

EXUMAS

We made the same mistake that most first time voyagers do. We spent too little time in the Exumas. Georgetown on Great Exuma is part of the Exumas geographically, but really, Georgetown is a class unto itself.

The string of islands between Nassau and Georgetown are varied and beautiful. Each has its own personality and its own set of blessings. We skipped and hopped and stopped at five of them over ten days. Too few! Too fast! It's the journey, not the destination!

We waited in Nassau for mild winds (something under 20 knots) for five days. The old Bahamas hands were saying it was unusually windy this season; and the winds stayed for several days.

Finally a forecast for 17 knots in the morning, dropping to 10-15 during the day, and we depart Nassau across the banks, southeast to the Exumas.

The wind and current are both against us and we're making only 4 knots motoring, pitching into 3 foot seas as we leave Nassau harbor. Hey... I've got sails...

We roll out the genoa, and by making a bit of a dog-leg in our course, we get enough angle to sail close hauled. With the headsail out the 4 knots increases to 6 knots motorsailing. Great! The day continues to improve, and the banks crossing causes no problems. We're paranoid about trying to spot the coral heads on this route, and I think we over-react, spooking at cloud shadows. Ha!



The wind direction and the dog-leg course have pushed us more southerly. Instead of Allans or Normans Cays, we reach Highborne. (See what I mean? We missed two of the interesting ones!).

We anchor for the night in the lee of the island, and continue next day to Warderick Wells, the heart of the Exumas Land and Sea Park.



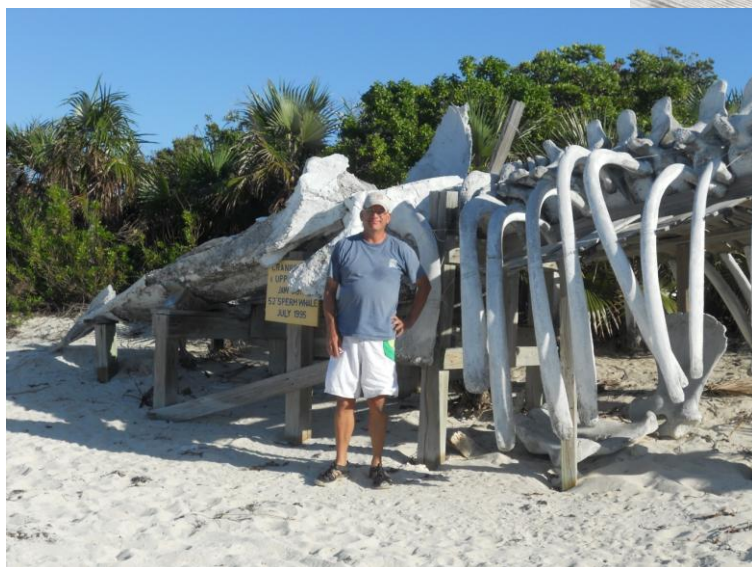
We arrive at the Park on Christmas Eve. Wow... what a beautiful spot! It's like it was created by God just for sailboats!

There's a semi-circular deep water channel around a central sandbar, surrounded by sheltering islands. A perfect harbor! There are moorings spaced every 100 feet or so.

Christmas Eve? Yes, and there's a park tradition. On Christmas Day the Ranger sponsors a "pot luck" dinner for all the cruisers in the Park, and supplies turkey, chicken, and ham for the main course. He cooks the meat personally, to a special family recipe!

Twenty boats. Forty people plus the staff, all sharing "Christmas" in paradise!

The photo is from the deck of the Ranger's home, with the anchorage in the background.



Over the next several days we explore both the land and water environment of the Exumas Park.

Here's a whale skeleton on the beach at the park. The sign explains it died after ingesting plastic. Remember, **NO DUMPING OF PLASTIC OFFSHORE!**

There's a tradition for visiting boaters to leave a memento on "Boo Boo Hill". No metal or plastic, only wood.

Ah ha... we have a bread board, hand crafted by Mary's Dad, Dick Davis. It was a gift to us in 1984. Solid walnut; weathered by use as a cutting board for over 25 years.



Now, it has a new and noble calling to represent "Gideon" on Boo Boo Hill!

We hike the trails around the park, and enjoy the tropical sunsets.

There's no services at the park; no fuel, no ice, no water, and no trash disposal.

"Gideon" has great tankage, but you can only stay so long before "something has to give!" (Smile!). We stay four nights, and regretfully move on.



Next stop... Sampson Cay. The Sampson Cay Club and Marina is open, although the fuel dock was damaged in the last hurricane. We go ashore for a celebratory beer-and-a-burger. You think cruising is cheap? It's a \$16 burger! (But, I admit... it was damn good!).

We head just around the corner of Sandy Cay to the Big Majors anchorage, near Staniel Cay.

