

Roatan report week 8

With the five kids aboard, we designated this time the week of AWARENESS. Jim and I would work with all the kids to be more aware of everything going on in our small world. It's very important to be aware of the little differences in the boat and the routine when you're at sea. Is the boat's motion a little different? What are the waves doing to us? Did the wind shift? Did the engine noise just change? Are we heeling more? Why or why not? We would talk about the importance of changes during the entire trip.

It's time to leave for home. We spent most of the morning getting the boat ready for the 4-5 day trip home. The weather is not as windy as it has been, 15-20. The problem is that it's out of the NE! We don't have to tack, but we will be close hauled and not going as fast as we would if it was out of the E or SE. Because of the large seas I made the decision to go around the west end of the island rather than slug 20 miles straight into the seas to go around the east end. The kids went to Fantasy Island for one last 'good' shower while I went to say goodbye to the Archs'.

I had planned on being off by 3:00 and we only missed it by 15 minutes. It took a little longer to get the hooks up without the pulpit. We headed out of French Harbour a last time. Turning west after we cleared the mouth of the harbour we were in the running seas that had taken our pulpit 2 days before. It was a great run to the end of the island. As we rounded the west end the seas got smoother for a short while and we checked all of our gear on deck and below for a long, roly poly trip home. The forecast was to blow 15-25 NE to E all the way to Cuba. It least we won't have to tack! Maybe.

We had worked through lunch getting the boat ready to leave. Jim had made a big bowl of chicken salad for sandwiches and we just didn't get to it. Now that we were all sitting around the cockpit watching the island go by for the last time it was time to eat a late lunch. Everybody dug in! Jim did a great job and even Chalmers, who says he can't stand chicken salad sandwiches, admits they were good! That would come back haunt most of them

On a trip of this length you take all the fuel you can and don't run at any break neck speeds. The magic boat speed number is 4 ½ knots. If we drop consistently below that sailing we need to be looking at firing up Mr. Perkins to help get us home. There comes a time to admit that we are not doing a 'traditional sailing only' trip, we do need to get home. At 1500 RPMs we burn about 1 gallon an hour. With 130 gallons on the boat we should be able to motor all the way home.....maybe.

We got to the west end at 5:00 and rounded up to our course to Cuba. The waves are breaking over the bow so we have to keep all the hatches and portholes closed. Ali informs me that she has water coming into the V-berth but not from the hatch or portholes. Maybe it's coming from the toe rail or deck hardware on the foredeck. Something we'll have to look at when we get home. We're dry everywhere else so the new gaskets on the portholes and the new mast/deck treatments are working.

The first night we go into the watches with 2 crew to a watch doing 2 hour stints. Everyone but Austin have done at least 1 trip to the fort so they know the routine for the overnight watches. Ali is the only one of this crew that have ever done a trip longer than the fort trip. You have to pace yourself. The first day and night at sea take some getting used to for some people. We had three of the crew that decided to feed the fish for the night. The general consensus was that the chicken sandwiches were a LOT better the first time!!

Saturday the wind started to lay down but was still out of the NE and the forecast says it'll stay that way to Cuba. The course to Cuba, 15 degrees. We tried to get east of the rhumbline so we could reach a little when the wind started to build as forecast in a couple of days. We did manage to get a couple of miles east but then the wind backed and we were sailing 355-0 degrees. The wind had also dropped so it became time to think about the engine for awhile. We fired up Mr. Perkins and got the speed back to 5 knots.

Saturday proved to be the day of the dead. Will, Sarah and Austin are hard down because of the fish feeding activities the night before. In fact, Will and Austin are still at it well into Saturday! Everyone else is doing a lot of sleeping because they claim they didn't sleep the night before. I think they were sleeping on deck. Those of us that ate, ate light on Saturday because most were still getting used to the motion. We got a Dramamine into Austin and Will long enough to start to work so they were starting to perk up late in the day. Sarah slept most of the day and got up feeling well. Chalmers and Ali, who didn't lose they chicken salad sandwiches, slept most of the day. By late in the afternoon they

were all feeling better and actually moving about the boat!



Dead day in the cockpit.

