

A Detailed and Personal Cruise Log of Dimitri's Voyage to the Upper Florida Keys (Elliott, Short & Largo) – December 29, 2011 -> January 2, 2012

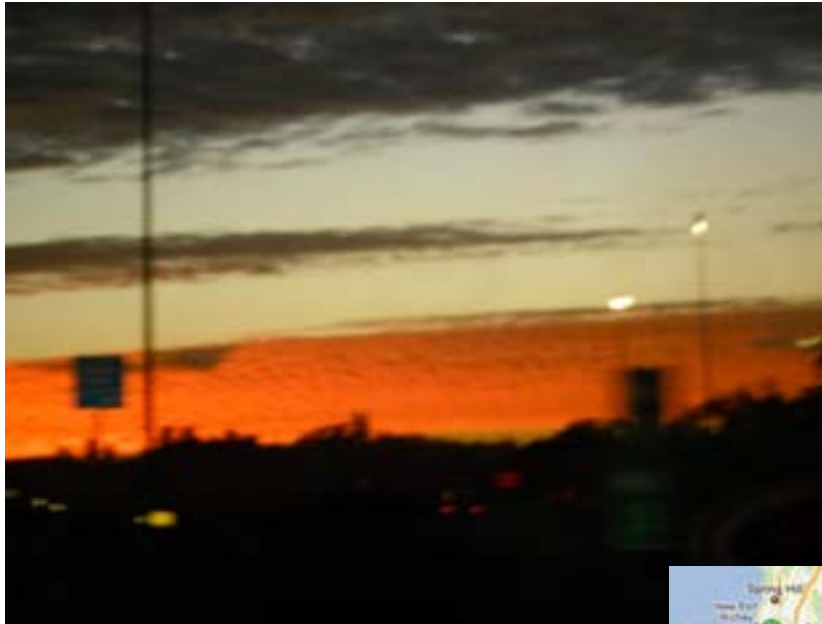
Figure 1 - My Son John-Nicholas (Niko) inspects the boat preparations



Figures 2, 3 – Florida Upper Key's Maps with Overall Tracks



Day 1 – Thursday, December 29, 2011



The trip began early on Thursday morning but I had considered leaving on Wednesday night and spending the night in a rest area in order to get a jump on the trip. But since my young teenaged daughter Larissa would accompany me, we were not comfortable with that plan and ended up leaving at 6:15 AM

from our home in Tampa.

Although the picture is a bit shaky due to the moving car, Larissa snapped this picture of the spectacular sun rise just after we had crossed over the Sunshine Skyway.

On only its second big trip, my new tandem Aluminum trailer is a heck of a lot better than the stock Macgregor trailer so the 332 mile trip down to South Dade Marina was pretty much a piece of cake. Since it weighs a bit more than the old

single axle, I'm probably towing around 4000 lbs and that makes my V8 Sequoia burn some gas. At 70mph highway speeds, it gets around 9.5 miles to the gallon so although

my tank was full when I left, I had burned half a tank by the time I reached Punta Gorda so thought it would be a good idea to fill up again before crossing Alligator Alley. I just got new sunpasses for both our vehicles so I decided to take all the toll roads on the way



down. After another stop for gas in Homestead, we arrived at South Dade around 11:40.



so he was just going to put up his mast and do the rest of his rigging later so he could follow Ken and I out to the first anchorage. As you can see from the sign here, South Dade only caters to sailboats and I also saw some human powered crafts using the ramp as well.

We motored out of the South Dade Marina into the Glades Canal which would take us to Manatee Bay in Barnes Sound.

Ed and Becky had left a bit earlier than us and were just launching their Hunter. Ken pulled in from Kentucky with his 26X and filled the spot next to my boat where Ed and Becky had just set up. After a little over an hour of set-up time, Ken launched his boat and then we got lined up to launch right after him. As I was about to put in, Phil arrived from St Mary's Georgia with his blue hulled Mac 26M. This was going to be quite a turnout of Macgregor sailboats it seems. Phil had forgotten his GPS



Ed and Becky on their Hunter and Ken on his 26X were already outside of Manatee Bay anchoring on the other side of Short Key. I hung out for a while to wait for Phil and then slowly made my way out of the Bay. We wouldn't do much this first day except get launched and anchored for the night.



