

Episode 12 –Finishing the Loop

The number one rule of cruising is “go with the flow.” It took over two months for us to travel from Halifax Harbor in Daytona Beach to Treasure Harbor on Plantation Key. We spent much more time in marinas than we had anticipated. This meant we did not get to go as far south as we had hoped, and we spent a lot more money, but it did not mean we did not enjoy ourselves. Everyone we talked with, from new cruisers like us, to 20 year plus cruisers, said that this was an unusually rough season, weather wise. We daily reviewed various weather reports and planned accordingly. While we were in the marina at Treasure Harbor, we studied the reviews on Active Captain and made a plan to take it slow and easy back up. The captain picked out 10 anchorages that looked good on the way back to Miami. We discussed the plan with Pam, the harbormaster (and owner with 25 years local knowledge) and received some very good suggestions. We made our preparations, but when the time came to leave, we wound up going down to Snake Creek to cut over to the Intracoastal and heading north all the way to Boca Chita Key in one day. When we arrived at Boca Chita in the rain, we were thankful that we made that decision. We were very thankful for the sheltered harbor when the wind blew all night. We were also thankful for the wind, because it blew the mosquitos and no see’ums away from us. We stayed in this great harbor for four nights (with lots of wind) while we waited for another opportunity to visit with Doug’s son in Miami. Most nights, we had this little paradise all to ourselves, with maybe one other boat. But on Sunday, it was a different story. The word was out in Homestead and Miami what a great picnic place was available in this National Park. Many boats of all sizes came and went during the day. The most I counted in our little harbor at one time was thirty. Other boats tried to come in, but when they saw how full it was, they anchored around the outside of the island. This trip to Boca Chita, we added a beautiful star fish to our collection of creatures. Of course, it was at the bottom of the harbor, so we did not get a picture.

We were able to schedule dinner with Doug’s son Courtney and his fiancée Allie for Monday night. We left our little harbor at Boca Chita and sailed across Biscayne Bay to Dinner Key Marina. On the way, we were stopped by the Customs and Border Patrol and questioned. It was no challenge for them to catch us in our little catamaran since they had four 300 horse outboards on the back. We were not going to outrun them! Fortunately, I took the USPS Cruise Planning course where they suggested that I prepare a “boat book” with all the info on the boat. That made it easy to grab my book and the very first page was our paperwork showing we were a documented vessel. We thanked them for keeping us safe and went on our way.

Juan Carlos was there to meet us at the Dinner Key slip again. He helped us last time we were there, too. He also rescued our steps from the dock on our other visit. When we moved from the slip to the mooring ball, we left our steps on the dock. We called and asked them to hold our steps until we were shuttled back the next day to take a shower before heading out on the next leg of our journey. We were very thankful to Juan Carlos to be able to retrieve them. It makes a big difference on many docks, especially when there is no floating dock and the tides change. We did not find the other staff at Dinner Key Marina as helpful as Juan Carlos.

We arrived early enough at Dinner Key Marina to take a refreshing nap (with AC) and an even more refreshing hot shower. Remember, Boca Chita has no water for showers. We could have taken a shower on the boat, but we chose to conserve water and wait for the marina. Allie picked us up first, then Courtney before heading to another highlight from “Diners, Drive-ins, and Dives,” Scully’s Tavern. We had a great meal and an enjoyable evening.

The next day, it was back up to Hollywood City Marina. That was 22.1 nautical miles with 12 bridges. We learned from someone along the way to go to OffshoreBlue.com and print out the “Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway – Florida” bridge list. It gives the Intracoastal mile, name of the bridge, clearance, fixed or opening information, and other info on each bridge. This was very valuable. We could tell how we needed to travel, if we needed to rush to make an opening, or just take our time so we would not get there too early and have to wait a long time. We did

find that two bridges changed their schedules from what we printed out before we came south and we wound up waiting nearly an hour for the next opening.

The marina at Hollywood looked calm, but there was enough wind (20 knot) blowing away from the fuel dock that it made it difficult to tie up. After fueling, Capt. Doug did a beautiful job of pulling into the slip this time. If you remember, the last time we were here, we were having engine problems and with the wind, we hit a pylon. Wind seems to be a constant challenge at this marina. The staff all agreed that the earlier we left in the morning, the easier it would be. So we were out of there before 8:00 am. I know, that is hard to believe that I would be up by then, but you do what you have to do.

