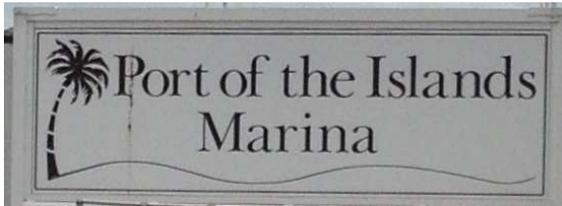


A Detailed & Personal Cruise Log of Dimitri's Voyage to the Ten Thousand Islands (Panther, Morgan & Picnic Keys) – January 9 -> 12, 2014

Day 1 – Thursday, January 9, 2014

Although I had luckily completed most of my preparations ahead of time, it was raining in Tampa on Thursday morning so I kind of dilly dallied around and didn't make it on the road until 11:15 or so. With a stop for gas and lunch, it ended up taking me about 3.5 hours to drive down to the Port of the Islands Marina which I had never been to before. I followed the sign and promptly ended up in a construction area that I had to back out of. After making it into the right entrance, I saw Art doing his final preparations on Kiva in the parking lot. I gave him a hand to launch his boat and he kindly offered to stay until I



had launched mine. But as it is at least an hour's worth of prep time to get into the water, I told him to go on and I would catch up with him at Panther Key. The mast went up ok but I missed having my helper along like I did with the Key's trip a couple weeks earlier. The tide was a bit low but the ramp was steep enough not to have any problems although I did have to back up all the way to the end of ramp sign. This would turn out to be more challenging when pulling out on Sunday but let's not get ahead of ourselves. Although this was the first time I had been to these parts, I had briefed myself extensively with marine charts and



Google satellite pictures. Too bad all this stuff didn't exist when I was actively flying airplanes over 20 years ago since it really helps get acquainted with the area. I started motoring south down the Faka Union Canal and the tide was starting to come in against me, contrary to the trip to the keys a couple weeks earlier where it seemed like all tides and winds were in our favor. I followed the channel markers



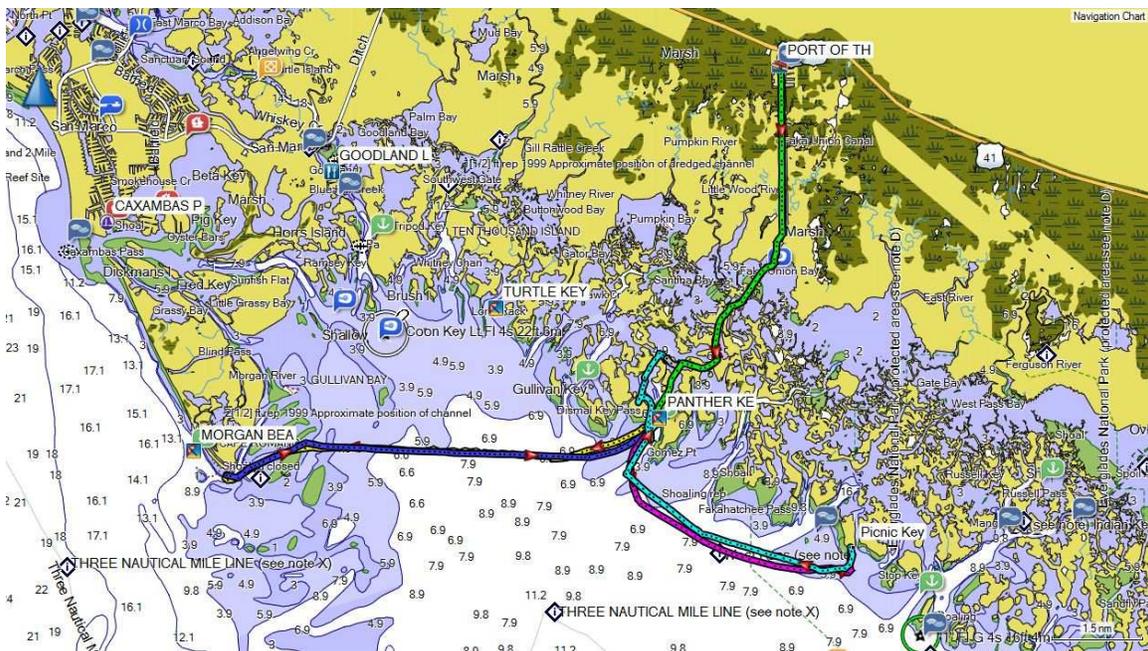
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carefully because there were some parts where the canal or river got down to 3 feet or so. But some areas were also very deep as