Here are some Google Earth and Marine Maps of the first day's 7.7 mile sail out to the East side of Short Key. I overshot the anchorage because I had the glaring sun in my eyes and I couldn't see any boats on the beach until I got word on the radio and turned around.



Pictures of the anchorage on Short Key with Card Sound Bridge in background:



Becky had shown Larissa some starfish creeping up onto the beach



so she took a few pictures but like a good nature steward, she didn't take any star fish home.





As my daughter Larissa does not eat meat, I cooked up a couple of freezer burned veggie burgers since I like the opportunity to get less fat in my diet when I eat with her. Night time falls and Dave and Teresa thankfully brought wood for a roaring camp fire. Temperatures were just a tad on the chilly side, probably upper 50's to low 60's, very nice sleeping



weather and good conversation around the fire.

We excused ourselves from the camp fire and went on board to watch the Sorcerer's Apprentice on

the boat TV/DVD. A couple times the wind shifted and the camp fire smoke blew



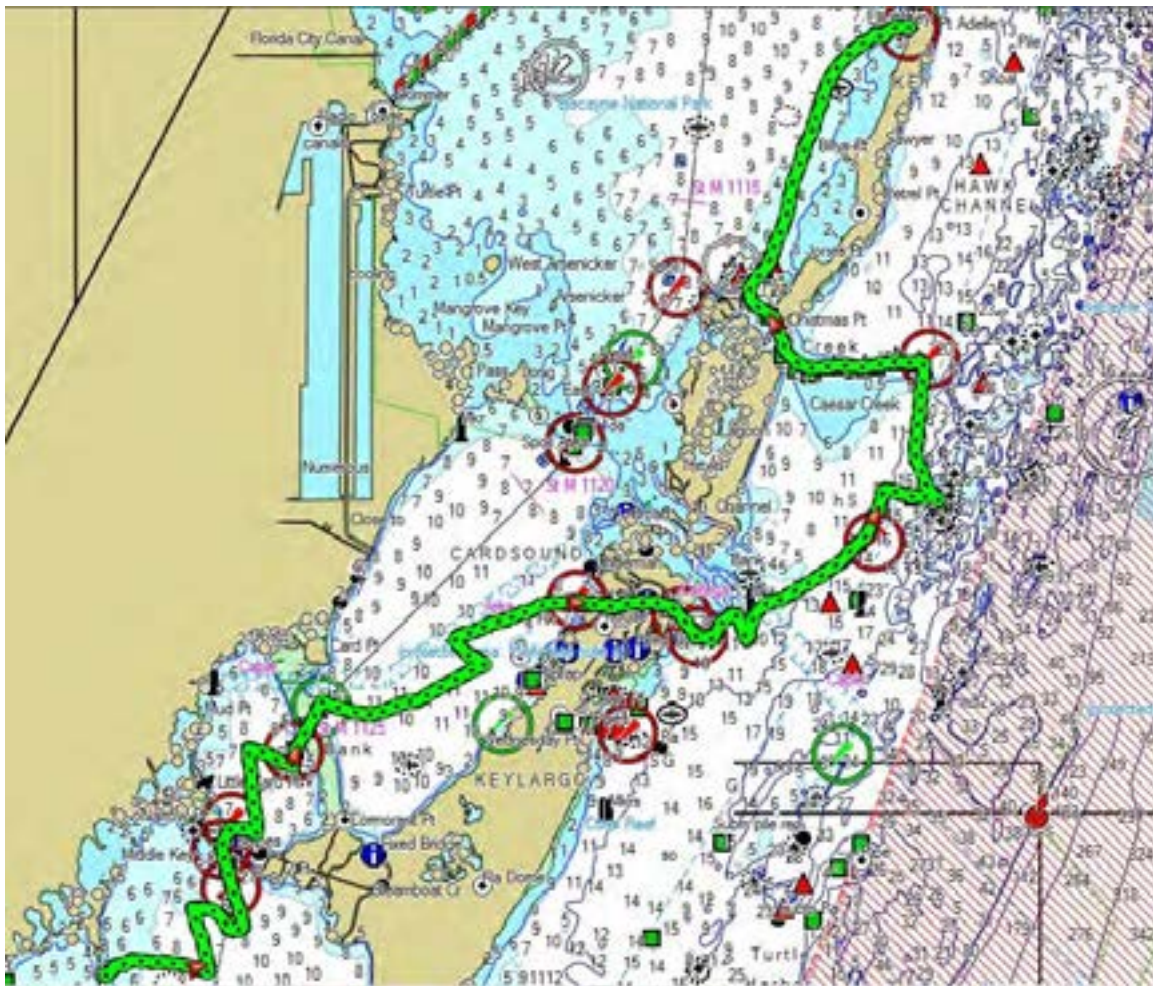
through the boat momentarily making me wonder if something on the boat had caught fire! Thankfully, no such thing had happened.



