

## LESSONS LEARNED !

Some lessons are learned the hard way. February is when we really started putting some miles under the keel as we moved up the east coast. Even with past boating experience, there are still things to learn. A wise man learns from his mistakes. A wiser man learns from the mistakes of others. "Lessons Learned" is the theme for February. I count five of 'em.

We left Boot Key harbor to go north on the ocean side, using Hawk Channel. This is pretty well protected on the north end of the keys, but it's almost the open ocean on the southerly end of the keys where the reef is deeper and not as continuous. The forecast was for 2' to 4' waves. We didn't see any 2' waves, but we found some 4' and 5' waves, all right!

The boat was pitching through the waves with the whitecaps coming over the bowsprit. It's 5' above the water. Mary and I both felt queasy. I had three jerry jugs tied to a fender board lashed to the starboard stanchions. The jugs started sliding back and forth, and the lashings on the fender board loosened. The darn things were sliding three feet forward and backward on the deck! I put on a lifejacket and went forward with a handful of dock lines and re-lashed everything to get the jugs secured. I did it... but by the time I finished I was really sea sick from working on the pitching and rolling deck. Gee, now I think I understand why other cruisers have these boards bolted onto the stanchions! The same thing applied to the dinghy, which started swinging and banging on its hoist lines on the davits. I rigged five more lines ( a total of seven lines, counting the two hoists ) to secure the dinghy and keep it stationary.

LESSON ONE: Things need to REALLY be secured when you go offshore !

The other lesson learned was that we both need to take our seasickness meds before doing this. Bonine has less of a sleepiness effect than other seasickness meds. We used that the second day ( which was also calmer seas ) and didn't have the same problem. Gee, why would two people who get seasick decide to sell everything and go cruising?

LESSON TWO: Take seasickness meds before going out on the deep blue sea !

The conditions were calmer the further north we went in Hawk Channel, and I figured out it was partly the offshore reef getting denser. That worked until the last few miles approaching Fowley Rocks, and the offshore reef petered out. But, it was a milder day with only 2' waves, and we handled it OK. We're going to practice this off shore sailing a bit at a time as we learn and get used to it.

We heard from a south bound cruiser that No Name Harbor was full. "You can walk across on the boats!" So, we passed into Biscayne Bay past the old stiltsville houses, and headed east to Dinner Key. We were motoring. A boat ahead of us unfurled their genoa, and quickly pulled away. Hmmm..... motorsailing. We unfurled ours, and gained 2 kts of speed, at the same time that I lowered the RPM's. Hey, this is great!

Dinner Key is both a marina and an anchorage area. The anchorages in Miami are not restricted. You can anchor pretty much anywhere the waters are protected and deep enough. This is a popular spot, as dinghy's can use the courtesy dock at a near by launching ramp, and you're within walking distance of the Coconut Grove area.



There's a grocery store and marine store nearby, and restaurants and a movie theatre in CocoWalk in downtown Coconut Grove. It's a great place to visit, and we stayed two days.

The second day we had a nasty surprise. After going ashore for a few hours in Coconut Grove, we got back and couldn't find the boat. Oh no... there it is... a half a mile away! The anchor had dragged while we were ashore. We chased down the boat in the dinghy, got aboard, and all was well. (The boat was soft aground, but I maneuvered and got it off). The anchor had 7 to one scope, and we had "backed down" to set it firmly. And, it had held fine for over 40 hours - a night, a day, a night, and half of the next day in windy, blustery conditions. I figured it was well set, but that's obviously wrong! Another "lesson learned" the hard way. The sea is unforgiving. I was lucky, and there was no damage except to my pride.



**LESSON THREE:** Set an anchor watch in bad conditions. Someone stays on board or stays awake at night. An anchor that is "set" may still drag later.

Time to continue our trip northward. The advice we had from many of our fellow cruisers was to avoid the south Florida Gold Coast and it's many drawbridges, and that we should take the outside route from Miami to Lake Worth Inlet.

Here's the weather report for the outside route:

.GULF STREAM HAZARDS...SEAS BUILDING TO 7 FEET THIS AFTERNOON...9 FEET TONIGHT...AND 10 FEET MONDAY AND MONDAY NIGHT THEN SLOWLY SUBSIDING TO 6 FEET BY TUESDAY.

Guess what... we chose to follow the ICW! We anchored by the Venetian Causeway in Miami, and then continued north the next morning. Despite all of the negative advice, we enjoyed the trip. The channels were nice and wide, and there was lots of interesting shore side scenery to watch.



It was a week day, so we weren't bothered with the abusive weekend boat traffic and wakes. And, best of all, the drawbridges were seldom a problem. Their restricted times are offset by about the time it takes a slow boat to make it from one bridge to the next. We usually found the bridge was opening as we arrived, or, we waited only a few minutes. We passed 31 drawbridges and only had to wait more than 5 minutes at four of them.

Next stop was Lake Sylvia in Fort Lauderdale. Fort Lauderdale is incredible; it's like Beverly Hills with canals and yachts. Wow! Great sight seeing! Lake Sylvia is flagged in some cruising guides as not a legal anchorage any more, but there were other boats there. Another cruiser gave us the secret dinghy route to the Southport Raw Bar, with dinghy dockage and nearby shopping and laundry. We stayed two nights while some weather passed over.







