

A Detailed and Personal Cruise Log of Dimitri's Round-Trip Voyage from Old Tampa Bay to Cayo Costa and Pelican Bay – November 10-15, 2010

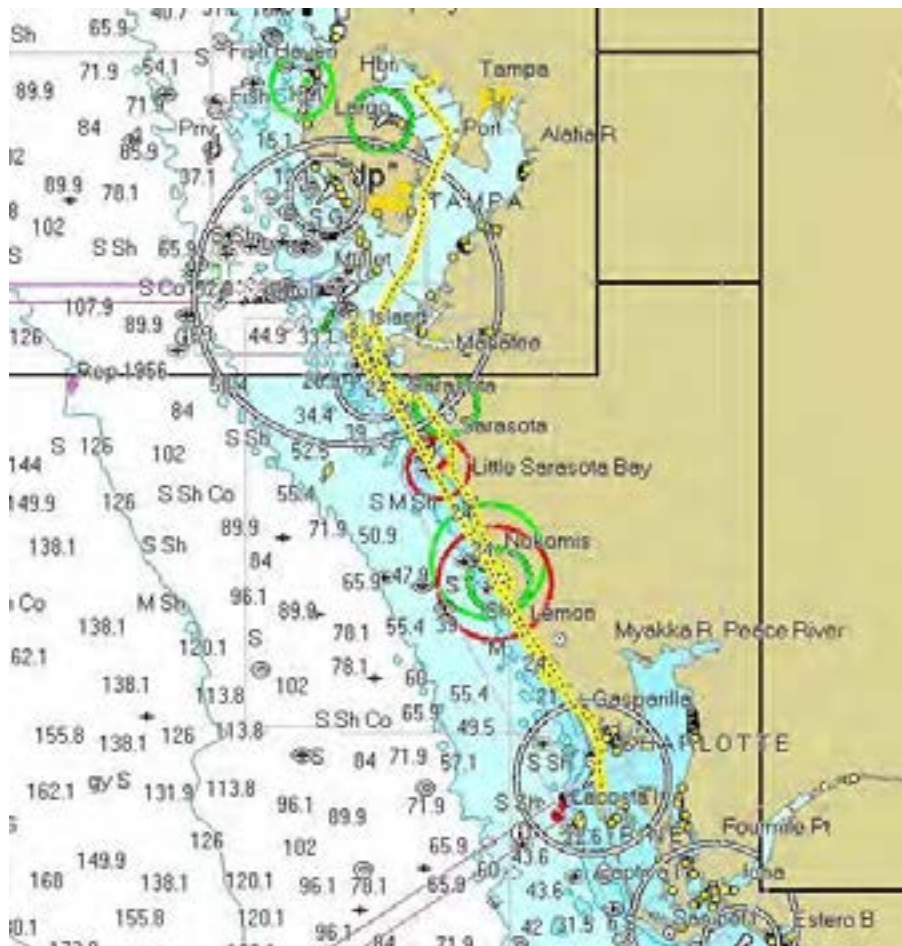


Figure 1 - Florida's West Coast Marine Map with Overall Track

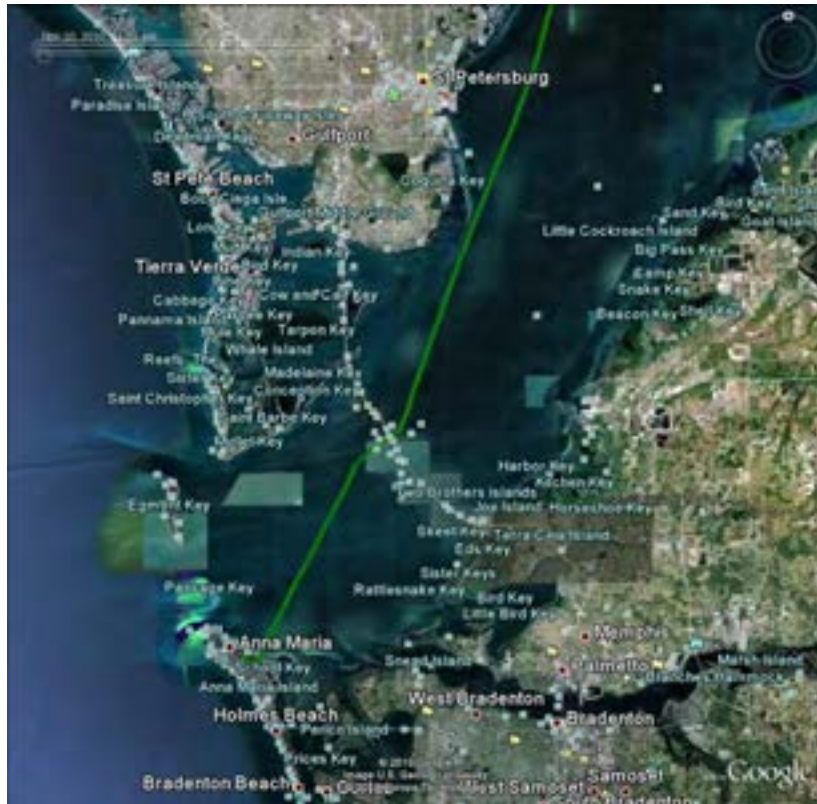
Day 1 – Wednesday, November 10, 2010

After spending about 3 days preparing and provisioning my 2000 Macgregor 26X Sailboat, I set off around 10:30 AM from my slip in Old Tampa Bay North of the Courtney Campbell Causeway. The weather forecast over the next few days is very nice. Low humidity, highs in the upper 70s, lows around 60. But coming out of Tampa today, winds were non existent so I had to motor all day long. Although the Mac

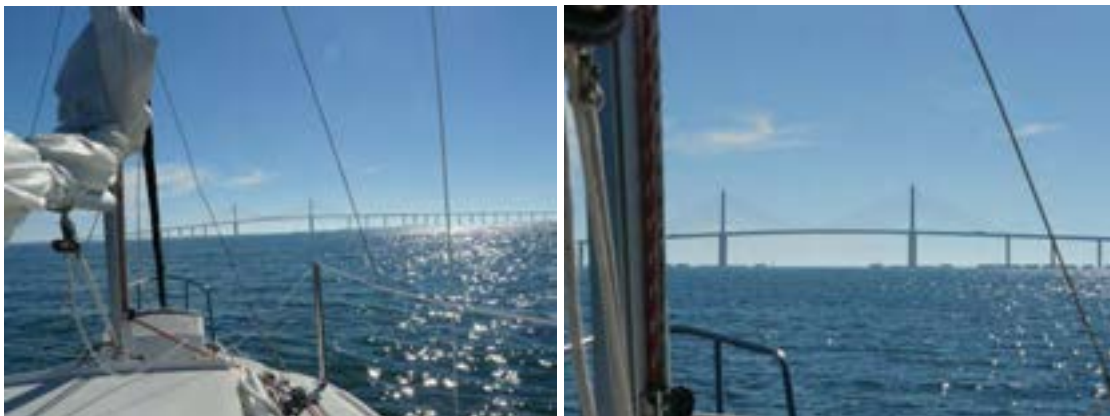


can do 15 knots on a plane with 50HP, it burns about 4 times as much gas per mile as when going hull speed like a traditional sailboat. I expect it only takes 10% of the available HP to keep it going at hull speed and since I had a long trip ahead of me, I wanted to conserve fuel. As I passed Gandy Bridge and rounded MacDill AFB, I made the turn to a SSW heading but still no winds to continue my ~115 mile southbound journey with. But I was on a schedule to meet the WCTSS bunch on Friday and so I kept on motoring.