Figure 24 - Larissa, Dimitri & Stin at the Campfire

Day 2 – Friday, December 30, 2011

After a good night's rest, I cooked eggs and bacon and English muffins on the propane stove. Well, that is turkey bacon for me and veggie bacon for Larissa. Today was going to be the longest sail of the trip. Although Ed had said last night that he didn't want to go out into the Atlantic, I was hoping to find some way to get out there and see some coral today. And that is in fact what we did thanks to Stin since we didn't want to go out alone. Here is a graphic of this day's 32.4 mile voyage, mostly done by sail but there were a few upwind portions that we motor sailed in the sake of time since we were on the water for close to 8 hours before reaching Elliott Key Marina in Biscayne Bay.



The furthest East point on this map track is where we found an impressive coral head which I'll write more about a bit later. The wind today was right on the nose from the NE, kind of light too. I didn't measure it but I expect it was in the 4-8 knot range most of the day.



The route started with some lazy beating until we got through the Card Sound Bridge. We were diverted for a while by some playful dolphins in Little Card



Sound. Larissa took this picture of a dolphin blowing its water hole. We then motor sailed through the channel across card bank and then we lifted the motor and pure sailed all the way



to Angelfish Creek where we cut through to the Atlantic.

About the time we were tacking around Pumpkin Key, Stin got on the radio and asked if any other boats wanted to go out through the cut into the Atlantic at Angelfish Creek and then come back through Caesar Creek. That happened to be the exact course I had plotted ahead of time for my GPS so I of course volunteered to accompany Stin and we made our way through the long passage to the Atlantic. We shut the motor and tried to sail a bit upwind out in the Atlantic but it would have taken so long that we ended up kicking on the motor again and heading NE straight into the wind.

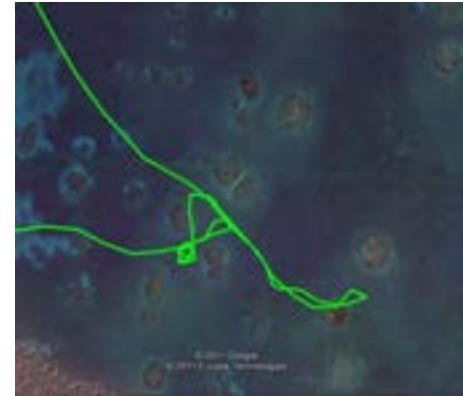
Here are some pictures that others took of us sailing towards Elliott Key:





