

Roatan Week 4

The timing to get Andy to the airport and pick-up Kenny and Jen worked out well. As we pulled in Kenny and Jen were sitting outside waiting for us. Andy and Kenny got to visit for a few minutes before Andy had to get checked in. It had been a long time since they had seen each other. With the gear in the car we shoved off to the boat.

I had a 2:00pm appointment with the mechanic to work on the engine so we headed straight back to the boat. We made a quick stop at the grocery store to pick up a few things. We got everything loaded and Kenny and Jen got their gear squared away on the boat.

Two o'clock came and no mechanic. Two thirty came and no mechanic. Three o'clock came, and no mechanic. I called Sherman to see if he had a phone number for, Shelby, the mechanic. He called and got no answer. At three thirty there was still no answer. AT four o'clock Sherman offered to drive over to Shelby's house, which is just around the corner. We got there to find Shelby sitting on the front porch drinking a beer.

His story was that he had just gotten home and was unwinding. I asked if he'd just like to come first thing in the morning. He liked that idea and we settled on nine o'clock. I'd rather have the guy working on the boat with a level head. So we returned to the boat to get ready for a night dive.

Kenny and Jen do a lot of diving so they were ready to get into the water. We went to the wall outside Coco View Resort and dropped in. There were not as many shrimp as we had seen the week before. I think the shrimp were spooked by the full moon. We did see several nice grouper and lots of smaller fish. We came upon a really nice Nassau Grouper that was trying to hide next to a sponge. He was lying vertically along the sponge. I swam right up to him and actually touched him before he darted off. He would have been great in the frying pan but I didn't have a gun.

Sunday morning the plan is to get the mechanic working on the boat and go get some motor scooters to tour the island. Nine o'clock comes and goes and no sign of Shelby. Nine thirty comes and goes and still no sign of Shelby. I spoke to Sherman and he was getting ready to go to church but would call to see what was taking Shelby. No answer. So we wait another hour or so and then decide to head for the west end to get the scooters.

As we got to the dock a fellow is walking out with a milk crate full of tools. This is Clermont and Shelby had called him to work on the boat. OK, great, at least we can get started on that. We rearrange the plans for the scooters. Jen has never driven one and Kenny and I were going to do doubles with Deb and Jen. I have to go back to the boat with the mechanic so Matt, Kenny and Jen go to get the scooters. Jen will drive my bike back.

Back on the boat Clermont and I go over everything I had done and he comes to the same conclusion that Marty and I had come to, the heat exchanger. He got right into taking the heat exchanger out and in about 40 minutes it's in his hands. Sure enough, we can see gunk inside. The heat exchanger is like a radiator in the car. In the marine application it passes the fresh water coolant through a series of tubes that are cooled by saltwater. With the exchanger in his hands he heads back to a shop that he uses to clean it out. I drop him off on the dock and he says he'll be back in 40-60 minutes. We exchange phone numbers so that he can call me when he gets to the dock.

In the meantime, the Hell's Angels found their way back to the dock and are ready to explore. I sent them off to see some of the area close by because I didn't want to be gone when Clermont showed up.

Well, I shocked and appalled, an hour goes by and no Clermont. I called him to see if he had any idea when he'd be back. Well, he couldn't get into the shop he uses and couldn't find the guy with the key. He was going to work on it at home. I could hear kids in the background as we talked so I guessed he was there working on the exchanger..... maybe! No, he didn't have an idea on how much longer he'd be but he would call me.

The Angels got back and I sent them off to get some ice. Jen was doing fine driving her stead, it was just slow going as she was getting used to it. This is not the place to be driving for the faint of heart. The drivers here have no problems using both sides of the road, they'll stop in the road to chat with friends or go blasting by you on a curve if you're not going fast enough for them.

Clermont finally shows up with the cleaned exchanger and we get it back onto the engine. We fire her up to see if the cleaning did the job. It wasn't getting too hot running out of gear so we put her into reverse and throttled her up to about 2,000 RPMs and waited to see what happen. The temp slowly climbed to about 170 and stopped. After 35 minutes of running in reverse we proclaim the problem fixed. Clermont packed his tools and I thanked him and dropped him off on the dock.