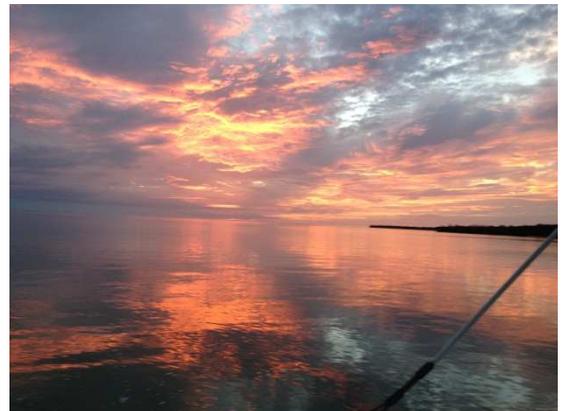
well. After a healthy 7 miles of weaving between what seemed to be 10,000 islands, I came out into the open at Panther Key and was impressed by the very long expanse of white sands that was well protected from the ESE winds



I found the first five squadron boats on the beach and anchored just as a spectacular sunset was occurring. Ron took the picture of the calm setting at Panther Key with me in it on Thursday evening. We had a little bit of firewood and were able to keep a small fire burning for a few hours on Thursday night. We sat around and debated what the weather might be like on Friday and whether we should make a side trip to Cape Romano and



would there be enough time to also go out to lunch. It seemed that



there were not a lot of folks who wanted to try to do both Cape Romano and Goodland in a single day.

Day 2 – Friday, January 10, 2014

After a leisurely breakfast on a foggy morning, we got off about 10 AM and Art cruised along on my boat. Winds were light but we poled out the jib on the broad reach and were making a few knots at the beginning. Then the wind started dying out to the point that we all started our motors and motored most of the way. Landing at the tip of Morgan



Point turned out to have a lot of current so I had to keep the boat from getting broadside on the beach. We stayed for a little over an hour, took some pictures of the remnants of the dome homes that a developer had built



in the mid 80s when this land was not under water. We also gathered up some of since there Panther Key.

the plentiful driftwood on the island was quite a bit more here than at We would have a bigger fire tonight!

About 1:20 PM, we traced our way back through the shoals the same way we had come through them and headed back towards our base at Panther Key. The wind was right dead on the nose and we were too gentlemanly to sail into the wind so we motored back just after 3 pm. It didn't turn out to be the best wind for sailing



so we called it an early day. When we returned to the beach, two more boats had arrived, John and Colette on their Hobie Tandem Island and Chris on an O'day day sailor. The crews on both of these new boats pitched tents on opposite ends of the beach. We made our dinners and then low and behold, yet another spectacular sunset, as good as or better than the day



before. I paused to get some more good pictures of the sunset and we also got the fire going about half an hour before sundown.



It was another nice evening socializing with the WCTSS gang. There were a few bugs on



the beach but nothing nearly as bad as what we had experienced at Elliot Key during last month's Biscayne Bay cruise.