Where there is a track jut out to the East is where the blown up Google Earth map clearly shows the coral heads we went around and over. The last one we saw was over 15 feet high according to my Sonar readings. By this time unfortunately, it was getting to be close to 3pm and we had seen so

many jellyfish around 2 miles offshore that we decided not to go into the water. Here is a pic that Larissa took of some jelly fish. There seemed to be jellyfish spotting about every 10 feet of progress; they



were everywhere! This ended

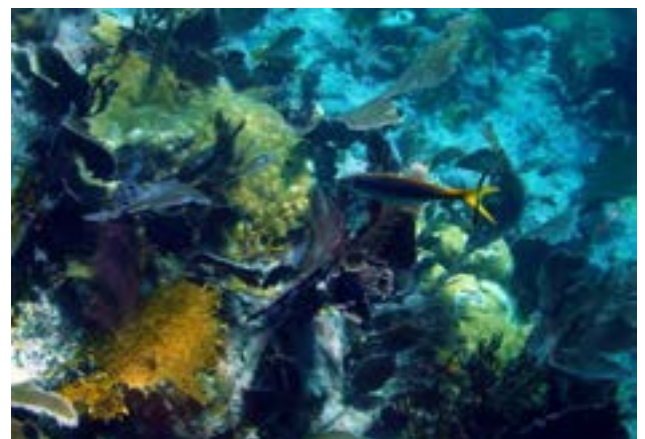
up being my only minor regret since the light winds made it take a long time to get out to the Atlantic and consequently Elliott Key. We were hoping some other



boats would go on the outside but only Stin and us went out through the cut into the Atlantic. I didn't want to get to an unfamiliar destination after dark so we didn't go into the water even though we had brought our wetsuits and masks. After we left, we also realized that our cameras were waterproof and we should have at least dipped THEM into the water to take a few pictures. Oh well, at least I have the coral marked in my GPS logbook now and could find it another time. Here are some pics I borrowed



from someone who did actually dive some coral near Key Largo.





We headed North and then West towards Caesar Creek where you have to go through a large bank where it is a protected reserve as part of the Biscayne National Park. I was



Elliott Key Marina where we met all our WCTSS friends who had mostly gotten there

mostly motoring through the bank and when we got into the creek, our ground speed dropped by a few knots as we were hit by a hard outgoing current through the pass. We motor sailed the last few miles to



before us since they took the shorter interior route. The marina docks were sturdy but covered in smelly bird poop. Guess it hadn't rained there in a while. There was an honor system which we put 20 bucks into which seemed a bit overpriced for a marina without electric or water. We joined the group on shore and I cooked up some hot dogs (turkey and veggie) for dinner along with some soup.



There were quite a bit of kids running around as it got dark and 2 boys (around 8-9 yr old) were running along the dock just past my boat when one of them must have tripped and fell into the Cold Harbor water and immediately started screaming. As I was near my boat, I grabbed a line and went





over a couple of spaces where the boy had fallen in but Teresa Barnicoat was already there and pulling the boy out of the water. I was impressed that she didn't seem to need any help pulling what looked to be an 80 lb boy or so out from the water 2 feet below her. She makes her living as a nurse but I doubt she was trained for