It seemed like I could only operate in certain RPM ranges without the motor coughing and spitting a bit. I've had some dirty carburetor problems in the past and hoped that they would work their way out (which is what happened during my 2009 Cayo Costa trip with the trailer). The boat is well set up for single handing; all lines led aft, auto-pilot, etc. So it is easy to eat while under way and I had my first of two prepared sandwiches while passing St Petersburg. My target for the day was Anna Maria Island.



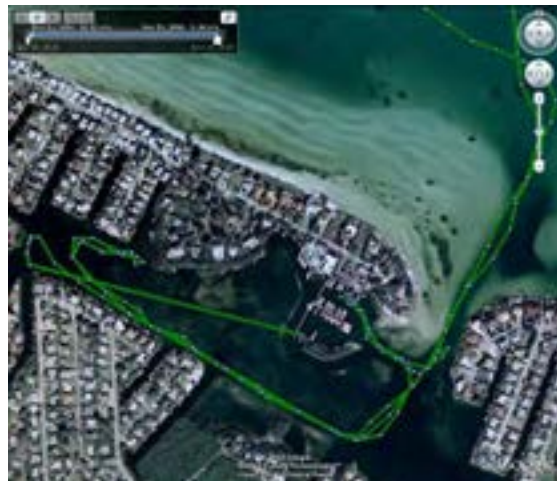
Going under the Sunshine Skyway is always a fun thing to do so I took a few pictures.



Another cruiser I know from the mailing list (Randy W) was heading northbound on his Pearson 35 after 3 weeks in the Keys. He had phoned me to see if I might make it down to meet him either today or tomorrow or if there was anything I needed. But he had only made it to Blackburn point for the night and that was still very far from where I was. I later found out that Blackburn point is a favorite hang-out for cruisers since the restaurant docks will supposedly let you stay overnight tied up after eating there.

Nearing the “bulkhead” sandbar in Anna Maria Sound a little after 4pm, I typically start heading south down the ICW towards Cortez but with the NE wind forecast for Thursday, I had decided I would go out in the Gulf the next day so I headed west into Bimini Bay on Anna Maria instead. In my cruising guides, I had read about a marina restaurant named Rotten Ralph’s in there that supposedly has very good seafood so I explored the bay looking for a place to anchor. By this time, it was after 5pm and it gets dark at about 6pm this time of year so I didn’t want to be caught un-anchored by dark. After finding what looked like a reasonable spot (albeit in a residential area), I circled back towards the Galati Marina to check out Ralph’s. I humbly think I do pretty well single handed in general, but there is one thing that is very difficult to do by myself on a 26 foot boat and that is docking in a cross wind on an upwind dock. Since now a bit of wind had popped up out of the East, the restaurant dock had this problem and I tried unsuccessfully to dock twice in front of about a dozen people dining out on the dockside within a rope’s throw of where I was trying to maneuver. I would get the stern line attached and before I could run to the front, the bow would start moving off and then I’d have to run back to the helm again to reverse out before I hit something. Not to mention the fact that the rough low speed operation caused the motor to stall a few times too. I couldn’t believe all these people just sitting there and not a single person could lift a hand to assist. These certainly couldn’t be sailors, must be tourists or something. The downwind dock was the fuel dock even though it was very close to the restaurant, so finally, I decided to dock there. AFTER I had both lines secured, the dock master comes out to inform me that the fuel pumps are closed. I made a frustrated remark to him about his lack of assistance when I needed it, and told him that I was there for the restaurant at which he said it was fine to dock there and he left for the day. I can’t say that the customers or employees at Galati Marine were particularly courteous to this single handed sailor.

But the food was in fact quite good. Since it was fast getting dark, I couldn’t afford to eat at the restaurant and ordered some take-out coconut shrimp and a blackened grouper sandwich. I had an Ybor Gold beer at the bar while waiting for my food to be cooked. The bartender was telling me about how people in Anna Maria were kind of strange and may not like the fact that I’m anchored anywhere near their houses. It was almost dark so I was going to take my chances anyway since it is a well protected bay. I



got my food, motored off the dock and went back to the place I had identified earlier and dropped both my anchors. Since the Mac tends to sail wildly at anchor with any wind at all, I always set a stern anchor to keep the boat straight. By this time it was dark and so I figured most people wouldn't even realize I was there. I ate my tasty restaurant sea food and other than the unhelpful dock hands; it had been a good day. Since I was in a residential area, I got my computer out and was able to find about 11 wifi signals, with 3 of them being unsecured. Whether the residents of Anna Maria are peculiar or not, they weren't particularly computer savvy so it was my gain and I was able to look at the emails from the WCTSS sailors who were preparing to trailer down to Charlotte Harbor. I had a good night on the hook, my boat is extremely comfortable for sleeping with only one person aboard (can get crowded with my family of 7 aboard though ;). The cushions are a bit thin though so I blew up my air mattress with the zippy fast Coleman pump and then hit the sack.

Day 2 – Thursday, November 11, 2010

As has become my habit in middle age it seems, I'm up before the sun. The first night on the boat was calm but as can be frequent on my first night away from home, I didn't sleep so well and woke up too early and couldn't go back to sleep. One thing that I had hoped to do before I left was to replace my boat batteries which are almost 4 years old now and getting tired. But I didn't have time to do that. I bring this up because my anchor light is non LED and would have killed the tired house battery pretty quick so instead, I burn an LED light I have installed in the head (which shines a dim light out of the windows) to make sure any other boaters might see me. Luckily, there was no boat traffic until a fishing boat came by just as the sun was rising.



Pictures of sunrise at Anna Maria

When cruising, I have a habit that if I break out my propane stove for dinner, I leave it out overnight and cook breakfast too. But since I had take-out food the night before, I just ate some cheerios this morning and was



out of Bimini Bay before 8AM. I raised the sails in anticipation that there would be more wind today, mostly out of the East and in fact, for the short time I headed NW, it blew for a bit. This would be my first time going out Passage Key inlet and my charts showed some shallow spots off of the NW side of Anna Maria Island so I was careful not to go aground. Although I was able to start the motor with my house battery (not having to resort to my second battery), it turned over very sluggishly so I needed to run the



motor some to charge it back up. Turning SSE heading to and going past Holmes Beach; the winds got lighter and since I also needed to charge the batteries, I left the motor running and did what a lot of cruisers on a short time budget do, motor sailed! I motor sailed during the whole morning. I needed to get a lot of miles under my

belt this day so I couldn't afford to pure sail with such little wind. After getting lots of good local knowledge advice from Bill D. (who lives in Placida), my "stretch" goal was Stump Pass which was 55 miles from Bimini Bay. If I couldn't make Stump Pass, then my plan was to cut back in at Venice inlet, but Bill had already warned me that the marine police were not so friendly to transients anchored near the yacht club there so I really preferred to make it down to the nicely unpopulated area of Stump Pass near Englewood Beach. Randy phoned again and said he was near the Anna Maria Bascule Bridge. I had probably just passed him, except I was on the Gulf side of the island and he was inland so we never actually saw each other! We went on our divergent ways and hoped to meet up another time. I passed LongBoat Key and then the other two passes near Sarasota.