Hey... there's a big yacht anchored out there. We swing wide to give it clearance. How big is that thing, anyway? It's the "Seven Seas", owned by Steven Spielberg!

A \$20 million dollar yacht, 282 feet long. If Steven isn't using it, you can charter it for only \$1.3 million!



Oceanco

And here we are, floating on the same water he is! (Smile!). I didn't get a photo as we passed; this is from the internet.

Big Majors is a large sheltered area, adjacent to Staniel Cay. The Staniel Cay Yacht Club hosts a series of events between Christmas and New Years, including several parties, and a sailboat race. We're here at just the right time! Hmm... so are the other big motor yachts! Big Majors has about 30 or 40 sailboats, several trawlers, and also several big power yachts; the kind you see at Ft. Lauderdale.

Here's our neighbor in the anchorage, a 100 footer, with a water slide on the back. I'm guessing there were another six or eight big boys like this.



Big Majors anchorage is famous for the pigs. They were domestic, released on the island, but now they're running wild.

If you bring your dinghy close to shore, the pigs swim out looking for handouts!

OH NO... DON'T GET TOO CLOSE!
The pigs can puncture your dinghy! We

swing by and throw some vegetables their way as the pigs came out, just for fun.



We go ashore at Staniel Cay to explore the island, and visit the Staniel Cay Yacht Club.

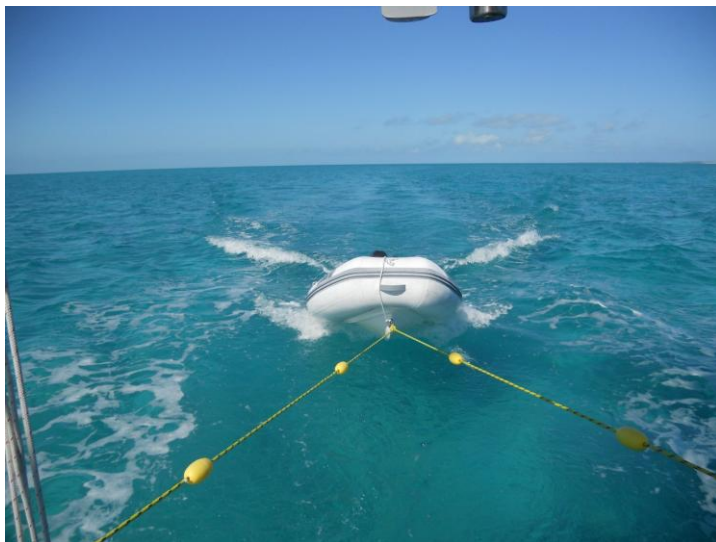
And, continuing our tradition, a beer and lunch to celebrate a “safe arrival”. Here’s Rapid Roy with a Kalik beer at SCYC.



Mary and I spend a couple of days here. We snorkel through the famous 007 Thunderball Grotto. We walk through the Pink Pearl Supermarket; and we reprovision and get propane at the Isles General Store.

Staniel Cay is a fun stop! Some cruisers spend a week here, especially with the activities at the SCYC during this time. Some even spend the season here.

BUT... we’re antsy. Georgetown or Bust! Underway again.



We’re on the sheltered side of the Exumas, and the forecast is benign today. We head south, towing the dinghy.

Towing saves the labor of hoisting the outboard, hoisting the dinghy, and strapping everything down.

We have a fast dinghy... lots of fun... but it’s a real pain to hoist!

Our next stop should have been Black Point. It's another place that's on everyone's list of favorite places. BUT... weather forecast... gale warnings! Two days from now! OUT OF THE WEST! The usual dominant wind in the Exumas is from the east so the sheltered anchorages are on the banks, on the west side. But storms will clock the winds around to the west, and many anchorages are exposed in that direction. Black Point especially.

The gale warnings are for day after tomorrow. There are sheltered anchorages behind us, in the northern Exumas. We can backtrack and find an anchorage. Or, we can continue two days further south and reach a nice marina to stay in. After a family conference, we hoof it south to the marina.

We stop and anchor behind Cave Cay on the way, and reach Emerald Bay Marina on Great Exuma island, on Sunday, New Years Day. Ha! We beat the gale warnings!



And what a nice place! A beautiful marina, but it isn't close to anything. It often has a low occupancy.

The rates are a bit steep, \$2.25/foot, unless you take the "no electricity" dock, where the rates are only \$1 a foot.

Ha! That's really funny... they didn't mention the bargain rate on the phone! (Sad Smile!). Next time we'll know to ask for it!

It's New Years Day, 2012. We're in a safe place to wait out the gale warnings. We've made it to Great Exuma Island and Georgetown is very, very close. We've been blessed!

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

P.S. We've promised ourselves, on the way back, to go s-l-o-w-e-r and enjoy the Exumas more. There's so much we missed... we'll have to go back again !