

FAMILY ISLANDS

During February, we visited Long Island, Farmers Cay, Black Pointe, Pipe Creek, Warderick Wells, and Eleuthera. We spent a week each at Long Island and at Eleuthera.

They used to call them the “Out Islands” until someone decided it was diminutive, and not politically correct. Now, they’re called the “Family Islands”. After a month in Georgetown along with a few hundred other cruisers, it’s time to move on and have a change of scenery. Ha! We’re still going SOUTH! Long Island!



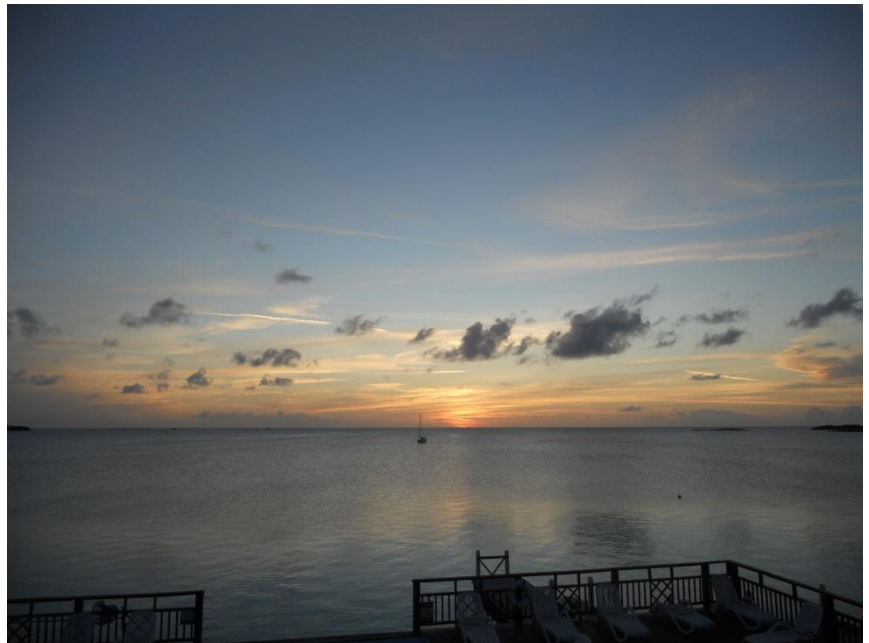
The cuts leading in and out of Elizabeth Harbor aren’t really treacherous; but they can be unforgiving if you don’t pay attention. There are rocks and reefs that are well charted, and you do zig-zags to get through them.

The Explorer Charts have GPS waypoints. You plug them in, store the course lines on your chart plotter, and follow them CLOSELY.

Even with the waypoints, you still PAY ATTENTION. Watch the color of the water, and where waves are breaking. Mary has the binoculars, watching a catamaran that’s going out ahead of us.

The route to Long Island is almost a milk run. The first few miles are on the open Exuma Sound. You can have big waves. But, as you go, you gradually gain shelter from small rocky cays and shallow sandbars. The last half of the trip is like motoring down Lake Lanier!

We reach Thompson Bay by mid-afternoon, set the anchor, and have plenty of time to get to the Island Breeze resort, and have a safe-arrival Kalik. Here’s the sunset from the Island Breeze resort at Salt Pond.



Sunday. It's our habit as Christians to attend church, wherever we are. It's sort of a serendipity experience. You never know the blessings you may discover! From the anchorage, we see St. Joseph Anglican church on the hill. This should be easy...



NOT! We landed the dinghy on a semi-sandy stretch of shore line, about a half mile away. Then, we walked the rocky shore until even with the church.

Where's the path? There MUST be a path from the church to the water. No! There isn't! We push our way through tropical jungle growth for a hundred yards up hill to get to the church. Ah, the tests for the faithful!

At the service, we meet a lady cruiser from another boat. She knows of a tangential path from the nearby road, past an abandoned house.

We let her be our guide on the way back to the dinghy; there's still jungle to push through, but it was a shorter stretch, and with a stone fence to climb over.

Ha! The lady manages this wearing a dress and heels! We gave her a ride in our dinghy back to her sailboat. I'm a gentleman, so I didn't look (honest!) as she hiked her skirt to climb aboard.