By around mid-day, I ate the second and last of my pre-prepared sandwiches and the wind had picked up, probably around 6-12 mph and quite gusty since it was offshore. So, I would shut the motor off when I could sail at least 6mph. But as is so typical when trying to make a great distance, every time I would shut off the motor, the wind would be good for a few minutes and then die back down and my speed would drop off under 4-5 again so I would have to turn the motor back on and do some more motor sailing. At least motor sailing saves some gas and I was able to make 55 miles using about 4 gallons (which is darned good for a 50HP outboard). Since it was only a little past 2pm when I went by, I passed Venice inlet and set my sights for Stump Pass. I also passed by

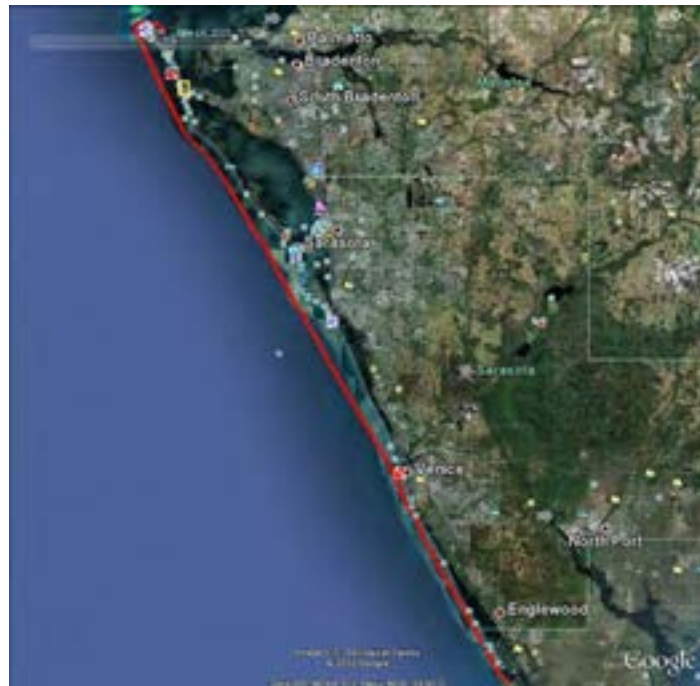
Caspersen Beach; which is a family favorite for shark tooth hunting. I took a few pictures to show my kids.

Pictures of Caspersen Beach from the Gulf



I got a phone call from Bill D, who had told me that Ron H. and Bill F. were going to meet him for an early dinner at the Fishery restaurant on the water in Placida and whether I wanted to join. I told him that it was unlikely I could make it all the way down to Placida and that I planned to re-enter at Stump pass and that would probably be about as far as I could get. Bill was a wealth of information about the condition of the passes and good places to anchor, eat, etc.

Interestingly and similar to last year, late that second afternoon, after burning through several gallons of Auto (Ethanol-10) gas and running the motor on and off for about 14-15 hrs, the rough running smoothed out and the motor idled perfectly and gave me no more problems throughout the rest of the trip! For once I won't have to disassemble the carbs and this teaches me that I'm not running my motor enough during the off seasons.





I made it through Stump Pass around 5:30 PM and took a hard left turn into a deepwater channel known locally as “Ski Alley”. With a name like that, I was a bit concerned that power boats may come flying through there but Bill did not think that was too likely at night. Once again, nightfall was looming quickly; I went down to the ranger station of Stump Pass Beach Park (near Englewood Beach), then turned around

and anchored in the Ski Alley (which is also listed as an anchorage in the cruising guides) just as night fell. Bill had also advised that I could use the public beach showers there if I wanted to, but it was getting cold so the thought of an outdoor cold water shower in the cool evening wind was not very appealing. Got my stove out and cooked dinner, and at about 7pm, two speedboats shot through there coming rather close to me. The second one was cussing me out like I didn’t belong. I seriously thought about moving, but it was pitch black in an area I was totally unfamiliar with and I was well anchored. So, weighing the risks, I thought it was probably safer to stay put and burn my LED cabin light all night for better visibility. Next time I bring the mast down, I really need to swap the incandescent bulb for an LED bulb in the anchor light. Last year when I trailered down to Placida, I lost the steaming light off my mast on the road someplace, so I need to do a bit of electrical work up there.



The good news is that those 2 speedboats in quick succession were the last ones I heard that night and so I was able to sleep well after two long hard days of boating. But even longer days lied ahead!

Day 3 – Friday, November 12, 2010



The next boat (a fisherman) came by just after dawn so all was good and I cooked an egg/bacon muffin and had a nice breakfast in the tranquil beauty of the deserted and natural Park. It felt like it had gotten down into the 50's that morning so it was a bit chilly for a while. This was the case on most mornings but pulling up the anchors usually warmed me up enough to shed my jacket once

underway.

I left anchor at about 8 AM and motored back out of the channel, taking pictures of the stumps that I assume are the namesake of the place. I had been doing about 5 knots in the alley, but as I turned back East into the pass, my speed dropped to about 1 knot with the engine revving at 2 grand where I should have been doing 5 knots. A quick look at the tide table confirmed there was an outgoing tide and this must have been causing about a ~4 knot current in the pass. I was happy to have the extra HP available to get back to cruising speed with a little extra throttle on the motor. I turned south into the ICW and throttled back down.



At Palm Island, Bill had informed me about the Ferry boats that cross in front of you and sure enough, they were ferrying cars across just as I got there. I guess I had expected to

see some sort of distance but in fact, these two working ferries just switched position on a section of the ICW that couldn't have been more than about 300 feet across. And these boats were probably a good 100 feet long so it was kind of funny to see these largish boats go such a short distance.

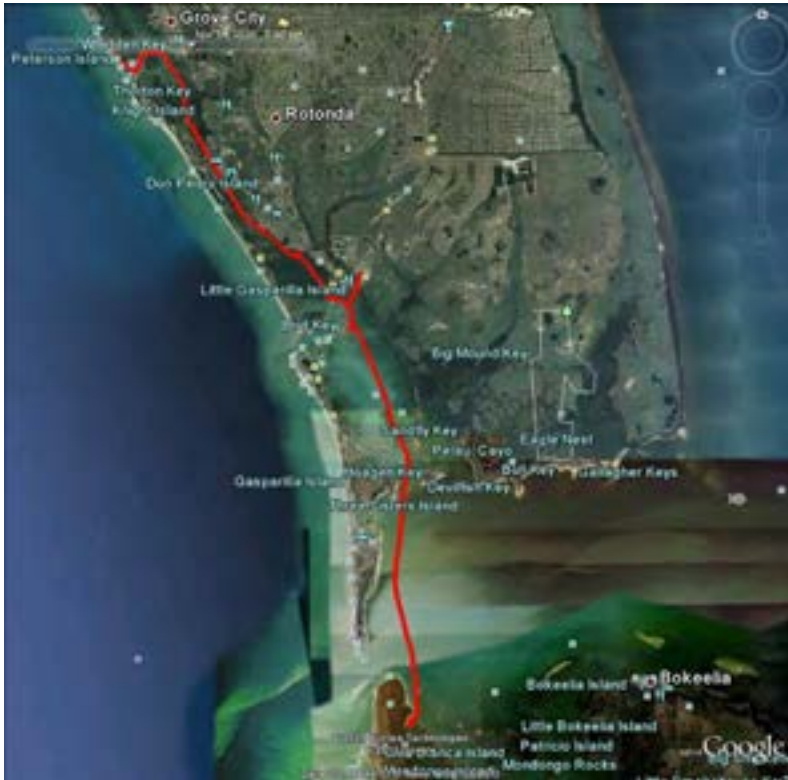


I guess it's cheaper than building a bridge! Bill later told me that they charge over 50 dollars a ride to get your car across. That would be an interesting way to live if you are a resident there.