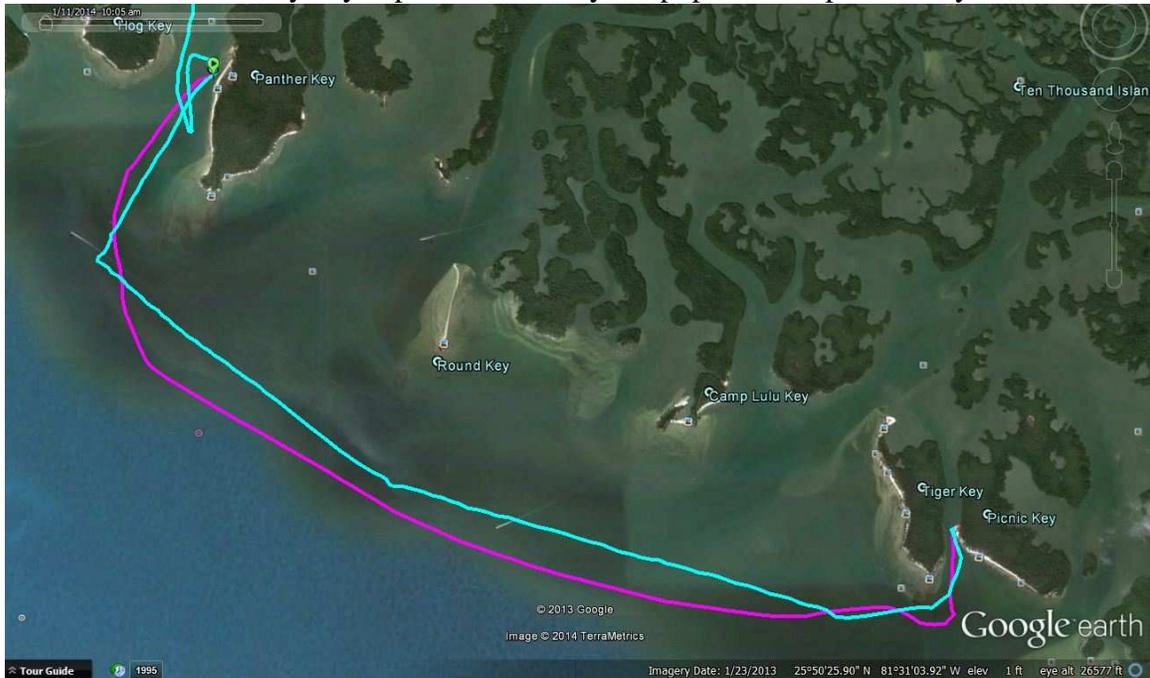
We burned up about half of the wood we had collected over at Cape Romano and saved the rest so we could have a fire on our last night. But it turned out that with the looming cold front, most of us would anchor out on the final night so not sure if the two tent



campers who stayed on the beach ended up having a fire or not. If not, then I guess the next visitors to Panther Key beach got lucky and found a bunch of firewood!

Day 3 – Saturday, January 11, 2014

It would be foggy again on Saturday morning but not quite as thick as Friday morning when we could not even see Hog Key a few hundred yards on the other side of the pass. While I was making my typical bacon egg muffin for breakfast along with some Italian coffee from my mini percolator, Ron was running around with some charts trying to figure out where we would go for today's excursion. With a SE to S wind forecasted today to be better than yesterday, the group decided to go east over to a little pass between Tiger and Picnic Keys. This would be about 5-6 nautical miles each way, a tidy little distance for a lazy day trip and took us by the popular Camp Lulu Key too.



The purple track shows the way East and once again, we started around 10am making a few knots with the SE breeze but within an hour, it had mostly died out again so all the boats started up their motors in succession. I don't mind motor sailing a bit on these longer cruises because it charges my batteries back up and I don't have to worry about running out of power. Since we were at the west side of Picnic key during lunchtime, it did make sense to have a picnic lunch! In this picture of the 5 boats on the beach, you can see how narrow the pass is between the two islands. When pulling out of there, the current was so strong in turning me around



that it wrapped my rode chain around the fluke of my anchor and pulled it out of the ground. Although a nice place for a lunch spot, definitely not a good place to anchor for a night. I didn't see a sign next to a blue building that I personally saw there by the beach (Cyan track in



get a picture of it, but that said Picnic Key right next to a porta-potty like what you would see at a construction site. I didn't investigate but I later read that park service puts park potty's and are actually toilets. On the way back (the Google Earth picture),

the wind had picked up out of the south and it was finally windy enough to sail well without any motor assistance. The 90 degree dog leg to the North was where I was testing out a newly designed autopilot to make a gybe for me. Then I took out my video camera and took some movie footage of About Time and Kiva approaching the beach at Panther Key. The first three pictures on this page are stills from the video.



I did a "gybe-by" the beach to take these video pictures and as I was taking footage of the beach, Colette was taking pictures of us heading in (the last two pics on this page are the inverse pictures courtesy of Colette).

I then headed south into the wind to pull my main sail down. The wind was now out of the south and



starting to clock towards the SW a bit. Panther Key beach is well protected from all winds except the SW so with the winds forecasted to keep increasing with the cold front, small waves were already starting to lap the beach and the prospect of

the wind picking up in the night did not favor Panther Key for our third night out.

