

ABACOS

March 1st we set sail from Current Island, by Eleuthera, at 4:30 a.m.

Many cruisers anchor in the protected harbor of Royal Island, and leave at first light in the morning, when they can see their way past the harbor entrance. But, our boat is a bit slow, so I like the extra head start. We anchored on the sheltered north side of Current Cut, and got an early start.



Sunrise over the Atlantic Ocean as we cross the Northeast Providence Channel. Looking east, there's nothing between us and Spain.

It's a mild sailing day, as forecast. Light winds, with the sails up more for stability than propulsion.

Safe Passage! We make it through the cut at Little Harbor, and anchor in the lee of Lynard Cay for the night.



The forecast is for weather coming. Several days of high winds. It's no fun being anchored out with the wind blowing over 20 knots!

Time to seek safe harbor. We motor north on the sea of Abaco headed to Hopetown.

Ah ha! There's the lighthouse on the horizon!

Safe harbor. The forecast was right, it “blew” for almost a week. But, we’re snug at Lighthouse Marina.

Hmmm... I wonder why they call it that?

There are only three kerosene burning lighthouses in the world. All three are in the Bahamas. The one here at Hopetown is still in daily operation!



Hopetown harbor is filled with moorings. Anchoring isn't practical. You'll hit something when you swing.

The moorings aren't expensive, but at the marina we get WiFi, showers, and we don't have to lug jugs of water in the dinghy. I figure the marina is the better deal!

Hopetown is special. It's a lovely community with pastel gingerbread houses and friendly, courteous people.

A little piece of paradise for boaters. With a week in port, we walk end to end of the settlement, with time to see everything.





The lighthouse is open to the public to tour, even though it's still in use. AND... as a special treat, if you come at sunset, you can watch the keeper pump up and light the kerosene mantle.

We walk the beaches and we rent bicycles and ride the Queens Highway to the north end and down to the south end of the island.



There's lots to see, and each day is a new adventure!





Sunday. As we travel, we visit a church wherever we happen to be. Here's Mary in front of Hopetown Methodist where we joined in Sunday services.

Behind the building is the beach and the Atlantic ocean.

You worship with a fabulous view of God's creation to inspire you!



And, while we're at Hopetown, it's INSPECTION TIME. There was a growling noise from the stern of the boat as we crossed from Eleuthera. What is that? We searched for the source while we were underway and found nothing. By elimination the next thing to check is the cutless bearing.

Mask, fins, and snorkel and into the water, then grab and wiggle the propeller. Yes, it moves. More than the 16th of an inch specs. Uh oh! Time for some repair work!

We leave Hopetown and boogie across the sea of Abaco to Marsh Harbour Boat Yard.

We arrive near high tide, and have the boat hauled out. The work list is a new cutless bearing, repack the stuffing box, replace a thru-hull sea cock, and get new bottom paint.



Here's BEFORE....



and AFTER pressure washing.



The growth buildup on the bottom wasn't that bad. Growth on the hull is worse in South Carolina than it is in the Bahamas!



From here the hull gets blocked in a parking space, for the work to be done. Our plan is to continue to live on the boat while it's in the boat yard. Does that sound weird?

Hotels in Marsh Harbour run \$150 a night. A week means a \$1,000 in hotel bills!

Instead we rent a car to go sight-seeing during the day, and the boat is simply someplace to sleep at night.

THE DECK IS TEN FEET UP IN THE AIR !!! It's a bit freaky!

"Skipper" is confused. Where's the water? She wants to jump down and explore, but it's TOO HIGH!



The same afternoon, we get our rental car. Whee! WE HAVE WHEELS!

Due to weather delays on the work, we spend 13 nights “on the hard” at the boatyard. It’s a hard life living on the hard... but at least we can get around!

We make the most of it. Over two weeks, we see more of Great Abaco and Marsh Harbour than a cruiser normally would. We drive all over town and around the island and see the sights.



We did a road trip with our friends Sami & Barry from “Déjà Vu” to visit Little Harbour.

Here’s they are in front of “Pete’s Pub” beach bar.



Little Harbour is also famous for the Johnston foundry and gallery of bronze sculptures. See: <http://www.petespubandgallery.com>



We visit Man-O-War cay by taking the Albury ferry over. Aha! SHOPPING! Mary found “Androsia” fabric she had been looking for!