I needed to get some gas and ice and had phoned 3 possible marinas earlier



which would be on my way to Cayo Costa. I had gotten the idea of a hot shower after being out for 2 days and only the Gasparilla marina said they had showers available for transients, so they ended up getting most of my business. It turned out that this was a top notch Marina with very nice facilities so I stopped there again on the way Northbound on Sunday too. As I was gassing up, a German fellow named George pulled up in a little motorboat saying that he had just bought a Macgregor 26X like mine as he pointed to a slip. After getting gas and ice, I pulled up and tied up to the floating dock near his slip and chatted with him for a while, telling him about the Cayo Costa gathering



and discussing his purchase. I said goodbye to George and told him to keep in touch via the Internet and drop by Cayo Costa if he was so inclined. I think this boat was so new to him that even a 10 mile trip probably sounded challenging. I can certainly remember the first couple years I owned my Mac, there was a lot of learning to be done even though I had a lot of previous sailing experience. It felt good to have a proper hot shower and since this was only a light 15 mile day, I could take my time and

be unrushed for a change. This was in fact, the only day on the trip that was like that, all the rest had very overloaded agendas.

As I left Gasparilla marina, I saw the twin masts of what is typically a WCTSS sailor behind a bight on a small white sanded island so I motored nearby to make sure there was no problem. Using my binoculars, I could see it was Dale on Lively who was just having his lunch and in fact, it was right about noon by now. I ate some snacks and raised the sails since there was a nice NE wind blowing around 10-12 mph I would guess. For a short while, the sailing was quite good, but after I had gone only a couple miles the wind started dying out. This also happened the next day too. My understanding is when the prevailing wind is Easterly, a Westerly sea breeze tries to pick up in the middle of the day and it battles back the Easterly and the



resulting stand-off is a dead calm. The calm gave me some opportunity to take pictures of dolphins playing near my boat.



As my speed kept dropping, I eventually had to turn the motor back on full time and motor sail to Pelican Bay. By the time I arrived around 2pm, it was totally dead calm so I rolled up my sails and motored into the cove. This was a very nice afternoon and the only time I got off the water early enough to need some sun

protection and drink a couple cold beers before nightfall.

Clearly, the biggest asset a cruiser needs is **time** not to be in a hurry. I have a bad habit of always being too ambitious on any sort of trip that I plan. But I had made it in 2.5 days and I was happy with myself since that was the longest trip I had made in my boat on the water!



Ron and many of the WCTSS bunch were already on the beach, enjoying some beverages and snacks. They are always a great bunch to hang out with, choc full of stories to share. Unfortunately, Ron noted that the other Bill (F) of EC fame ended up going home early due to flu symptoms so I never saw him. This is the second year I've joined this group at Cayo Costa, a gathering which is made

twice a year. After spending a nice leisurely afternoon watching one by one as later comers arrived, I joined Bill D. and Jeff for dinner aboard Bill's Marshall Sanderling "Cat Boat". It is very nice and spacious inside with a wide beam as well as also being very fast at sail. Alas, I have 4 sailing boats already (mostly little dinghies); I don't think I can fit another one in without selling something else first ;)

After I ate my chicken and dumplings, we gathered on the beach for the customary camp fire. Dave and Teresa brought a grill to put over the fire as well as some good smoking wood so a few people cooked steaks and hot dogs over the open fire. About the time the cooking was done, a park ranger showed up out of no where. And this is a large and mostly deserted island so we were kind of surprised to not hear any sort of land or sea motor vehicle. The next morning on the beach, I did see some tire tracks so I figure he must have driven up in a quiet 4wheel SUV or something which no one heard. Anyway, he told us off about the open campfire, said he was the only fireman on the island and it was against the rules. He also reminded us to sleep on our boats because camping is only allowed in the designated camping area of the State Park. Dave seemed to think that the ranger was probably expecting to see a bunch of drunken teenagers out here as opposed to the more mature looking and better behaved WCTSS bunch. Maybe that is why he hid his vehicle, in case the 15 or so (mostly male) bunch of folks sitting around got hostile and cut off his escape route ;) But being a more mature crowd, we told him we would put out the fire and so we started kicking some sand on it and he left as mysteriously as he arrived. Ron mentioned that in the 10 years he has been going to CC, this was only the second time he had been hassled. For the rest of this night and the next, people wondered whether another ranger would show up. So anytime someone walked up with a flashlight, we all joked about it being the ranger.



About this time, a pretty strong (perhaps 15kn) and cold wind kicked up out of the NE and turned the water outside of the cove into frothy whitecaps and 2-3 foot waves. Teresa took a stick and started unburying the hot logs out of the sand and the wind quickly whipped them back into a small fire. By this time, people were just plain getting cold so we took our chances at keeping a small fire going for a while longer. Someone yelled that Simon's boat had dragged its beach anchor and was heading out into the cove (still attached by bow anchor though). Simon was about to go for a swim when someone reminded him that one boat (I think Mike was the captain's name) had a dinghy so Simon hitched a ride out to his boat and got it back situated on the beach with a larger anchor. People didn't stay out too much later with this cold wind blowing and I turned in soon too after checking that my beach anchor was holding well. I only had a light bungee around my mainsail though and I was getting worried that the wind might catch it so I put the sail cover on to prevent that from happening. I also had to slack the halyards to make them stop banging against the mast. For a few hours as I was close to going to sleep, the wind was humming through the rigging and vibrating the boat. I was a bit nervous as I had the stern quarter and quite a bit of the beam to the wind. The Mac has a very high freeboard and windage too. But luckily, once set properly, my Danforth anchors have never dragged and that also turned out to be the case on Friday night. Sometime around midnight or so, the wind dropped a notch and the rigging stopped humming so I knew everything would be fine and dropped off to sleep.

Day 4 – Saturday, November 13, 2010

Another bacon/egg muffin for breakfast today (those never get old!). I got out and took some pictures of the squadron with the early morning light.



I spent the rest of the morning tidying up the boat getting ready for my family to arrive.



The plan for today is for my wife Melissa and our 5 children to drive down to Boca Grande where I will pick them up for a day trip out to Cayo Costa. But in the morning, the stiff winds all night have kicked up the bay pretty effectively. I was

chatting with Jeff about the plan and he knew Boca Grande pretty well and mentioned that another possibility could be to rent a golf cart and drive around the island. As my oldest daughter has developed a (teen ager induced) type of boat phobia lately, I gave this alternative some serious consideration. About 10:30, I set off towards Boca Grande and the wind was starting to drop somewhat, similar to the previous day. We had decided to meet at Whiddens Marina and Jeff had also mentioned they had a couple pet pigs and some other animals there. My second oldest daughter loves pigs so I phoned them enroute and told them about these various new discoveries.



