

Cruising Means Plans Change

In March, we stayed on a mooring in Stuart while we watched the weather for a calm period to cross the Gulf Stream to the Bahamas. Our departure point would be from Lake Worth Inlet, by West Palm Beach. We could have anchored near there, but Stuart is a nicer place to “hang out” if you expect to be waiting a while.

GULF STREAM HAZARDS...SEAS OF AROUND 7 FEET THROUGH SATURDAY...EXCEPT POSSIBLY 8 FEET FRIDAY NIGHT INTO SATURDAY PALM BEACH WATERS.

This is the forecast you often see during the winter weather cycle, December through February. There are occasional mild days with south winds. In the spring the mild days become more frequent, and later in summer you have lots of calm days for the Gulf Stream.

Our crossing plan was to leave from Lake Worth Inlet. It's one day from Stuart south on the ICW to Lake Worth. We'd anchor for the evening and get some rest, and then depart for the Bahamas in the wee hours of the morning. Our destination was the Abacos, and this is the standard “Northern Route” for the Bahamas.

With a favorable weather forecast for two or three calm days in a row, the wave height dies down and everyone waiting at Ft. Lauderdale or in Lake Worth dashes across.



It's March. We waited... days passed... There were a couple of brief crossing opportunities we missed, either by not recognizing them, or, not getting down to Lake Worth ahead of time for a one day window. Not a hardship, since we were enjoying our stay in Stuart, which is a cute little town.



Hmmm.... there's a \$300 customs fee to clear into the Bahamas. And, we want to be back in South Carolina in May. Our budget means we need to work part time for six months of the year.

Is it really worth \$300 if we're only going to be in the Bahamas for a couple of weeks? By mid-March we decide to bag the idea of crossing, and just enjoy our time in Florida. Here's the Stuart mooring field at sunset. Beautiful !

OK. So cruising means your plans may change. Does it look like we're suffering ?



On March 30th we left Stuart and headed north on the ICW. At last, underway again !

Our first stop is Fort Pierce, where we anchor on the south side of the inlet, by the Harbour Isle condos.

The next day we continue past Vero Beach, and tie up at Jones Fruit Dock, mile 945.

Here's a real taste of "old Florida". It's obligatory to walk over to the house and sit a spell and visit with Milton Jones, the owner. He's 91 and sharp as a tack !





The next morning we get an early start, before the power boats start to “wake” us.

The waterway is soft and still at morning twilight. It feels like we’re in a Norman Rockwell painting. Beautiful beyond words.

We continue and anchor by Dragon Point near Melbourne, and the next night by Titusville.

Hey... there’s going to be a Space Shuttle Launch on Monday! The shuttle program is being discontinued this year, and there’s only a few more launches scheduled. The NASA buildings and the launch gantry can be seen from Titusville; we’re only a few miles away. It’s as close as you can get without having a pass to the spectator seats. We decide to stay over a few days to see the fireworks.

AWESOME! You see the light, a fireball climbing slowly into the sky. It’s silent; then seconds later the continuous roaring thunder buffets you. We were miles away and yet I could feel the vibrations on my skin. It picks up speed and accelerates into the heavens leaving a white vapor trail, which gradually starts to glow as rays from the rising sun illuminate it high in the stratosphere. It’s a striking vision; the last ever night time shuttle launch!

I took lots of photos, but none of them are as good as this one from NASA:



We had another special blessing in Titusville. Our friends who inspired us to go cruising (and who led the way by doing it FIRST!) were in town. Eric and Mary Harrs lived aboard and cruised “Sea Gypsy” for four years. Eric and I had the same dream, but he beat me to it!

Here’s some photos of Eric and Mary, and “Sea Gypsy” when they passed through Port Royal.



THANK YOU my friends, for being our inspiration !

And, THANK YOU for the great stuff you shared with us from cleaning out your storage unit !



Even good times eventually come to an end. No one cruises forever. The Harrs are ashore now, back in Atlanta. Hey, it was GREAT to see you guys again in Titusville !



Back on the ICW... headed north...

Name that Lighthouse; St. Augustine !

Sunrise over Fernandina, from the mooring field.



Motoring on the ocean, going outside around Cumberland and Jekyll islands.

Epworth by the Sea on St. Simons, from the Frederica River anchorage.





Time to kick back and relax, in the Wahoo River, a beautiful wilderness anchorage.

We passed Hell's Gate at low tide. It was just dredged last month. We're in the channel; the power boat isn't! (Smile!).

Here's another one; a sailboat that was anchored near Skidaway Island. Uh-oh.



Georgia has 9' tides. With tides that high you have a strong reversing current every six hours.

Some people anchor with only one anchor. It's risky. The anchor may drag when the current reverses at the tide change. And, you could swing out of the channel and wind up aground.

In this kind of tidal range, I prefer to use two anchors in a Bahamian moor. One anchor upstream, and one downstream, both deployed from the bow. When the tide changes and the current reverses, there's an anchor already set for that direction. Plus, it limits the swinging. The boat pivots on the bow and stays mostly in the same place. It's a real pain setting two anchors, but hey, I like to sleep at night !

Finally, April 14th. Back in Port Royal! It's been 15 days since leaving Stuart, and we've traveled 560 miles on the ICW. We've averaged 37 miles a day; we made 40 to 45 miles on the days we traveled, but we had stopovers for weather and a stay at Titusville.

Returning to Port Royal is nice, like slipping on a comfortable pair of old blue jeans. It's great to be reunited with friends and the camaraderie of the local live-aboard group here.

But, Mary feels there's something missing in our lives. We need another crew member. Meet "Skipper", who has joined us in Port Royal from the local animal shelter.



"Skipper" has even been on a dinghy ride to the local sandbar.

She made a valiant effort to sink claws into the hypalon. I'm glad she failed... (Smile!).

Our plans are to stay in Port Royal for a while. We'll work six months and try to balance our budget, so we can leave and go cruising again !

...Roy & Mary
S/V "Gideon"