While I'm working with Clermont on the engine we had a drama going on with the scooters. It seems that the scooter Matt was driving needed some air on the back tire. When they put air into it the wheel came apart! They drove it back to the Iguana Farm and called the scooter people. When the scooter guy shows up he is very agitated and accused Matt of jumping the speed bumps along the island. They left another bike, took the broken one and said they'd find out how much a new wheel will cost so he can charge Matt. Matt was sure that he hadn't caused the wheel to break and wasn't happy about the situation.

The plan for the next morning was to get up early and travel about the island on the scooters. When we got up we were greeted by a light SW wind. This is not a regular occurrence this time of year. Well, do we change our plans? This wind will sure be a nice one to go to Guanaja on! We make the call to go to Guanaja while the going's good. That means we have to return the scooters and pick up a few things for the trip.

The Angels load up on their bikes and head for the west end. I load up with Sherman in his truck to get some ice from the fish house in Coxen Hole. Then we'll swing into the west end to pick up the Angels. We got the ice and headed west. When we got to the west end we couldn't find the Angels. They had gone to a different scooter place than I had been using and I didn't know the name of it. We cruised the dirt road that makes up the west end and finally found the three bikes, just no bikers. I searched up and down the road to no avail. Sherman stopped into a place and bought a battery for the dory. They finally show up. They were eating breakfast at a place I had missed.

When they got the bikes back the guy wanted to get into it again about the wheel. He didn't know how much a new wheel costs but Matt would have to pay for it. He insisted that the bike was brand new and Matt just had to have been jumping off road or something of that nature to cause the wheel the break. After an hour of going back and forth and holding Sherman up we left with Matt telling him he'd get back to him.

We loaded up the ice and headed out. The engine was running cool and with the light breeze we motored off to the east for Guanaja. It took about 6 hours to get there. As we got to the end of Roatan the wind shifted to the nose and built to about 15 knots. We got to the settlement just before dark and anchored up for the night with the wind building.

The weather here has been very windy. They haven't seen any rain for several months and the locals can't recall a windier May. While the trade winds here should be blowing at 15-20 they've been at 20-30. We've even seen some mid to high 30s in the last couple of weeks. The pattern has been to be lighter in the morning and early afternoon and then building to max about midnight. We've had several nights that we just didn't sleep well for the 30-40 knot blasts coming through!

We all went to the settlement to see what kind of night life was going on. We docked at the Island Gas station. As we took the path to the main path we were greeted by one of Guanaja's 'greeters'. His name was Hondo and he says he lived in New Jersey for a dozen years before returning to Guanaja. He wanted to show us his island. Kenny and I agreed that this was the same guy that greeted us last year.

He led us through the village answering questions about the life on Guanaja. The settlement was built on two cayes. As the population grew they just started building over the water. Now they have houses built on stilts with waterways under the houses to get to your house. There are eight to ten thousand people living in the settlement. There are no cars or trucks or even golf carts. The main path is about four feet wide with the smaller ones two to three feet wide.

This settlement has everything you would have in a small town, motels, restaurants, grocery and hardware stores and bars. The police force has a jail on the main dock where the ferry comes in. All of their supplies have to come in by boat or ship from the mainland so costs are quite high. The selection of items is smaller than they have at Roatan. If they need something special they order it from the mainland or get it from Roatan.

There are also a number of churches on all of the islands. They run the whole gamut and the people are always going to church.

We followed Hondo up some stairs and arrive on a porch overlooking the ocean. As I take in the beautiful view the owners of the porch arrive. They're a little taken aback to find a group of strangers on their porch! It turns out that Hondo knew them and we chatted for a few minutes before leaving.

After winding our way back to the dink Hondo finally hits us up for a 'donation' to help feed some kids a breakfast on Saturday morning. Kenny and I thought about it and remembered that last year he was looking for a 'donation' to help the local basketball team buy jerseys or something.

The next morning we got to the island to get on the internet and find some parts Sherman needed for his dory. The internet place is a trip. It only took me three machines before I could get out. Then I had to use a Spanish keyboard. Then, when I went to send my report I tried to plug in my memory stick to find that it wouldn't go into the USB connection. Don't know why, it just won't. So much for getting the report out, let's see if we can find the parts for Sherman.