Wearing a dress to church... knowing you have to ride a dinghy, hike a jungle trail, and climb a stone fence to get there? I'm impressed!



Long Island is truly a l-o-n-g island. We rent a car for a couple of days to do a driving tour. One day south, and then one day north.

To the south is Clarence Town, with it's two beautiful white stone churches; one Anglican, the other Catholic. Both were built by Father Jerome.



From the front St. Paul's Anglican church looks beautiful; but then you realize it lost its roof in hurricane Irene.

A year later, they're still working on raising funds so it can be rebuilt.



Further on, we hike to Lord Dunmore's Castle. Well... it used to be a castle.

Here's Mary amid the ruins. Look at the background; that's what we hiked through to get there!

She's smiling that we made it without getting bitten by any spiders or snakes, and now we can go back to the car!

On a Long Island road trip, you gotta stop at Max's. It's a road side bar, but it's well suited to cruisers looking for a cold one ashore.

They even have coconut sculptures of a cruising couple, desperate for an ice cold Sands!



Mary is the red head; she's the one on the left. (Smile!)

On the north end of Long Island is the Columbus Monument. It's dripping with irony.

It's on an island that Columbus didn't land on; his log shows he sailed past Cape Santa Maria.

And, if you read the inscription, it's dedicated to the Lucayans; "the gentle, peaceful, and happy people" that the Spaniards (who followed Columbus) pushed to extinction by carrying away the men as slaves.

You can bet the Lucayans didn't appreciate Columbus!



Time to get moving again. Back for a quick visit in Elizabeth Harbor, followed by a pit stop at Emerald Bay marina, on Great Exuma.



It's a beautiful multi-million dollar western style marina located on a remote island. It has floating docks in an enclosed basin; the perfect place to stop for fuel and water.

Notice the dinghy's up on the davits, since we're going out on Exuma Sound. We tow it on calm days on protected waters, but we hoist it when we go on the exposed east side where it's rough.

On the way back up the Exumas, we alternate. We take the time to stop at some of the places in the chain that we had skipped on the way down. Different sights and scenery.

One is Farmers Cay. We anchored out with two anchors in the tidal run in front of the island.

Here's Rapid Roy at the Farmers Cay Yacht Club. Let me interpret this; "yacht club" means they charge \$5 for a beer instead of \$4; and "marina" means they have a dinghy dock, so you don't get your feet wet wading ashore. (Smile!)



While there we walked up to J.R.'s wood working shop. One of his sidelines is making "conch horns" you can use to salute the sunset. It requires grinding the tip down until you have a nickel sized opening as a mouthpiece, and then trim the sharp edges with a dremel.

You can make your own, but I don't have these tools aboard. Thanks, J.R. !



Mary and I walked the island for adventure and for exercise. (Dr. Oz says it's good for you!). There are small and large marvels. Most of the geography is a rocky, sandy, desert island. No topsoil. That's why the colonial "plantations" never made it.

But then, amid all the sand and rock, you see the incredible beauty of tropical flowers. Wow!

And, while you're out-and-about, you never know what cultural lessons you'll find. Life is tough on the Family Islands. The knowledge based economy hasn't reached here yet; its still pretty basic.

How do I feed my family? Well, there are wild goats on a nearby island. Here's a goat being butchered on the dock. The entrails go into the water, where "something" will eat them.



BUT... out on the same walk, we passed a local strolling along with his cell phone pasted to his ear. HA!



We continue northward along the Exumas, with a stop at Black Pointe, and fresh baked bread from Lorraine's Café;

And a stop at Staniel Cay, where we donated books to the library.