After motoring into the marked channel, I took a left towards Whiddens and passed the upscale marina formerly known as Millers. When I got to Whiddens, the



sign said they monitored some VHF channel so I tried that but got no response. So I called on the cell phone and an old lady told me that they had golf carts to rent but they were both broken down and “they” hadn’t come to replace them with working ones. This place is quite rough, the marina and docks look like they are 84 years old and have not been updated much.

In fact, I learned later that this marina is some place of historical landmark but

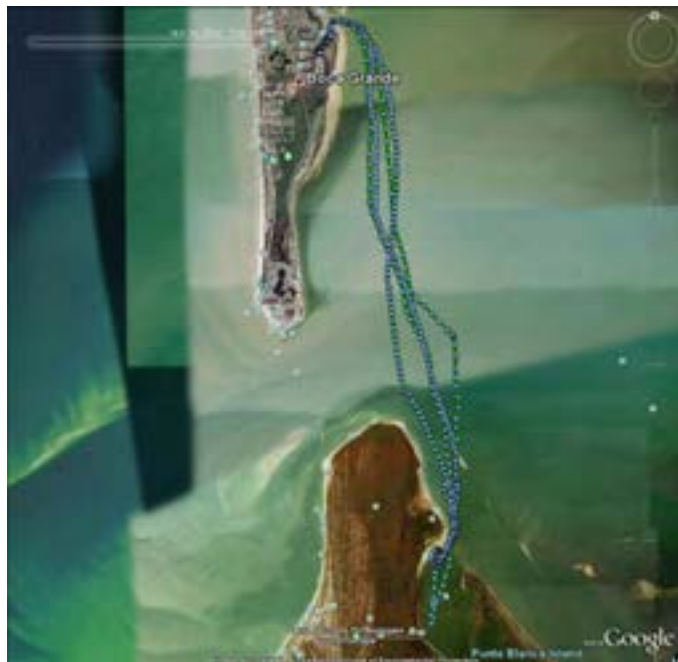


nonetheless, I motored back to the Miller’s marina where a couple spiffy folks in uniform (man and woman) were managing the docks for the multi-million dollar yacht type looking customers. I came close to the dock and asked if they had golf carts for rent. Yes, they said, but they had no place to tie up my boat...maybe try Whiddens. Arrggg, I called the Whiddens lady back on the phone and asked if she had a place to put the boat. Yes she said, it will cost 5 bucks to leave the boat there for a couple hours. So, one marina with golf carts

and no slips and the other with slips but no golf carts. I tied the boat up at Whiddens and was very careful not to jump on the wooden docks too hard as the place looked so old, I was wondering how sturdy they were. I came out to the parking lot and there was my family, arriving with perfect timing, but couldn't find a public bathroom. Luckily, Whiddens did have one of those and so I paid the old lady her 5 bucks. She would barely take her eyes off of a computer screen where she was playing Windows solitaire. I got the idea she didn't really care what I did with my boat or her marina.



Most of the kids had decided they still wanted to go for a boat ride, especially since 3 of them had joined me last year at Cayo Costa and so they wanted to go back again to reminisce. By this time, it was afternoon and like clockwork, the wind died back to a dead calm again and the seas subsided. So, I figured there would be no hurling today and got everyone onto the boat. They had been volunteering at our church's Greek festival on Friday so they brought a cooler full of



yummy Greek food which we loaded onto the boat along with the rest of the stuff. We left Whiddens and motored slowly back towards Cayo Costa. I let out the headsail to catch the remaining available NE wind as we motored. But as is usual in my family,



none of us could make a decision on what to do with the two options we considered. One option was to go back to Pelican Bay and the other option was to go anchor out on the Gulf side of the island. This democracy stuff never seems to work too well I'm afraid but I don't really want to be a dictator either ;) After debating back and forth too much, we saw Becky waving to us from the beach and we decided to go into the cove at Pelican Bay.

This was for the best since Melissa got to meet some of the nice WCTSS folks as well as the fact that a Westerly Sea Breeze picked up and may have been kicking up some waves on the West side of the island. So we set up our umbrella and chairs and they brought the Greek festival to me as we ate Gyros and Baklava and had a relaxing afternoon. The kids also had a good time playing in the tidal pools and catching little fish and crabs. It was too bad that Jose had a business emergency and had to cancel the trip at the last minute since the kids had a lot of fun playing with his boys last year. We will get them together again at an upcoming event.



But the kids were having such a good time, it was hard to get them to leave now and it was getting well past 4pm. As I'm not really fond of anchoring in a close

group of boats after dark, I figured that if I didn't make it back to the cove by night fall, I would need to spend the night tied up at Whiddens....with the pigs and the goats!



minutes or so. After unloading the boat and getting them back into the minivan bound back to Tampa, it was after 5:30. So, time to burn some more gas and speed back to Pelican Bay before darkness.

So after getting them on the boat, I decided to open up the iron Genny for the first time on this trip and got them back to the docks in about 20



As it was getting dark quickly, I tried turning on my running lights and they would not come on. I toggled the switch a few times and finally got them to come on, they have never acted like that. I got back into the Cove just as darkness had fallen and Bill came over to catch my stern line. The group had decided that the rangers probably didn't work on Saturday nights so took the chance of having another campfire. And this one was even better than the night before, engineered so that the rising tide would put it out!

The tide came right up to the fire but then stopped, so it kept on burning into the night and we sat around and talked a lot, mostly about boating. It was a nice evening, and without the cold wind of the night before, so folks stayed out until about 10PM before retiring to their various boats. I went in and broke out the computer again to start planning my trip back to Tampa. I decided I would take the ICW all the way so as to make the full circle and get the experience of going up the inside route. I hadn't



programmed my GPS with the bridges as waypoints so I did that in the hope that I could time my arrival appropriately for openings so as not to waste time. It turned out that many of the bridges would open on demand, so, it was probably an overkill to do all that course programming. But I like to walk through my course on the computer before



actually doing it, makes it more familiar when I'm navigating a new territory. I blew my air mattress back up and hit the sack on my last night in Pelican Bay.

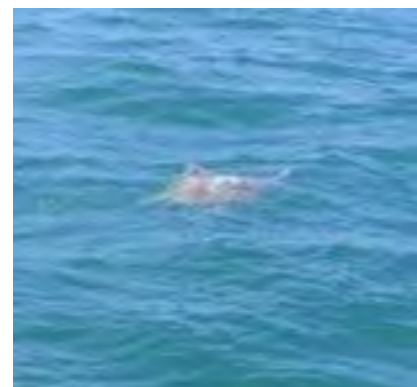


Day 5 – Sunday, November 14, 2010

As is typical with these outings, most sailors were out of the Bay early, by 8 or 9 at the latest. This year was no exception, about the only folks left when I hoisted my anchor were Dave/Teresa and Simon who was waiting for a higher tide to put his boat back on the trailer. The wind was out of the NE and again rather brisk in the morning. I hoisted my sails in the cove before pulling my anchors. Last year it had been quite a beat back to