Instead of heading straight to the beach, I decided to explore some anchorages better protected from the cold front wind shift forecasted for this night. The wind would clock through SW-W-NW overnight and would be North in the morning. As you can see from the cyan track, I first went behind Hog Key. I had to make that funny loop to avoid a sand bar that goes around Hog Key. If I decided to stay on the beach at Panther Key that evening, I could always retrace my steps behind Hog Key after dark and anchor there. As it was only about 15:20, I decided to go a bit further north and explore an anchorage that Ron had told me about that morning. Although I didn't know exactly where it was, I was generally aware of the location and my charts showed pretty deep water to the east of Four Brothers Key so I headed North through the pass. My board dragged a bit so I had to make that little jog to the west to get back into deeper water. Although there is no name on the Google Map, the island just north of Four Brothers is called Dismal Key and as you can see, it has a large basin that is well protected from all directions. I started going in there but the water fell to under 3 feet at high tide and I didn't want to be on the ground in the morning with the North wind so I headed back SE to the end of the cyan



track where the water was 4-5 feet deep. I threw an anchor to test the holding and did a couple jobs on the boat. The time was before 4pm and I still intended to go back to Panther Key but about then I heard Ron on the radio saying that 4 boats had left Panther Key and were headed my way. At that point, I cracked open a cold beverage and decided that I'll just stay put since this seemed like a good place to weather the frontal passage. Since I had such a hard time anchoring down near Key Largo, I was a bit paranoid about dragging and since I was the only boat in the basin when I got there, let out a lot more scope than I needed to (probably close to 20:1 to be on the safe side). The wind was mostly south at this point but with an easterly current, I was facing SE. This would become relevant later that night. Whisper and Shadow pulled into the basin and anchored

about 200 feet to my south, and then About Time pulled in and anchored about 60-80 feet to my east. I was somewhat concerned that he was too close and Jack offered to move but I waved him off thinking that we would probably just swing together during the wind shift. Art steered Kiva about 150 feet to my West and anchored. It was a quiet evening with all of us keeping to our boats. I fixed dinner and turned in early to watch the rest of



the movie I hadn't finished the previous night. And when that one was over, I started watching another one which I got about 2/3 of the way through before my laptop battery died. Somehow, between the Key's trip and this trip, the power cord went bad on my regular DVD player that plugs into boat power. I can charge the laptop with an inverter but I normally only do this when the engine is running so I just put it away when the battery died. By this time,

it was around 10PM, I phoned home with my 2-3 bars of cellular coverage and felt tired like I was ready to sleep. I was about to doze off when I looked outside the window and saw Jack's mast head light moving very close to me as the boats were dancing around in the increasing SW wind. This took away my sleepiness as I remembered where he had anchored and started drawing swing circles in my mind. Since I was anchored on a SE bearing when I started, that would mean I would swing first to the east as the wind shifted from the west and then eventually I would swing to the south as the wind shifted north in the early morning. Since Jack had anchored only 60-70 feet to my East and since I probably had 80-100 feet of rode out, he was in my circle and may have only let out 30-40 feet of rode so his swing circle would be much less than mine. And then there were the currents too which would shift at least once. I went out into the cockpit and looked at Jack's boat. The wind was picking up some, a couple showers were on the radar about 10-15 miles away near Marco island and Jack's boat still seemed like it was 40-50 feet away but it was getting closer as my boat swung in its larger circle. I suppose I could have shortened the rode some, but I really didn't want to reduce scope either since the winds could spike with the frontal passage. I went down below, got back in bed but couldn't sleep.

Day 4 – Sunday, January 12, 2014

By now, it was just after midnight, the showers were getting closer although they were weakening some as they moved south. I was still worried about Jack's position so I went back outside. Now the wind was out of the west but between the Mac's hull sailing due to its high freeboard and the current, I was still pointing south. But Jack was way too close now, probably only about 20-30 feet away. I shined my flashlight at his boat and I guess he wasn't sleeping well either because he came right out. Since he anchored after me, he did the polite thing and offered to move his boat to which I agreed. He moved