The wind will tease us for the next day. It would build so it looked like we could just sail. We'd turn the engine off and then 15 minutes later the wind would die, boat speed 2.8 knots, turn Mr. Perkins back on. We were still only 1/3 of the way to Cuba. This was the stretch of the trip we thought we'd have wind; we could be going very slow before this trip is done.

Sunday would be more of the same for wind. The only change would be that it shifted to the NNE and we can't make our course to Cuba! Great!! While we were motoring we did get hit by a 25# dolphin, fresh fish! Will landed a nice dolphin that would feed us for several meals. Speaking of eating, everyone is back to normal in that department. It is a lot easier with the seas down, though there is still a swell rolling through that will get you wet when you least expect it!



Late Sunday afternoon I was cooking dinner, fried fish and noodles. Feeding a crew of this size can be a challenge on the stove we have. The burners are situated so that with the large frying pan, which is the only one you can use with this size crew, you can't get any other pans on. Ross had found a neat tall pan that we can use to cook pasta so that was on. I heard a shout from the cockpit, dolphins! I popped my head up to see a pod of whales alongside of us. They were about 20' long and really cool. They stayed with us for 10-15 minutes and then headed off behind us. The next thing I heard was a shout, a

whale just took one of our lures! He was jumping behind us. The other lure got bumped as well but not hooked. I came up to see the line just peeling of the reel and there wasn't a thing we could do! Finally the line broke. The whales were still heading away from us with an occasional jump. This was a first for me. I have never had a dolphin or whale take a lure before!! It was getting dark fast and then I hear another shout, dolphin! We were visited by a pod of small spinner dolphin. They were jumping clear out of the water just 8-10' from the boat alongside of us! It was really hard to get any cooking done!!!



We were getting into a routine with the boat life. After the first day of sleeping and getting acclimated to the boat's motion, everyone settled down and we were getting up in the morning and there was time for a nap each afternoon. The boys got the fishing lines out every morning and checked them for weeds all through the day. We took turns cooking, except I was the only one allowed to cook the fish!

Sunday morning was quiet. The wind was spotty and we were motoring on course for Cuba. We were about 30 miles from Cabo San Antonia, the western most tip of Cuba. I was reading and watching for boats when I spotted a dark speck on the horizon. I pointed it out to Sarah and went back to reading. A little while later I glanced up to see if I could identify the mystery ship. I was surprised to see a Cuban chug several hundred yards away! We were going pass them at a right angle. They were waving at us and calling out. I slowed the boat down, the boys got the fishing lines in and we circled back to the chug. I didn't want to get too close, but if they needed something, water or food, I'd try to help them.





As we came about 2 boat lengths away we shouted to see if any spoke English. They responded by asking for Mexico in Spanish. They didn't speak English. One of them stood on the top and asked about Mexico several times. We pointed the way as we circled them. They wanted us to go to Mexico with them! They seemed all right so we returned to our course and left them. As we approached and circled them, the boat appeared to be dead in the water. As soon as it became apparent that we weren't hanging out they kicked their engine into gear and off they went!

About midday Jim and I had to make a decision. In cruising you can't be tied to schedules, you never know when Mother Nature will step in and make a mess of things. We hadn't planned on having to motor almost the whole way. We knew that as we got closer to the Gulf the wind would get lighter, if that was possible! With that in mind we started doing the math, 5 knots and 400 miles to go. That'll take 80 gallons of fuel, we have 70-80. We could slow down to 4 knots and burn less fuel but is there a real trade

off? That would put us home Friday, maybe. We have enough food so that's not a problem. How about going to Key West fast and putting on fuel and then being able to motor home from there fast? I'm starting to like this option. We can get a big boost, almost like a turbocharger, from the Gulf Stream and make 7-8 knots in. That beats the hell out of 4-5 knots!!!

I called my brother Jim who lives in Key West. Jim is in the Coast Guard and we could have him take us to a gas station for some fuel. I called him on the sat phone and explained the situation to him. No problem, he says. OK, we're going to Key West. We make the course change and as we get further into the Florida Straights our boat speed climbs. This change will get us home Wednesday night, that's great. I told Jim I'd give him a call the next evening to coordinate and give him a better ETA.