Placida and that was fine since I had the whole morning and early afternoon to get back to my trailer. But this year, I had to go more than 112 miles back to Tampa and I was feeling like I should try to get back in 2 days instead of 3. This would require slightly upwards of 55 miles per day which is about maximum range (and overly ambitious). But I figured I needed the extra day off to unpack the boat and unwind before having to go back to work on Wednesday so I wanted to be home on Monday night. Also, a cold front was approaching and due to hit on Tuesday evening with rain showers so I also thought it would be wise to beat that home. The wind was about 40 degrees off my nose and although I have the rigging properly tuned, the Mac is not the best upwind pointer. But with the help of a little motor sailing, I was able to keep it on one long tack all the way back to Placida. I have never seen a full grown sea turtle in the wild but as I was passing by the channel at Boca Grande, one came to just below the surface and gave me a thrill. Manatees and especially Dolphins are frequently easy to see, but it was the first time I had seen a (presumably Loggerhead) Sea Turtle. Then, just a few miles later, passing near Devilfish Key, I saw another one! This time I ran to get my camera, but by the time I came back up from the cabin, I could not spot the turtle any longer. Apparently, they do

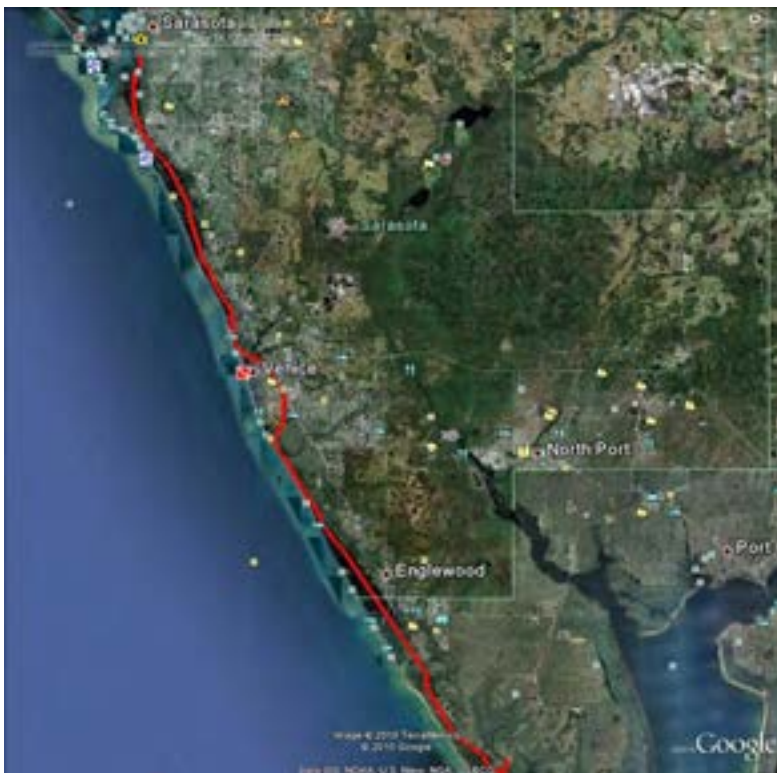
not stay near the surface for long. But I did manage to find a picture that someone else took near Boca Grande so this gives you a pretty good idea of what I saw on Sunday morning. Ron mentioned that he also saw a sea turtle near Boca Grande pass so I guess they were out en mass that morning.



Picture of a Sea Turtle at the Surface near Boca Grande

Arriving at Placida, I saw Ron taking down his sails on Whisper and getting ready to pass under the Gasparilla Island Bridge. I pulled back into the Gasparilla Marina again to fill

up my fuel tanks, get a couple last bags of ice and take a shower again too since now I knew that trick! And who should be there again but my new friend George and his lady friend (I didn't get her name). She mentioned that she works within sight of the water near Stump pass and was pretty sure she saw me come in on Friday morning since she keeps an eye out for Mac 26X's like the one they just bought. They were busy scrubbing their new Mac and complaining that the Marina staff got black scuff marks from wearing the wrong shoes while doing work on their boat. We exchanged phone numbers but I did not have much time to chat since I had to get a lot of miles under my belt today. We said our goodbyes and I left the dock at 11:28 AM. I knew I couldn't make it to the GIBA swing bridge by 11:30 but luckily, on weekends, the bridge will open every 15 minutes so I was able to saunter over there and hit the 11:45 opening. North of Placida by lunchtime, I felt like I could make it to Sarasota which would be approximately the halfway point. On this day, I counted all the bridges I opened. There were 10 of them! Luckily, most of them open on demand so I wasn't wasting a whole lot of time waiting for bridge openings. My course took me back by the Palm Island Ferries; today there was only one of them operating instead of two.



And then back by Stump Pass and into the scenic Lemon Bay where the cruising guides warned captains not to try to sail due to all the shallow spots. Going by Englewood and Manasota was not too difficult other than the occasional big power yacht wave knocking stuff off the cockpit benches. There was not much use trying to sail any of these areas since the channels are rather narrow. And besides that, the wind was due NNW, right on my nose the whole day. Overall, the trip had not provided many great sailing opportunities since most times the wind really howled, I was holed up at anchor. Although I was far too busy to take any pictures, piloting the boat got more intense as I

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turned into the Venetian Waterway park which is close to Caspersen beach just south of Venice. This is obviously a manmade channel for the ICW but has bike paths on both sides which go all the way to the beach. I've decided that we will try to make a family trip next week with our bicycles there provided the weather is nice during Thanksgiving week. Avoiding power boats in the populated Venice area was tricky and just about the time I got through most of it, I realized I had forgotten to turn on the radio to listen to the Tampa Bay Bucs game. When I finally remembered just before 4pm, they were handily beating the Carolina Panthers with just a few seconds left so the Bucs continue to do well after a slow start to their season.

The ICW started opening up a little bit past Venice in Blackburn Bay as I continued northward. By the time I got to the Blackburn Point Bridge, there was quite a party going at the shore side restaurant which I had heard about. But I needed to press on towards Sarasota if I would have any chance of making it home on Monday. The swing bridge there is very small and the lady complained on the radio that she had just opened and the rule is they get to wait 5 minutes before opening again so I had to waste a few minutes. This was the only bridge on the ICW where the bridge tender had to leave her little bridge house and walk across to the middle of the bridge to operate the controls, effectively stranding her on the island should it malfunction in the open position! I guess this is good exercise having to walk back and forth across the bridge to open it. ;)

After getting north of Blackburn Point, I entered Roberts Bay where I started feeling rather tired. It had been hard work navigating through 10 bridge openings and keeping from getting tossed around too much by the big power yachts in the ICW. There were a few captains who were courteous enough to slow down their behemoths before going by me, but most were the usual powerboat types who think they can speed by very close to sailboats since there is a large speed difference. I had opened it up on a few spots when trying to make a particular bridge by a certain time but for the most part, I was motoring at the hull speed around 6-7 mph. Since it was now getting after 4pm, I told myself that I really needed to be looking for an anchorage by 5ish. I really had no idea where I would stop for the night yet. By the time I got most of the way through Robert's Bay, it was just after 5pm and I saw a couple nice islands to the West of the ICW, but there were already a couple boats anchored there and the forecast was for east winds to pick up overnight so I figured I would be better off staying to the east side of the ICW.