These beautiful tropic designs and pastel colors may show up soon in a quilt or a tablecloth.



We take another ferry ride to Guana Cay. The “Barefoot Man” is doing a concert at Nippers.

It’s a special event, only once a year! Standing room only on the ferry!

Nippers, of course, is... well... it’s “Nippers”. There’s really nothing to compare it to.



It’s the Bahamas most elaborate and most extensive beach bar, with multiple levels and mind-numbing pastels everywhere!

Here’s Sami, Barry, Rapid Roy, and Sweet Mary, my first-rate first mate ! Mary is wearing her new “Androsia” blouse!

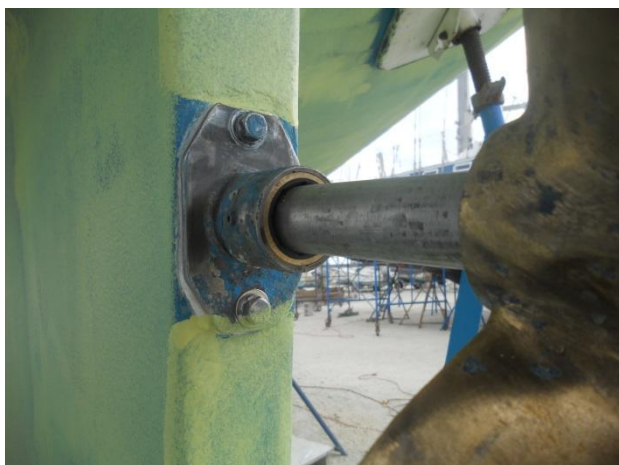




After the concert, we make one more stop to have a rum punch at Grabbers.

They call it a “Guana Grabber”; its the perfect drink to sip while you’re watching the sunset over the anchorage.

The anchorage is nice; just west of Grabbers, sheltered from the dominant east wind. You can see the dinghy’s pulled up on the sandy beach.



Back at Marsh Harbour Boatyard, progress is being made on our boat. The new cutless bearing has been installed. It’s the bronze tube with hard rubber lining that you see where the propeller shaft enters the hull.

A primer coat is on the boat, and the new bottom paint is applied.



FINALLY... after 12 days...
(due to weather delays)... All is
done, and we're ready to launch.

Here's the travel lift, ready to
"splash" the boat.

Doesn't she look LOVELY in her
new coat? (Smile!).

The yard bill? \$5,988. I'm glad my
wife doesn't wear expensive coats
like this!



Once the boat is in the water, the
mechanic makes final adjustments to the
stuffing box for its dripping rate, and we
move the boat around to the dock.



Finally, we're set to get underway...
tomorrow. (???)

The depth of the channel is
marginal. Time and tide wait for no
man, and it's mid-tide-falling. We'll
wait for high-tide-rising in the
morning to depart.

The extra night makes it a lucky 13 days in the boat yard !

Underway again. The reports on the whale are good; offshore waves are a bit steep, but nothing breaking in the cuts. It's passable.



We pass Man-O-War, Guana Cay, go out the ship channel, around the whale, and head for Green Turtle.

We arrive late in the day. I don't want to enter a strange harbor that may be crowded and try to anchor at evening twilight; so we anchor for the night in Coco Bay, on the west side of Green Turtle.

In fact, I'm not sure about anchoring in Green Turtle at all. I've seen how crowded the other Abaco harbors are. I like long scope for safety, and I get nervous when there's short swinging room. It's a dilemma. I may swing and hit someone; or, if I shorten scope, the boat may drag. A friend who recently anchored here dragged at 4:00 a.m. Dammit, I like to sleep at night!

After a phone call and a check of the rates, we reserve a slip at Bluff House.

There's a sweet discount for members of the Royal Marsh Harbour Yacht Club, and we'll have use of the shore side facilities.
GREAT !



We enjoy the sights at New Plymouth,
and saw some of the places we had heard
about; like Miss Emily's Blue Bee Bar.



Loyalist and Founders Sculpture Garden.

Fortunately we didn't wind up in "Gaol".
(Smile!)



We visited the famous Green Turtle Club,
and had dinner at their restaurant.