Late in the afternoon we would see the lighthouse and buildings around Cabo San Antonia. It was too bad we were running late. Maybe we should go in and see if they had fuel??!!



the lighthouse in the center.

CUBA! This is a shot of Cabo San Antonia, the western tip of Cuba, with

As we got into the Florida Straights we saw the boat speed climb. Half way to Key West we were seeing 9 knots of boat speed without an increase in RPMs. We also saw more ship traffic. Here is an example of the company we would have.

Tuesday would see the wind drop to nothing. Boy, are we glad we're headed for Key West! We got hooked up with a couple of schoolie dolphins. Everyone got a nice nap and we even had showers!





is on watch.

Allie doing dishes while Jim



off of Cuba.

Sarah with a morning moon and a sunset

Wednesday is quiet with little to no wind. The forecast is for the breeze to go to the SW. They hadn't done a great job of calling the weather yet for the trip so we take this forecast with a grain of salt! Late in the day a call my brother to confirm our arrival sometime in the middle of the night. We should keep the speed up until we get to within about 25 miles of Key West and leave the Gulf Stream. Jim and I agree that if we get in after 4:00 we might as well go straight to the marina fuel dock and wait for them to open. If we get in earlier it'll make sense to have him get our fuel so we can get back on the road. It looks like we'll get in around 4:00-5:00. As the evening settles in the breeze starts to fill in from the SW, son of a gun! Boat speed stays up in the 9s even as we leave the Stream. We zero in on the Key West sea buoy going fast. We get into Key West Harbor around 12:45. WOW. I call my brother and roust him from bed to help out. As we drop the sails He's headed for the dock.

We meet at an empty spot at the dock and give him our empty fuel cans. We can't fuel in the basin we were in without a fuel boom in the water so he makes two trips to fill our cans and grab us some ice and candy bars. By 4:00 we're back on the road and headed home motor sailing through the Northwest Channel. The wind is still up and we're making 7-9 knots motor sailing!

In the morning we see the condos of Marco and keep trucking north. It's comforting to see the local area again. There's Naples, then Vanderbilt, Bonita and then you see Sanibel out to port. The water color has changed from the beautiful deep blue we've seen for so long to the shallow water green. That is a let down! Off of Marco we got hit by a pretty good squall. The wind gets up to 30-35 and the rain is very heavy. We could use the rain to wash off the salt from the last couple of weeks.

Now the big question is when is the low tide? Will we be able to go all the way up the river or have to stop and wait for the tide? We past FMB#2 and the tide is real low. I looks like we may have hit it. I called Eric to get him to look up the Cape bridge tide. 11:53 tonight. That's Great!!! We can go straight home! As we motor up the river the current is going out. We'll get to the bridge an hour or two early so we may have to wait a bit. When we got to the bridge I slowed down and we started to pull ourselves along the fender. My gauge said it would be close. Can we make it? We s l o w l y inch to the old span. Are we going to hit??? NO!!! We made it. As soon as we got clear of the bridge it was pedal to the medal and lets' get home!

We heard the thunder moving in behind us. There's a storm moving in from the NW and it looks like it'll hit us just before we get there. As we race to the dock the storm is closing fast. It looks like it'll be a wet return for us! The lightning is getting closer as the night air gets cooler. We reach the dock and get tied up to the new dock in record time. It's starting to drizzle but that's all we saw of the storm. We grabbed our gear and everyone went home for the first time in a week and a half with several bagfuls of stories to tell.

Here are a few comments from the kids about the trip home.

Well hello again its Chalmers!