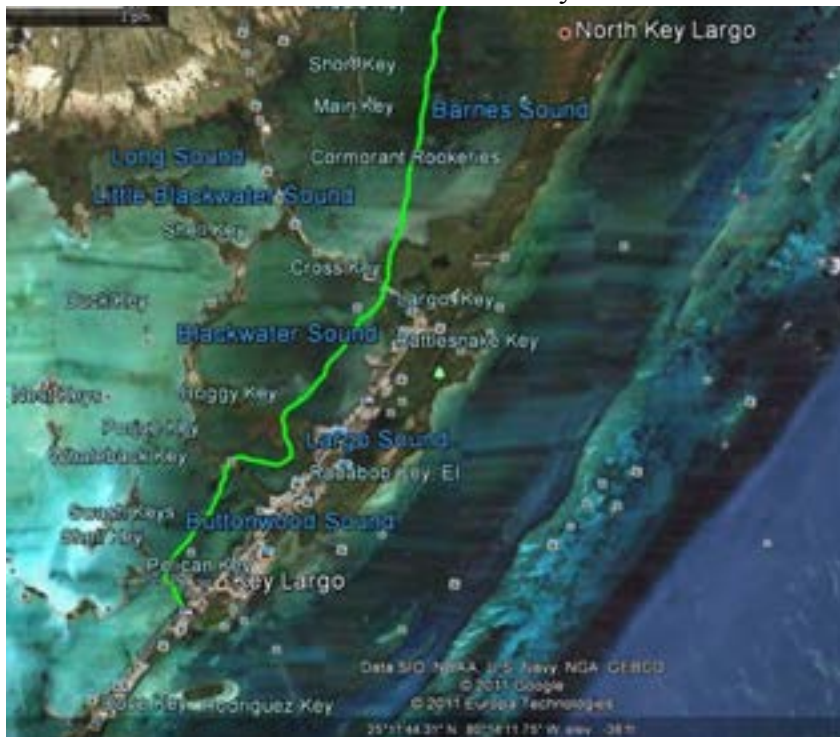
that incident. Kudos to her quick maternal thinking and strong reaction in getting the boy out before his parents even got there from across the dock. Some people pulled in towing a boat and set up a tent near us, they had a metal bowl which they lit a campfire in. Since we didn't have such a device to keep a fire off of the ground, we didn't end up having a fire that night even though there were a few others going on in the marina camping areas. Perhaps that big bowl thing would also make it legal to have fires in other state parks such as Cayo Costa. Larissa found by shining her flashlight into the jetty rocks, that there were dozens of lobsters right at the entrance to the marina. Some people were getting hungry at the sight of all those lobsters, but alas, they are protected in Biscayne Bay National Park so hands off! It was another nice night for sleeping so we turned in and watched Paul Blart, Mall Cop on the video.



Day 3 – Saturday, December 31, 2011

In the morning, we wanted to get an early start since we had a long trip to Key Largo to meet up with the rest of the family for New Years Eve. I opened the hatch around 7:30 or 8:00 to cook pancakes for breakfast and was immediately swarmed with nasty little biting midges (aka no-see-um's). They came into the cabin where Larissa was sleeping and it took us hours to get them

all out of the cabin later in the day. Today would be the calmest wind day of them all, with not enough wind to even move 1-2 mph so I decided to motor virtually all of the 34.9 mile distance from Elliott Key to the Rock Reef Resort in South Key Largo.



Averaging about 7mph, it took about 5 hours. We saw some interesting scenery as we navigated South from Elliott Key into Card Sound. A couple miles from the bridge, we passed Rick and Linda on their 26S and exchanged some greetings on the radio. Its interesting how the water is clearer and blue as you are up near the open part of Biscayne Bay and then as you go south, the water becomes browner again through Card and Barnes Sound. As you get back into Blackwater Sound and the open Florida Bay, the water once again takes a clear blue hue as you get away from the more estuary type sounds.

Larissa learned a bit about navigation today as we needed to follow very strict courses through the twisting channels and creeks that lead from one body of water to the next.

Since my autopilot is broken, she was steering quite a bit whenever I needed to do something down below.

After leaving Elliott Key, we were only about 18 miles from downtown Miami which would be the furthest North we would sail. The rest



of the fleet was going further north to a little beach near the Tide Station a couple miles north from the Marina. The Miami Skyline seemed to be shrouded in smog the 2 days we were close to it. Perhaps this was made worse with the lack of wind. As we entered Blackwater Sound which is the main Bay of Key Largo where the fireworks were scheduled to be set off at