After several days of sightseeing, it's time to head west.

We leave Green Turtle Cay and head for the Hawksbill Cays in front of Fox Town.

We'll use that as an overnight anchorage before moving on to Great Sail Cay.

This one is JUST FOR ME... for years I've looked at Bahamas charts and dreamed of cruising these waters. One item has always fascinated me;

"Centre Of The World Rock".

There it is! Huh... I'm underwhelmed....



The next day we anchor in Great Sail Cay.

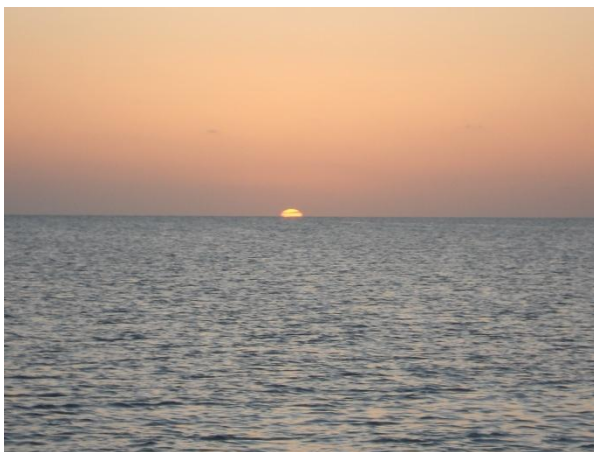
This will be our "staging" stop for crossing the gulf stream and returning to the U.S.

There's a mild crossing opportunity coming in a few days; so we have time to explore Great Sail by dinghy and enjoy the area as a quiet wilderness anchorage.

We're anchored low in Great Sail, since there were several other boats there ahead of us. Plus, I like swinging room.

This isn't a problem since we're protected from the dominant east wind, which is the forecast for the next several days.

AND... we have a perfect grandstand seat for watching the "green flash"! Here's the view west from the foredeck just at sunset. The sun is just above the bimini.



With a clear, crisp water horizon to the west, we get a "green flash" two nights in a row!

Finally it's time for departure. Back to the States. It's 115 nautical miles from Great Sail to the Ft. Pierce inlet.

We leave at mid-afternoon, planning for a 20 hour run to arrive mid-day the next day. It will be an overnight passage across the gulf stream.



The photo above shows us west bound, still on the banks, at sunset. The chart plotter shows the autopilot set for White Sand Ridge waypoint, with the boat motoring at 6.5 knots on flat seas. Life is good!

The waypoint is a bottleneck. It's a popular spot to enter or leave the banks. It's deep water, and a mile wide. (27 degrees 08'N, 79 degrees 11'W). There's boats entering and leaving the banks, plus ships are passing north and south in the deep water just off the banks.

As we leave the banks I look carefully for lights and radar blips. Since it isn't a marked channel, I also watch the depth sounder carefully, every few seconds. We pass an east bound trawler port to port, and I pass astern of a south-bound ship two miles out as we enter deep water.

There's not much activity crossing the middle stretch; the boat rocks along through the night; hours pass with the engine rumbling and the boat pitching and rolling lightly in the stream. Mary suggests dousing all of the cockpit lights; aha... yes, that's better. As our night vision improves we both feel more at ease.

We get traffic again as we approach the U.S. shoreline. The radar helps. Three small high speed vessels, presumably sport fishermen. One ship far away, and another a few miles ahead. There's lights out there; the ship is flooded with deck lights. Which way is it going? I flag it as a "target" on the radar, and get a vector of its speed and course. Ah ha... it's southbound; I alter 30 degrees to starboard to pass astern of the ship.



Noon the next day, we're in the Ft. Pierce channel. "Skipper" smells land!

It was 18 hours from Great Sail to the Ft. Pierce sea buoy, and 19 hours total to our anchorage on the south side of Causeway Island.

Friday, March 30th. WE'RE HOME AGAIN! Back in the USA!

We crossed over to Bimini on December 7th. We've enjoyed a four month circuit of the Bahamas; Miami to Bimini to Berrys to Nassau; then down the Exumas to Georgetown, and a visit to Long Island. Back north along the Exumas, then across to Eleuthera. Finally, a month in the Abacos. What can I say? We're exhausted, but HAPPY !

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