Nearing Sarasota and the Siesta Key Bridge, the area is more populated so the bridges don't open on demand during the day. My GPS said I would reach the bridge around 5:17PM and it was on a 20 minute schedule and would open at 5:20, so I told myself that I would try to get through this one last bridge and then look for a place to stop. My cruising guide had spoken about an Eastern anchorage near Marina Jacks in Little Sarasota Bay near Big Sarasota pass. There were also some nice looking anchorages near the pass itself but I was concerned about the currents if I was too close to the pass. I made it through the bridge and once again, the sun was setting fast. This would make the 4th out of 5 days that I was looking for an anchorage within about 30 minutes of sunset. I told myself I should not be in this position repetitively and it would be far less stressful to have been anchored before 5pm. My charts and cruising guide are outdated and still

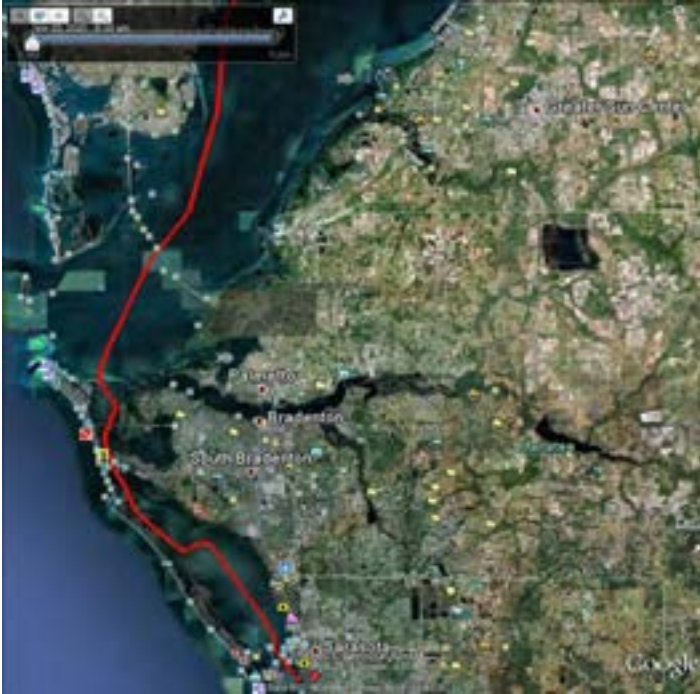
showed the Ringling Causeway Bridge as a bascule. I spoke to the tender at Siesta Key and he straightened me out that it was a fixed bridge now with 60 feet of clearance so would be plenty for a boat of my height (I typically need about 38 feet to clear my antenna). I told him that I would be stopping for the night soon and he kindly mentioned that a lot of sailboats anchor in the bay right to the northeast of his bridge. This again was a residential area but it showed quite deep water on my charts and there was already a very large (probably close to 50 foot) sailboat anchored in the general vicinity. I went a little bit shallower, closer to the houses and dropped the anchors right as it was getting dark. Where I was would be well sheltered from any north or east winds that might pop up overnight.

I broke out the propane stove and cooked some ravioli. This neighborhood was very expensive, easily more than 2 million dollar houses. Since I got lucky with Wifi on Wednesday night in Anna Maria, I decided to give it a shot here. I picked up 10 wifi signals but every single one of them was locked down. I guess people that live in multi-million dollar mansions are not foolish with their security, ha-ha. Being only about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile off of the ICW, I suppose a lot of transients throw in the hook there too. Although the winds were fairly calm and I had taken that into consideration for where I stopped, there were some waves coming off the ICW boat traffic. As I got into the cabin for the night, some really big ones hit and knocked me silly. About this time, I started remembering a very bad night I had in the deep water anchorage of the Vinoy Basin in St Pete when East winds picked up unexpectedly around midnight and caused huge waves in the anchorage. After that night, I had vowed never to anchor again in a deepwater anchorage with other sailboats since my Mac only draws a foot of water even with the ballast full and I can anchor just about anywhere, particularly, in the shallows near islands where the waves can be blocked as well as the winds. Although it is nice to be in 7-10 feet of water where I won't have any chance of waking up on the hard, I couldn't stand the thought of getting beaten up by waves especially seeing as my last 4 nights had all been in such calm and protected water. Once again, I weighed the risks and it wasn't worth trying to move in the darkness in an unfamiliar area. Certainly, there couldn't be any really big boats going down the ICW all night long. I went ahead and filled the ballast and dropped all the boards for extra stability. But the centerboard bangs so bad in the trunk, I decided to lift that and just leave the two rudders down. I'm glad I was patient because the boat traffic died out completely after about 9pm and my night turned out to be quite smooth with no waves until after daybreak.

Day 6 – Monday, November 15, 2010

After a good night's sleep, I checked the marine forecast on my Blackberry and the East wind previously forecasted had become a South wind forecast. How nice for my northbound track, but interesting that I would have north winds all day Sunday and then it would clock completely south the next day without going east first. I cooked up my last egg & bacon muffin and left my anchor just after 8AM. Heading towards the Ringling Causeway and the start of the larger Sarasota Bay, I went by the next bay to the north where the Marina Jacks is and the Island Park. I'm glad I didn't stop there after all, because it was just completely overloaded with boats at anchor. As I mentioned

previously the Mac swings too much at anchor so it's no fun to be anchored close to other sailboats who are not swinging as much.



Sure enough, the wind had turned out of the South during the night and at that early morning hour, it actually seemed to be blowing around 8-10. So I raised my sails and headed under the causeway. Like clockwork, the wind died out again and I looked at my destination on the GPS being 56 miles away. I just couldn't sail again, not unless I wanted to add another day to my trip. This was pretty frustrating being on a sailing boat. I guess I now know why long distance cruisers end up motoring much of the time. I started up the motor

again and tried to motor sail. The wind died even further and now there wasn't even enough wind to motor sail. If the boat won't even move at 2mph with the sails up, it's just not worth it. So, in frustration, I lowered the sails, not even 30-40 minutes after I had raised them. What a waste of time. I had originally thought I could make it back on the fuel I bought down in Gasparilla, but by this time, I was ready to be home and so I decided to do some higher speed motoring across the rest of Sarasota Bay. I figured that I would gas up again in Cortez and that way, if the wind ended up being non-existent later, I could just zip back in less time.

So I high speed motored through the rest of the Sarasota Bay and the channels that go past Longboat Pass. This killed one of my 3 fuel tanks that I had been careful of overusing the day before and got me well into the second large one. Although I can carry 4 tanks if I want to, I usually only carry 3 (two 6.5's and one 3.5). This way I have some room to stow my stern anchor and my propane tanks in the extra fuel locker space. I knew that if I did this bit of high speed motoring, I better stop again for fuel in case I get becalmed again later.

I neared the south side of the Cortez Bridge which would be the second to last one I would need to open before going back through the Skyway and Tampa Bay. I saw the Seafood Shack on the North side of the bridge and figured I would stop there since I had visited it a few years ago and it was a nice place. Since it was a couple minutes before 10AM, I quickly radioed the bridge and had them open up for me just as I got there. But for some reason, I thought the Seafood Shack Marina had fuel too. I motored in and chatted with some folks on a boat who set me straight in the fact that they had no fuel. They recommended Bradenton Marina which was back on the South side of the bridge I

had just traversed. This sounded like backtracking so I asked if there was anything north of the bridge. They mentioned a small bait shop slash bar slash tiny restaurant named “Annie’s” right between the bridge and the Seafood Shack. So I pulled in there and topped off tank 2 and refilled tank 1. This way, I had enough fuel to get all the way back at either low speed or high speed. It turned out that I got back without ever totally draining the first tank, so now I have some extra marina gas on the boat to use up.