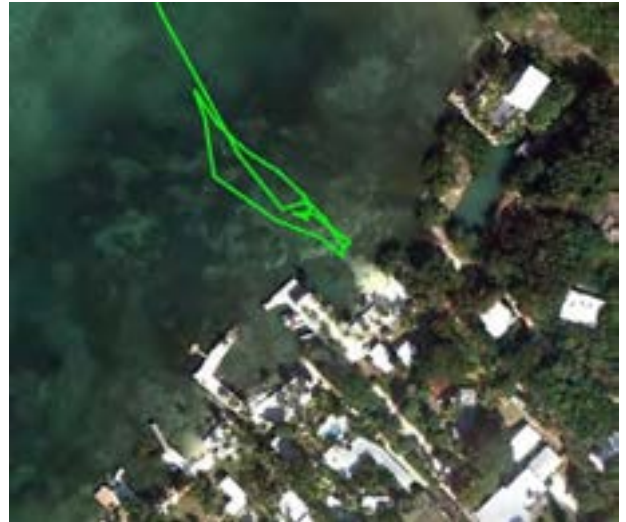
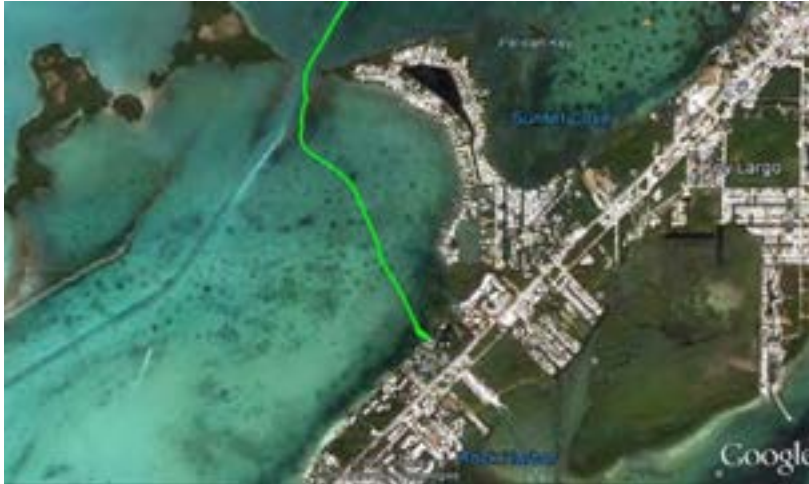
midnight, I snapped the picture of the two resorts (Gilberts and Anchorage) that are at the Route 1 Gateway into the Keys. This would be the last day that I would have my daughter Larissa with me since she would join the rest of the family in order to be back at



School on

Monday. It was nice to spend so much quality time with her before she becomes an older teenager who doesn't want to take trips with her Dad any longer. She was the only daughter who volunteered to do 30+ mile sails each day. The younger kids are ok with an 11 mile sail to Cayo Costa in return for 2 days on the beach but that is about their limit.

We phoned my wife Melissa as we got to the middle of Blackwater sound and they were already on their way to Pennekamp national coral park to take a ride over the reefs in a glass bottomed boat. Being used to my usual tardiness when it comes to boating, Melissa did not think we could have gotten there so fast so she didn't check to see if we could have made it onto the 12 noon ride. So we just kind of putted around slowly on the final



leg to the Rock Reef Resort. Coming around that final point of Sunset Cove

into Florida Bay, I ran into some very shallow water just outside of the ICW which made me wonder if I would be able to make it to the hotel beach.

Luckily, that was just a temporary shallow area and after kicking up some mud, I made it through. From the blow-up map, you can see that I tried to anchor about 100 feet off of the beach but the grass flats would not allow my Danforth (knockoff) Anchor to set so I ended up having to go about 300 feet offshore to find a bare spot in the weeds where I could set the anchor. This required me to extend the anchor rode by about 20 feet in order to be able to have the stern close to the beach and still be able to unload and load up. We



found our room and after being let in, took some nice hot showers after being away from





civilization for close to three whole days. It certainly didn't take long to get re-acclimated to civilization at this resort hotel. I can move between boat and cushy hotel bed pretty quickly it seems. The hotel had a paddle boat so after donning the required PFD's and signing the waiver forms, I took some of the kids on a little paddle, checking out the anchor placement, etc. It was beautiful weather for a New Year's Eve with a picture perfect Key Largo Sunset and there were

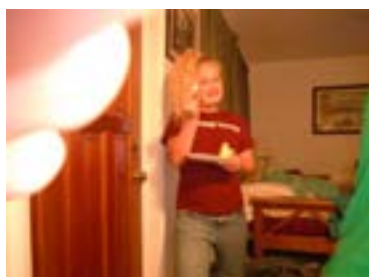
at least 2 bbq parties going on the hotel grounds. The main fireworks were in Blackwater Sound but we decided to avoid those crowds and went to dinner at the Tower of Pizza instead where we got some good Italian food topped off by a whole Key Lime pie to go. Since we don't typically stay up to the wee hours of the morning, we have a habit of opening our champagne before midnight or else we fall asleep before the bottle is gone, so we went back to the room around 11, popped our bottle as well as the one for the kids with the non alcoholic sparkling grape juice and waited for the ball to drop.