I had to find Dunston to ask where I'd find the zincs Sherman needed. While I worked on the parts Matt and Kenny went back to the boat to take her up to Graham's place. I went to the gas station and they said he was at the other dock. I went to the other dock and they told me he was at the gas station. OK, did I pass him on the way over? I went back to the gas station and he wasn't there. They called him on the phone and he was on another dock. I took the dink over to pick him up and we went to mainland to get the zincs.

The place used to be a fish processing plant that had just been shut down. The owner had died and the son and daughter didn't know anything about the business and were just selling things off. They had a whole warehouse of parts that were used on the fishing boats. It kind of looked like all the spares we have at the club. I got what Sherman needed and headed to Graham's place in the dink.

I caught up with the boat as they got to Graham's. Last year I had helped Graham put new shackles on 4 moorings he had put out for the cruisers. This year there is only one mooring left and I was told before arriving that it was a little sketchy so we anchored off the island.

We all went ashore to see what had changed and to get drinks. Graham was off the island on a trip to La Cieba. Kenny and Matt took rods to see if they could catch any bonefish. Last year Kenny caught one on his first cast. That must've been beginners luck because this time they got skunked. We found the WIFI working so I went back to the boat to get my computer.

The island is pretty much as we left it last year except he has built three new cabins. He was working on them when we left and they're now completed. There are about a dozen

turtles in his fish pen as well as a big jewfish and a couple of nurse sharks that ran Kenny out last year.



Graham's new cabins.

While we ate a late lunch of some of the best fish fingers any of us had ever, had we visited with a couple that we met last year while down here. They had spent last summer on the Rio Dulce in Guatemala. A number of Americans take their boats to the Rio for hurricane season because it's protected from the winds by a mountain range. The problem now with the Rio is that the crime on US boats is getting pretty bad. Dinks and their motors are being stolen as well as gear off the boats. A number of cruisers are now taking their boats to Panama for the season.

While we chatted with the three couples that had come in to eat Kenny found that he had worked with one of the couples while he was the power company in Texas. It's a small world!

We got back to the boat to get our gear to dive a wreck the boys had found out about. This boat was in about 70' of water. The water was pretty murky. Matt and I took spears and saw a nice grouper when we first got down. The problem was the grouper stayed just out of range! Matt must have chased him around the boat two or three times before he just took off.

The boat had been stripped before they sank it so there was no gear in the holds. With the dirty water and the lack of stuff to see we went back to the surface. While we were down the breeze had picked up to about 25-30kts. We had a LONG trip back right into the wind. The dink just doesn't go well with 4 divers and all their gear into any wind, let alone 25 kts.

This would be the pattern for the wind for the week. Around 5:00 it would pick up 10kts or more. Then, after dark, it would pick up even more.



Kenny and Matt loading free ice from Graham's.

In the morning the plan was to motorsail to the north side of the island, dive off of Mangrove Bight and then anchor inside the reef at Michael's Rock. With the way the wind had blown most of the night we figured that outside the reef it would be really rolly polly. We secured everything down below for the rocking and rolling we'd see and motored to the cut in the reef. Once outside we were pleasantly surprised by how nice it was. There were a few big waves but it wasn't as bad as I thought it would be.

We sailed around the eastern end of the island and then headed west for Mangrove Bight. Helmut had told me there was a buoy on a great dive site just outside the reef. As we sailed into the area we spotted a small buoy. We dropped the sails and motored to the buoy for pick-up. We had secured the line to the bow and I was waiting for the boat to settle when a wave pulled the buoy line off the bottom. We dropped the buoy quickly and went into shore to find a place to anchor. With Matt on the bow pulpit we threaded out way past coral heads and rocks until we found a good spot to anchor.



Kenny, Jen and Matt got their gear together and went off to dive. Deb and I stayed with the boat in case we dragged anchor. The divers came back to pronounce it one of the best dives they had ever done!

