island, on the way to West Bay. I wanted to show Jim the lighthouse at the west end. To my surprise there was a house built at the base of the light! It wasn't just a little hut; it's a 2 story gringo house! I don't know how you can buy the lighthouse, but I guess you can here.

Jim and I dove on a number of spots that I haven't been to before so it was a great recon week. Mary's Reef was a great wall dive while the ship wreck in the Coco View channel had a number of fish that I haven't seen there before. Grouper, hogfish and dog snapper all were hanging out on the wreck. Last year I didn't see a single big fish! We also found the airplane wreck in the Coco View channel. There were a number of fish, both large and small as well as a BIG green moray.

Friday afternoon Sherman took Jim and I on a tour of the east end of the island. We went all the way to Camp Bay on the north east end and Port Royal on the south east end. The only village we didn't get to was Helene which is only accessible by boat. While in Port Royal we met the honorary mayor of Helene, Wally. Wally and Sherman go back to childhood.

We spent some time with Mervin, another childhood friend of Sherman's from Oakridge. Mervin owns Paya Resort just east of Camp Bay. His resort is built on a rock that's about 70'-80' above the ocean and has fabulous views out to the north and east. Mervin spoke of how the politics of the island have kept a paved road from being built to his area. He was a fountain of history information about the island and a lot of fun to talk with.

While the road is gravel and dirt, in the rainy season it's mud. A lot of the road can't be used because of the inclines and the mud. During those times the locals have to rely on supplies coming in by boat. The boats have to come in from Oakridge or Jonesville and come around the east end of the island. Some of the trip can be done in protected water but a lot of it is in open, rough water.

We found this bar at the entrance of Camp Bay. They have a BBQ every Sunday. We asked how many people show up for the BBQ and was told that the average was about 5-6 and a really good turnout was 12-13. Alongside the road there we found this laundry service. If you have to do laundry, this is probably one of the best places around to do it!!

These shots are all taken in Camp Bay. They show some of the sights and life in this remote village.



laundry day in Camp Bay

Saturday morning Jim left for home and I had Matt and Andy coming in. Sherman provided taxi service in the morning. He had a rental car because his truck was in the shop. We stopped to get the truck and I was shocked and appalled to learn the truck wasn't ready!!! Sherman needed to run some errands that morning so I worked a deal with him to share the car for another day. He could take care of his stuff and then I'll

have wheels to pick up Matt and Andy and we'll drive around the island to show them the island from shore.