After the weather cleared, we were back on the ICW. It turns out the two headaches of being in a mooring (electricity and water) are not a problem while cruising the waterway. We're almost always motoring, and the engine has the batteries fully charged each day. And, our water tank will last three times as long as our holding tank. With daily running and a weekly pump out and water tank fill, we don't have problems with electricity or water.

Passing Jupiter Inlet, we ran hard aground. The inlet is confusing. My chart plotter showed the ICW passing on the west side of red "2". Chart 11472 shows the ICW passing on the east side of red "2". As I looked in front of me, there were two buoys; a "2" and a "2A". It's coming up fast... quick! What to do? I followed the chart and went east of "2", but west of "2A". BAD DECISION! The boat stopped dead in the water and humped upwards and then down as the keel ran aground over the shallow bar. Hey, no fair... I was in charted 10' of water! Idle. Neutral. Reverse. Forward. Left rudder, right rudder. Reverse again, and rev it up.... ah... we're moving again.

LESSON FOUR: Buoys are moved to adjust for changing channels. So, when in doubt, follow the buoys that you actually SEE. ( not the chart or the chart plotter ).

I grounded again, hard, in the ICW behind Ponce inlet. This time from inattention. There was a dog-leg curve, and I cut the corner slightly. Same result; it was a hard stop as the boat humped upwards and then down over a shallow bar. Again, I was able to maneuver and get off and going.

The chart plotter showed I was in deep water the entire time. ( Ha! )

LESSON FIVE: Don't cut corners, don't trust the chart or chart plotter. Watch the depth sounder, and PAY ATTENTION!



We stayed in Stuart for four days, as we re-supplied. This is a great place to stop for cruisers, and a chance for a family visit with Mary's Dad, Dick Davis and his friend Joyce Mullett.

There's lots to see and do in the restored downtown section, which is a few blocks walk from the anchorage. Unfortunately, the Stuart mooring field is being closed. Yup; it's another real estate development deal. It's supposed to reopen as a marina again, but the expectation is it won't be cruiser friendly once the high-priced development goes in.

Here's Mary taking the dinghy to do the laundry ashore at Stuart. The laundry is in the dry bag.



(Why is this woman smiling?).



Next stop Vero Beach, to stay at the moorings there. Vero is another very cruiser friendly place, with a beautiful setting, nice shore side facilities, and free local bus service. Highly recommended.





After leaving Vero, we anchored out by Eau Gallie. It wasn't by Dragon Point; since the wind was out of the southwest, I anchored on the west side of the river. We could see the collapsed wreckage of the Dragon by binoculars; poor thing. For the next night, we were targeting Titusville. But, it was raining when we got there. It was a gentle but steady rain ( not a thunderstorm ) and was slowly moving north to south. We still had better than 3 miles visibility, so I continued on a few more miles and popped out into sunshine. Great! We anchored for the night in Mosquito Lagoon.



Next night was Seabreeze; I was nervous about swinging into the channel, so I set two anchors and we dinghied over to Caribbean Jack's restaurant for dinner.

Next day was good weather after the fog cleared, and we made it to Palm Coast. The forecast was for a severe storm system the next day, so we tied up at the marina for several days.





This was another chance for visits with friends, the Myrick's, who came by for a visit from Jacksonville.



From Palm Coast, we bypassed St. Augustine and continued on into the Tolomato River and anchored for one night, and reached Fernandina the next day.

#### Itinerary:

February 6<sup>th</sup> – departure from Boot Key Harbor, Marathon  
 February 6<sup>th</sup> - anchored at Long Key bight  
 February 7<sup>th</sup> - anchored at Rodriguez Key, Key Largo  
 February 8<sup>th</sup>- 9<sup>th</sup> - anchored at Dinner Key in Biscayne Bay near Coconut Grove  
 February 10<sup>th</sup> – anchored by Rickenbacker causeway, Biscayne Bay  
 February 11<sup>th</sup> - anchored by Venetian Causeway, Miami Beach  
 February 12<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> anchored in Lake Sylvia, Fort Lauderdale  
 February 14<sup>th</sup> – anchored at Lantana  
 February 15<sup>th</sup> – anchored at Hobe Sound.  
 February 16<sup>th</sup> - 19<sup>th</sup> – on a mooring at Stuart  
 February 20<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> – on a mooring at Vero Beach  
 February 22<sup>nd</sup> – anchored by Eau Gallie causeway, Melbourne  
 February 23<sup>rd</sup> – anchored in Mosquito Lagoon near MM861  
 February 24<sup>th</sup> – anchored at Seabreeze, near Daytona  
 February 25<sup>th</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup> at Palm Coast Marina.  
 February 29<sup>th</sup> - anchored by Pine Island, Tolomato River  
 March 1<sup>st</sup> - on a mooring at Fernandina

That's 480 statute miles in 24 days; for an average of 20 miles a day. We typically ran 35 miles a day motoring, allowing us to stop mid-afternoon and relax. There were two 50 mile days where we ran long hours to reach a desired marina or harbor, but there were also weather delays when we didn't travel and days when we stayed in a marina or mooring.

March 2<sup>nd</sup>, we sailed out of Florida and into Georgia on the ocean side of Cumberland. That's covered in next month's update!