We then motored back outside the reef with Matt guiding the way from the bow. We had about two miles to go to reach the Michael Rock entrance. It didn't take anytime and we were looking for the hole in the reef to go through. Matt again guided us in. We anchored off the End of the World Resort and went in for drinks.

This small resort has a second story restaurant/bar that overlooks the ocean. Last year we found it and whenever we were on this side of the island we'd stop. They have a couple

of humming bird feeders and they stay busy all day. This is one of the few places I've ever seen the birds light in the trees. I also got a shot of this green anole on the porch.



I went to see Helmut on the other side of the rock. He was happy to see the crazy Americans and wanted to know when we were going diving. We wanted to go then and I asked for the location of a close dive. He pointed out a spot just on the other side of the reef. I went back to the boat to get geared up.

The dive was pretty cool. The rock formations here are incredible. There are cracks and small caves as well as walls that can be 20'-80' high. This is quite a departure from the flat landscape we're used to at home. If you see a 10' elevation diving at home you've found Everest! It takes a little getting used to see the bottom drop away from the reef in 5' of water and then 1/4 of a mile away you're in 1000'! A mile from the reef you can be in 3000' of water. At home you have to travel 150 miles to find water that deep.

As we came out of the water around 5:00 we see that the wind has picked up again. It's got to be blowing 25+ and coming down the backside of the mountain. Elevation at Michael's Peak is about 1300' and we're seeing a venturi effect on the wind. The blasts are coming through so strong they shake the boat.

We've anchored the boat next to a small reef. The wind has been out of the east but if it goes to the south we could have some issues. With the way the puffs are blasting through it may be a matter of concern should they go to the right. I set both anchor alarms and we go down for a long night. The alarms went off several times through the night as the boat would swing. They're set to go off we if move more than 60' from where they're set. With 120-150' of anchor rode out that can happen without actually having a problem. Matt and I were up a number of times throughout the night checking on things.

The next morning the wind has laid down a little. Everyone got up early for a hike to a small waterfall I had heard about. We set off on the path that I thought would take us up to the waterfall. Instead it took us to the other side of Michael's Rock. There is a beautiful beach on this side with a small wooden dock. The water here is as clear as any swimming pool and the beach had just been raked clean. There is also a small creek coming from the hill. Because this is the dry season the water in the creek isn't running. It looks like in rainy season it empties into the ocean here.



Another interesting point about this side of the island is the color and make-up of the sand. In some places it's white, but in others it's a darker brown. All of the sand has sparkles though. It looks as though someone has dumped a huge jar of sparkles along the beach. Everything has the sparkles on it. When you walk through the sand you've got the sparkles on your feet. The docks have the sparkles on them from people walking out on them. While hiking we found some rocks that appear to be loaded with gold they have so many sparkles in them.

Helmut joined us on the beach and told us that someone was going to build a development here but had stopped. In the mean time the fellow that had been raking the beach for the owner was still doing it. He has a rake that's about 5'-6' wide and drags it over the entire beach by hand.

Jen has decided that this would be her happy place and Deb loved the place so much she



wants to come back next week.

Helmut told us he didn't know of any waterfall here so we decided to return to the other side of the Rock and go see if we could get something to eat at the End of the World. Off we go to hike back over the Rock. On the east side is a small meadow that used to have some cattle on it. There is also a grove of Caribbean Pine on the east side.

When we got to the End of the World we were the first customers of the day. When we asked for food, well they weren't really prepared but could cook something up for us. How about some steamed grouper? Ok, we'll try one. Thirty minutes later a plate with grouper and plantains came out. As we passed it around a comment was made that the

rest will be ready in a few minutes. The grouper was good, but we didn't need a plate for each of us. They had two more prepared as we went to say we didn't need more. We ate those and called it a day.

I needed to get onto the internet so we asked if theirs was working. Well, no, not right now. They were working on it. Ok, I'll go to the next place down the beach, Bo's Place, and see if they had theirs working. Matt, Kenny and Jen were going to climb to the waterfall so Deb and I went to Bo's.



Yes, theirs is working.....sort of. Bo's is pretty neat. The restaurant is built over the water and then he has a couple of apartments on shore. While I set up the computer the woman who was working the bar yelled out the window to the house on shore to turn on the internet. After messing about for a few minutes they finally got it going enough so that I had a low signal. At least there was something!