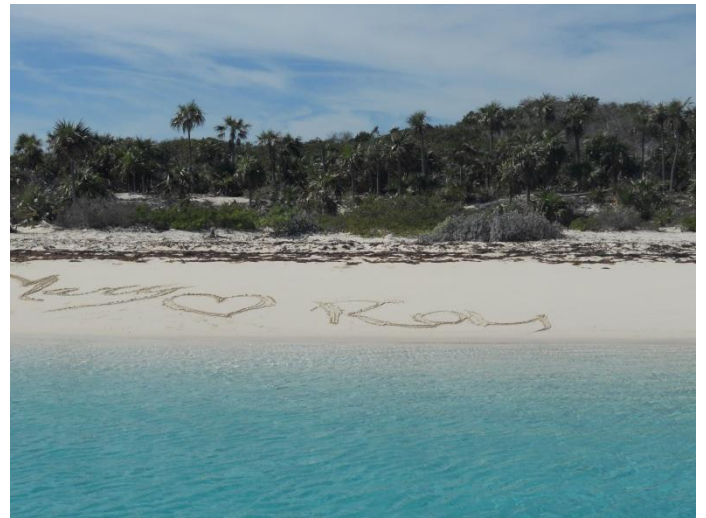
The library is the oldest building on the island, built during British colonial times. Note the air conditioning: thick walls, cool inside, with shutters!



On our way north, we stop again at the Exuma Land and Sea park, on Warderick Wells. This time we take a mooring ball in a different section, by Emerald Rock. The natural beauty of the islands continues to amaze us; we spend several days here, exploring the area by foot and by dinghy.



Here's "Mary Loves Roy" on a deserted beach by Hog Cay. We spent the afternoon here, swimming and snorkeling and walking on the beach.



After a few days, the winds die down, the big rollers on Exuma sound subside, and we have a mild south wind. PERFECT for crossing Exuma Sound over to Eleuthera!

We get an early start, leave through the cut, and do a day sail across to Rock Sound. It's a lovely little community, fronted by a large natural harbor. It's a nice stop for cruisers!



It's late in the day as we arrive, so we stay on the boat. The next day, we're ashore in Rock Sound to go SHOPPING!

I find a "husbands chair" in front of a local gift shop. Look close; I'm wearing tie-dye and the chair is painted in pastel colors. Hey, Tropical Camo!

Here's some more photos from Eleuthera:

Government building, in a pretty pink color. Gee, if we painted the U.S. Capitol pink, do you think congress would be a little more laid back?



Fifty pounds of laundry in a dry-bag backpack. (The Admiral insists on doing laundry from time to time.)



Governors Harbour, Eleuthera. The mooring balls behind me are empty; it's a beautiful day for sailing and the transients have headed out to their next destination.



De Colores!

A free range rooster in the church cemetery.



And, some photos taken on a “road trip”. We rented a car for a day to see the sights.

The famous Eleuthera “Window On The World”. It’s a square shaped cut between the east and west sides of the island, with the rock surface just inches above sea level.

At high tide, the surf from the Atlantic (east) side crashes over the rocks into the Eleuthera Bight (west) side. It’s high tide now.

The photo is from the bridge above the cut. If you approach in a boat, on the bight side, you see a “window” to the Atlantic!



Preachers Cave, where shipwrecked missionaries sheltered out a storm.



Do you know where the “First and Last Bar” is?

Eleuthera !



It's time to get underway again. We move from Rock Sound to Governors Harbour;

Personal choice; we don't take a harbor mooring, instead we anchor out. Bahamas moorings come in various stages of use, repair, and dis-repair. (The exception are the moorings in the Exuma Park; they're maintained regularly).

In the Bahamas, I've learned to pay more attention to anchoring. The subtropics weather can be temperamental. Sometimes, the wind blows 25 to 30 mph for several days!



I back down **HARD** on the anchor, rev'ing the engine to 2000 rpm in reverse to make damn sure it's set solidly. I really TRY to pull the anchor out and make it drag. If I can't, then it's set!

Once done, I trust my own tackle more than I do an unknown mooring. I know my gear isn't worn or weak or frayed.

At Fraziers Hog Cay, a boat was on a mooring that broke at night, and the boat went on the rocks. It was towed off the next day and still floated; but it doesn't sound like a nice experience!

After a few days to see the local sights and walk the nearby "pink beach", we head on out yet again, sailing north on the Eleuthera Bight. Next stop is "Current Cut". February 29th we anchor on the north side, in the lee of the island.

Our last Eleuthera sunset! Tomorrow... March 1st, we sail across the Northeast Providence Channel to the Abacos!

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