Both Cortez and Anna Maria Bridges are on 20 minute opening schedules and as I pulled out of Annie’s around 10:40, the bridge had just opened and closed for another boat, but it was still almost 2 miles away so I couldn’t make it. So, I sauntered towards the bridge at slow speed and got the 11:00 AM opening. This was the last of the dozen bridges I had to open going up the ICW and I could now see the Sunshine Skyway in the distance. Winds were still low but had picked up slightly since I left Sarasota. I motored back



through the Bulkhead cut and figured I could sail towards the Skyway. But now instead of south, the winds had turned from the southwest and were dead on my stern. Similar to the day before when I did not want to tack at all from Cayo Costa to Placida, I also didn’t want to have to waste time gybing when I still had about 38 miles to go. So I ended up motoring to the Skyway. Once past the Skyway, I made myself a

ham sandwich and headed slightly south of my rhumb line in the hopes that I could have a nice last reach in lower Tampa Bay. This actually worked pretty well and I was able to raise my sails and shut off the motor as I sailed towards St Pete at a fairly decent clip after turning NNE. One nice trick I’ve learned on my Mac is when I need to run mostly DDW, I can turn the boat onto a broad reach (so that the headsail doesn’t collapse) and pull up the centerboard and let it crab towards DDW by actually inducing leeway. As I passed St Pete, I was a good 3-4 miles offshore and saw a windsurfer just barely planning on a reach. This guy reminded me of a 25 year younger version of myself since during the mid 80’s I would frequently take my windsurfer completely across Old Tampa Bay. People thought I was crazy especially since sometimes I would not even wear a harness and my arms would get a bit tired out. I don’t think this guy had a harness on either and he was a good ways out. I took some pictures of the St Pete pier since I understand it will be demolished soon. I sailed like this for a while passing St Pete, but the wind started dying out again and the boat was not slipping enough downwind anymore so I had to start the motor and turn to a more downwind heading.



All this switchin
g between sailing and motoring caused me to tilt my motor up and down a lot. When I first had set out last Wednesday, it had been making some clicking noise which I attributed to the fact that it hadn't been used a lot over the summer. But by the time I was back in Tampa Bay, the T/T motor has started making an awful grinding noise. If it had sounded that badly

when I left, I don't think I could have started the trip. It really sounded like it was on the verge of failure and I was worried that it might get stuck in the up position. My last few miles are through narrow channels and canals where it is virtually impossible to sail up to the docks although it might be done in a pinch with a south wind. When I tilted the motor in just past St Pete, I knew I would have one more course change to the NNW after passing Gandy Bridge so perhaps one last opportunity to sail. But instead of tilting the motor up, I would leave it in and lose that $\frac{3}{4}$ knot of speed by dragging my lower unit through the water. Changing out the tilt motor probably won't be easy and I expect it's pretty typical for that to fail on a 10 year old outboard motor that operates in salt water. And as if I didn't have enough of an issue with almost dead batteries and a grinding tilt motor, I had been running my autopilot all day long, much more than the previous day when I needed to have more precise manual steering through the narrow canals. A couple miles before I reached the Gandy, the autopilot freaked out and just started turning the boat towards starboard for no good reason.



I felt the motor and it was pretty hot, I was hoping it had just overheated. But after letting it cool down for close to an hour, it was still up to no good so apparently, something has gone wrong with that now too. In conjunction with the A/P malfunction, the steering also became stiffer. Macs also have a well known weakness in their rack and pinion steering box. I've already had to open mine up a couple times and lubricate it as well as tighten it up. The last thing you want to do is force the steering and break off parts of the rack so I started steering very gingerly on my final leg home. It's possible that the stiffness is related to the A/P malfunction. As I turned NNE past the Gandy, the

wind fell even more so it was just futile sailing conditions. Obviously, this approaching cold front was weaker than forecast even though it did generate some showers on Tuesday night. I kept the sails up all the way until halfway between the Howard Franklin and Courtney

Campbell, mostly as good luck because the wind was not really filling them anymore.

Finally, I gave up and took the sails down and put on the sail cover. As I motored on my last leg east and then north, I caught a pretty



Sunset over Tampa Bay. Once again, I was arriving right before nightfall but this time, the journey was ending.

So now I have to fix all of these things before I take the boat back out again. She did well for me by getting me back home safely but between batteries, looming failure of the tilt motor, autopilot and steering issues; I will need to give her some TLC time before thinking about any more big voyages.

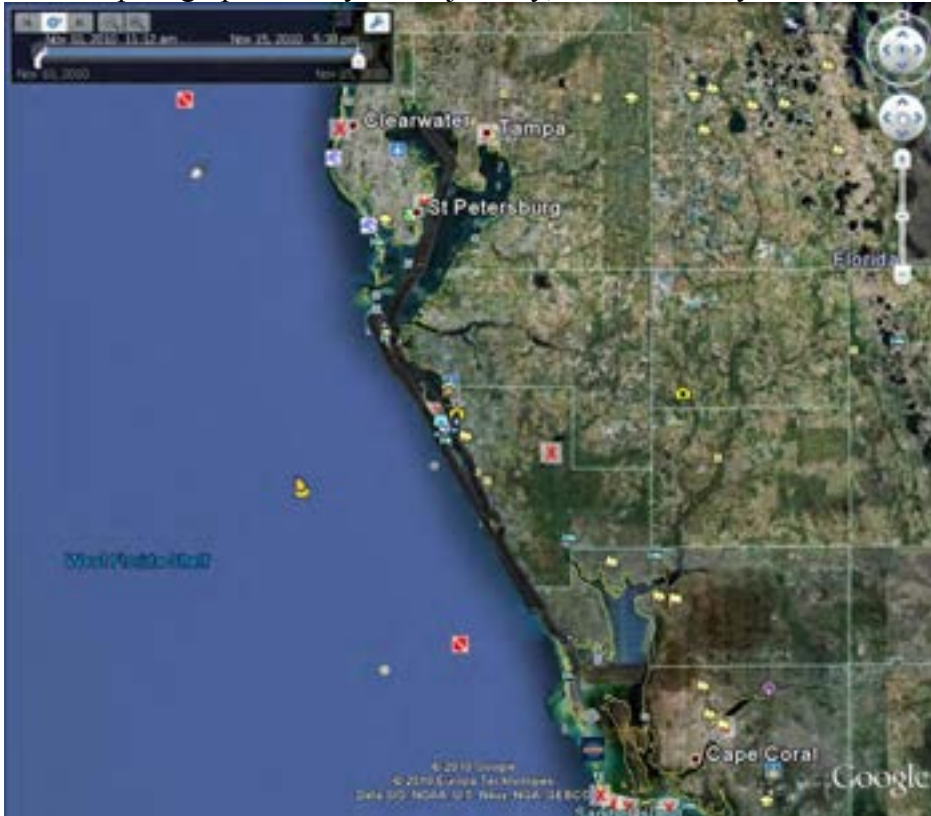
I logged close to 250 miles on this cruise and had a wonderful time despite the looming mechanical issues towards the end.



I really appreciated the support from folks like Randy and Bill who offered to even drive up to wherever I was if I ended up needing any help. It was nice to have good friends to make me feel like I wasn't totally alone and had options in case things went south. Luckily, all the machines worked well enough to get me through safely. And talking about safety, thanks are also owed to Eric for loaning me his SPOT tracker. Since I was going solo, it

made my family much more comfortable to always know where I was at any point in time.

One last path graphic of my entire journey, a nice memory now



And special thanks also to my wife and children who supported my trip and warmly welcomed me home after an almost week long adventure!