So the whole trip home has been a totally different experience that what I thought it would be. Lots of unexpected things have happened in the 5 days at sea some of which include meeting Cubans escaping on a homemade chug, seeing Cuba, almost catching a pod of pilot whales, Visiting the Coast Guard station in Key West and catching more fish than you can believe! Monday morning was fairly uneventful because of the slicked out conditions but we still tried to get up every square inch of sail so we set the spinnaker. But Monday afternoon was when all of the action started! Steve said that he had spotted a fishing boat or something like that on the horizon, but as we got closer I could see a person standing on the bow! What's up with that? Then Steve said that they were Cubans that escaped last night, so we dropped sails and motored over to them to ask where they

were going, and they said they were headed for Mexico! But then they told Allie, the only person who speaks fluent Spanish, for us to come up along side of them and we would both go to Mexico! Allie did her best to say that we were going north to Florida and they actually understood so they turned their motor back on and headed for Mexico. So then Steve took out his satellite phone and called his brother who is a commander in the Coast Guard fleet at Key West. He was going to call to ask if we could stop by and fill up with some diesel because we had consumed more than expected! But also in that conversation he mentioned seeing the Cubans and gave him the coordinates of where they were and where they were going. The day before all of that happened it was still slicked out but we had fishing lines in the water in hopes of catching some more delicious mahi. Instead everyone was occupied in looking at the whales that were jumping out of the water; fortunately I got some awesome pictures! And the next thing you know they were gone! So everyone just forgot about them, or not! The fishing lines start paying out line like it was nobody's business! So we slowed down to reel them in, but still with the drag full on the reel was still paying out line, then Jim thought what if the whales ate the lure? Oh boy so we have just hooked up with a whale! Then we see a big splash and the line snaps but it was fouled on the keel so Will went for a dive to untangle it! And right now we are almost home! After a nice pit stop in Key West where we picked up 25 gallons of fuel! So were moving along at 7 knots and are expected to be at Fort Myers Beach at 8 tonight! Well this trip home has been something out of this world, and I am sort of sad that I have to go home after 7 days in a foreign country and 5 days at sea! This trip has been a once in a lifetime experience that I will never forget!

See you all soon
Chalmers

Hey it's Will and all I can say is WOW. The trip by water is nothing like I had ever imagined. Mostly because I didn't plan on puking chicken salad all over the deck and because I got a couple of dreams fulfilled. Ever since the first time I got on SeaQuest I have dreamed of getting all of the sails up. This trip though most days there wasn't much wind we did just that it was so cool. The morning we prepared to raise the reacher I remember just waking up and looking to see in the cockpit a pink and white sail in a large bag. That nanosecond I connected in my head what it was and I was in the cockpit with the biggest smile on my face. Steve asked what I wanted and I responded to help raise the spinnaker. I was really excited oh it was so cool! Before that I fulfilled another dream to catch a Dolphin fish. She was a fighter she weighed 25lbs and I named her Michelle. Oh Michelle was a great eat MMMMMMMMMMMM! Oh yeah we also hooked a pilot whale. They were swimming around our boat when suddenly they all slow down and go behind the boat where we happen to have lines out and CLICK CLICK CLICK. We were whale on we stopped the boat and waited for it to either take it all or the lure. Then it stopped Austin starts reeling it in except we were doing circles around the line. Austin stops reeling it won't go anymore Uh-oh it's stuck but where? Steve asks who is going down a couple seconds pass ok I'll go I say. I get my dive mask and snorkel and my knife I go down once everyone is ready. It was stuck on the rudder and the keel but not the prop so I grab the line and just go down with it problem fixed! Yaaaaaaa! It was really cool and I was really excited.

See ya,
Will Hackett

Hello this is Austin and I would like to say WOW what a return trip! Ok first thing I would like to say about the return is I was seasick for TWO days. I can't believe it ME seasick HA! I haven't been seasick since I was four years old. I've always been good on the water never seasick since I was little thought I was over it and the seas weren't really that bad it's not like I was getting sick for big seas or anything. Well I got over it and you can ask any of my crew I was NOT a happy camper. After I got through the seasickness I was fine it kind of took me a while but I was ok after. First thing that was on my mind after was FISHING. Right when I was up for it I asked Steve if we could get some poles out we did the first fish we caught was a good size mahi it. We were in a line so Will caught the first next was me then it was Allie Chalmers and Sarah I think. I caught a good size mahi like Will did and all the rest caught some schoolies. The fish was delicious I haven't had fresh mahi in a long time so it was a treat for me. The ride home wasn't too rough we averaged around four plus knots UNTIL the wind died down. We had to motor/sail the rest of the way home.