We only had 11 bridges this day in 22.3 nautical miles. We reached a sheltered anchorage in the north corner of Lake Boca Raton. I neglected to mention that we anchored here on the way down. It is a beautiful spot where we slept in the cockpit. One thing about our Island Packet Cat is that it swings a lot at anchor. The first time in this spot, we only set one anchor and the boat swung enough to wrap the rode around the anchor and pull it out. Fortunately, Capt. Doug woke up in time to notice the drift and reset the one anchor and put out another for safety. This time we used two and had no problem.

The next day, it was back to the same anchorage in Lake Worth after another 13 bridges. If you are counting, that is 36 bridges in 3 days. That is why many people choose to go outside through this section. With the weather reports we were hearing, it seemed advisable to stay inside and deal with the bridges. This is a great anchorage, and we only needed one anchor here. Even though the strip of the Intracoastal from Dinner Key to here can be challenging if you get impatient with the bridges, it is truly beautiful cruising. There are long narrow stretches with mangrove on both sides, and other stretches with amazing houses, I am talking incredible houses! I had a great time just taking pictures.



After leaving Lake Worth, there were only 10 bridges in the 44.1 nautical miles back to Ft. Pierce. Since this was Memorial Day week-end, we made sure we had reservations at each marina on the way up. We went back to Harbortown Marina. We had a slip here for a month before while we made the first trip down to West Palm Beach and back, and also while we took a car trip to New York and Daytona Beach for spring break. This marina has the advantages of a really nice pool, a great boater's lounge with a big screen TV, lending library, and computers with internet access available, and easy walking distance to West Marine and Publix.

Since we planned a short day up to Vero Beach, we stayed at Harbortown long enough walk up to Publix and West Marine. We picked up some milk at Publix, but fought the urge to buy much since we were on the way back to home port. We also took time to take another dip in the pool before taking off. It was only 12.2 nautical miles with 3 bridges, one on demand, and two fixed. We had an even better slip this time at Vero Beach than before. Of course, we had to laugh at the memory of hearing the shrimp clean the boat for the first time when we were here. Joey helped us cast off. It was his very first day, and he did a great job.

Sunday, with all the wind, we chose to stop at Melbourne Harbor Marina instead of anchoring out by the bridge this time. It turned out to be a very good choice. We had an easy-in slip and a comfortable night after lots of week-end boat traffic for 29.6 nautical miles (only one fixed bridge). We repeated many times, "You can't fix stupid." Motor boaters must not realize how hard it is on sail boaters when they zoom past very close, making big wakes. One big one came so close, we could have thrown them a line. Needless to say, it was a good thing we had things well tied down. Also, this marina had a great restaurant called Ichabod's. One of benefits was a \$5 coupon for the restaurant. We had excellent conch fritters and risotto with mussels, shrimp and scallops. Doug said it might have been the best seafood meal he had ever had. Most of you know how Doug loves to cook, so you know that is a lot for him to say. We will be going back there, even if we have to drive.

The manatee was there by the seawall to welcome us back to Titusville Municipal Marina. It was an easy 7 hour run up from Melbourne to Titusville, 36 nautical miles. We only had to request an opening for one of the seven bridges. We also enjoyed the dolphins along the way. We have chosen to leave Imagine at Titusville while we clean her up and prep her for next year. Yes, we are already making plans for next season.

As we traveled, we made a list of things that will make it more comfortable next year. The biggest expense in preparation for this year, was a new electronics system. We were very thankful we made the investment in a touchscreen Garmin with a vision chip for the Intracoastal. Since the Intracoastal is a narrow channel with very shallow water outside the channel, it is great to have the guidelines and information available at a touch. Since we want to spend more time on the hook and at Boca Chita next year, we plan to invest in a wind generator, solar panels, and a water maker before we go again.

To follow our adventures, please go to www.Windsongsail.com, click on "Our Stories" and select our names from the list of "Cruisers".

Love to all,
Capt. Doug and First Mate Joyce

More pictures on the next page below.

“Blondie” the first mate.



Check out that tan on Capt. Doug as he’s caught napping in the cockpit with the “Charger” blanket made by granddaughter Ally.



Boca Chita – our paradise