about another 50-60 feet to the east and dropped his anchor again. I thanked him for moving. We both sat outside and watched the boats for a while longer and something still didn't seem right. I had set a drag alarm of 150 feet on my iPhone and it was not going off, but was it working right? The motion of the boats didn't seem right and it was like I was still getting closer to Jack, but the current was holding the boat some too. Jack had noticed this too and yelled over that I was dragging...but was I? I really couldn't tell but seeing as the wind was out of the west now and my position had already shifted about 100 degrees, I didn't want to take any chances if I was going to have any chance of getting some sleep. I started pulling the rode and it was quite slack. Was this because I was dragging or because the current was holding me close to my anchor? I kept pulling it up and then got to the chain, pulled that up some until I got to the anchor and it was buried hard. It had not come unset; but maybe this is because there is still an easterly current and perhaps it is going to shift west later. Danforth's have a bad reputation of unsetting if the boat does a 180 and I've already shifted more than 100 degrees so I gave it a gorilla pull and got it unstuck. I found it to be a very muddy bottom which is typically very good holding for a Danforth. I didn't want to be so close to these other boats any longer so I motored about 300 feet north into the basin and dropped the hook again, backing it to the south to set it. I suppose I had probably woken everyone up in the anchorage by now but I had to set my anchor and make sure it wasn't going anywhere. I looked at my clock, wow, it was almost 2 AM; I didn't realize that much time had gone by. I went back below just in time as the showers had arrived although they just turned out to be pretty light compared to what was on radar a few hours ago. I had a couple cabin top leaks that I failed to fix before the trip so I just dangled a tarp from the ceiling to catch the few drops of water (diverted from dripping on me) and finally went to sleep.

Sleeping in to about 7:30 after the night's excitement, I woke up to lower humidity, clear skies and brisk north wind. All the boats were still in the anchorage when I woke up but by about 8:30 when I went outside to cook breakfast, 3 of the boats had left. Only Kiva was still there with me. I cooked my last egg muffin of the trip, packed up everything and raised anchor about 9 AM. Art was also weighing his anchor about that same time and I pulled out of the basin right behind him. He went south for a bit and explored a cove at the north end of Panther Key which he later told me would have been another protected area we could have weathered the front in. I went north towards POTI marina since I needed to be home by 4pm to watch the kids. Since I knew I would motor, I had left my boom tent up but heading into the wind, it was flapping so badly, I had to pull it down. I passed John and Colette peddling and beating into the wind and then just a couple miles from the marina also passed Chris who was sailing (short tacking) with just a main and a bit of engine power in the 2-300 foot wide canal. I later found out that he was doing this because he had a partially broken prop and could not develop enough thrust against the wind with motor alone. At least the tide was incoming so it was favorable for the trek northward.

When I arrived at the ramp, the two sea pearls were already out and Jack was taking down his mast at a floating dock. I pulled into the ramp with the tide still being rather low. I had plenty of helpers to get loaded but with one axle already off the end of the ramp, I could not back down any further and would have to winch the boat for the last 3 feet. I attached the winch to the fore dock line and started cranking. The angle was steep and the ballast was full and with a crack the rope snapped. Luckily it did not take my cleat with it. I guess it was kind of an old dock line so was probably weak. I had the boat far enough up to get the bow eye now and so winched it the rest of the way without incident. I was hauled out by about 10:30 and pulled over to the side of the parking lot to de-rig. After a leisurely prep time and some goodbye conversations with the other sailors, I made some lunch for the road and was out of the marina by 12:30 and home by about 3:45...15 minutes to spare! I was last one out, about 10-15 minutes after Art and in fact I passed him on I-75 somewhere near Sarasota.



Statistics and Closing Thoughts

Daily Boat Nautical Mileage:

Day	Miles
1	7.1
2	15.3
3	13.8
4	6.1
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Total	42.3

The attendees of the 2014 10K Islands' cruise were:

Name(s)	Boat Type	Boat Name
Ron	SeaPearl Tri	Whisper
By	SeaPearl	Shadow
Jack	Suncat 17	About Time
Billy	Suncat	SeaCat
Art	Peep Hen	Kiva
Dimitri	Mac 26X	Lucky 7
John & Colette	Hobie TI	SpunKey
Chris	ODay Ds2	

Despite the middle of the night re-anchoring, the cruise was a great success. I had wanted to explore this area for years so was very happy to finally go there.



Last Pic - The Spectacular Sunset from Panther Key

The rest of my pictures from the cruise can be seen at:

<https://picasaweb.google.com/118432519420056328189/10KIslandsWCTSSJan2014?authkey=Gv1sRgCNm80aSRINKCvwE#>

{ Cut and paste whole 2-line link into a browser if second line is truncated from link (well known Adobe PDF problem) which causes a page not found error in Picasa }