After we returned to the boat I decided we needed to move the boat to the other side of the rock. The wind had been up all morning and the forecast was for it to increase so we moved the boat to the more sheltered west side of Michael's Rock. We picked a spot behind the line of boats that were already anchored there. I wanted to be out from the shore a little further anyway so the wind generator got plenty of breezes. There were already five boats in this small cove so we settled in behind everyone.

Four of the boats were there waiting for the weather to be more favorable so they could head south to Panama. This is a 600 mile trip that most of the cruisers do in 2-3 legs. The first leg is to make an easterly to the Vivario Cays off the northeast corner of Honduras; From there they head basically south. The Vivarios are about 120 miles away and they

would like to see a northeasterly breeze to reach down with. It's not unusual for these boats to wait several weeks for the best weather. They don't really have a schedule so it's just another place to hangout.

The breeze continued to build late in the afternoon. We talked about a dive but Helmut had said that when he dove the Pinnacle the day before it was pretty murky. Ken and Jen said they'd give it a shot and took the dink off to dive the Pinnacle, if they could find it!

The wind was still building and was holding at a steady 25-30. Even though we were only 300 yards from the shore we were getting some strong blasts, mid to high 30s. That should be enough for the wind generator! I was thinking that maybe we should have gotten closer to the shore now. It would be a long night. Matt and I do think that the anchors may have dragged a little.

That night we talked about what we may have to do to get back to Roatan. All of them were scheduled to fly out Saturday from Roatan. The plan was to sail back Friday. If the wind is going to blow 30+ it'll make for a really lumpy bumpy 30 mile trip! Are there flights out of Guanaja to Roatan? How much? Is there another way? The plan had been to leave early Friday morning to get back around noon. That would give them enough time to do one more dive and still stay in the safety time zone before their flight. But now that may not happen.

Friday morning the wind was still up in the 25-30 range. I sent Kenny and Matt to the settlement on the other side of the island to see how bad it looked. The question was were we getting a lot more wind because of the mountain or not. The guys came back to say that the wind on the other side was not blowing nearly as hard. With that in mind we prepared the boat for a roly trip back.

After securing everything we motored around Michael's Rock and headed for the channel out. We cleared the channel with no problem and set our course for the Pigeon Cayes, just to the south east of Barareta. As we got some distance away from the island the wind moderated and we had a delightful broad reach in 15 kts. We had full sail up and were just cruising at 6-7 kts. After leaving the Pigeons to starboard we headed for French Harbour. The last couple of hours we sailed wing and wing and got to the opening for the harbour about 5:00. We motored into the anchorage and dropped the hooks in our favorite spot right off the Iguana Farm.

Back to our home anchorage and the troops will be able to make their plane rides home tomorrow without any problems.

Saturday morning Kenny and Jen tried to reach the airline to see if they could go out on the same flight as Matt to simplify matters. We tried to find a phonebook, huh???? Then we went to Fantasy Island. They had the number; it just rang and rang and rang. Finally we got an answer and found the flight was booked.

We got Matt loaded into Sherman's truck and off to the airport we went. We got him there in time for his flight, we think. We didn't hear back from him anyway.

When I go back to the boat Jen and Kenny and I went for a snorkel just around the corner from the boat. There we saw a toadfish, two moray eels and all kinds of small tropical fish. We dove until the last minute and got back to the boat in just enough time to rinse off, change and load the gear into the dink to head to Sherman's.

Off to the airport we go again! Again I have to assume we got them there on time because I didn't hear back from them later in the day. Around here being on time is not a hard and fast thing. They say to be at the airport three hours before your flight. Well, nobody is there three hours before the flight! Nobody is there two hours before the flight. At an hour and half you may start to see people coming in. Most show up about one hour before the flight and then some will push it to fifteen minutes before. Most of the locals know someone who was in the fifteen minute range that didn't get on the plane, sometimes. I guess it depends on the mood of the person loading the plane.

It's been a busy week. Now I have some boat chores to attend to and then Deb and I are looking to get back to Guanaja for 4-5 days.

Later