We all hugged at midnight and in good Greek tradition, cut up the Vasilopita to see



who would get the lucky coin. And what do you know, it ended up being Larissa!



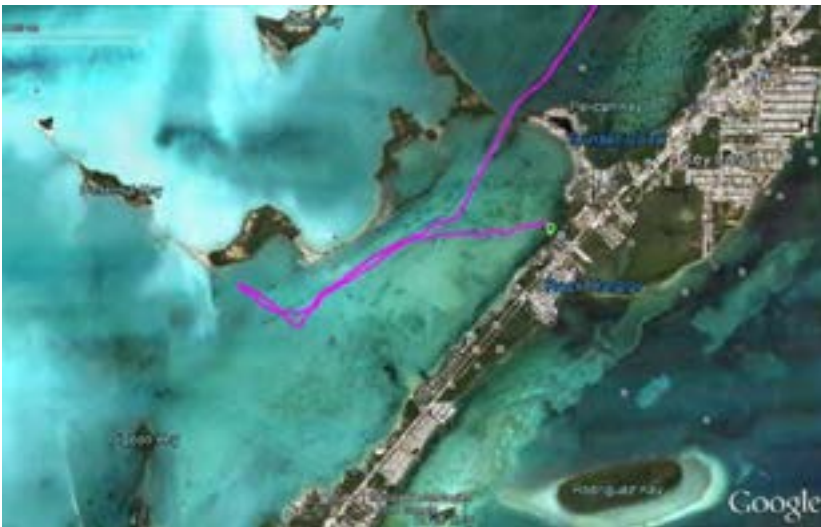
**Happy
New Year
2012**

Day 4 – Sunday, January 1, 2012

Sunday morning would see us split up after we checked out of the hotel at 11. Melissa and the kids packed up and drove back to Tampa so the kids could get back to school on Monday but I had one more day off so I would rejoin the fleet back in Barnes Sound for one more night out on the boat.



We had thought about going on a Sunday morning cruise in Florida Bay but no one was moving very quickly on Sunday morning and Melissa was very concerned about her sickly 96 year old grandmother whose condition had been worsening. So she left early enough so that she would be home by nightfall. Since it was only about 17 miles to Alabama jacks, I had a little time to explore so I decided to go a couple miles southwest into Florida Bay. You can see my course takes me by some pretty keys I'd like to visit again.



After my little deviation to the south, I pointed the bow right into the wind and headed NE towards Buttonwood Sound. It seemed like it would be a difficult day to sail with the wind on the nose and I started out motoring upwind but I was able to modify my course slightly to beat upwind on one tack with the motor turned off through half of Buttonwood



pictures taken down in Florida Bay at Pigeon Key and Swash Keys

sound and all of Blackwater and Barnes Sounds. So it turned out to be a pretty decent sailing day afterall, with at least a dozen miles sailed in winds that I would estimate to be about 8-12. The winds were stronger in Florida Bay and subsided a bit as I headed north. And once again, I noticed how brilliant blue/green the waters were down in Florida Bay and then started becoming more estuary like as I headed through Blackwater Sound and Barnes Sound. You can clearly see the difference in these



compared to the third picture (left) taken near the bridge leading into Barnes Sound.



When I had been doing my planning of this trip and trying to find a hotel for my family to stay at, one of the places that still had vacancy a few weeks ahead of time was Gilberts Marina and some blogger had written



that there is always a party at Gilberts. Well, sure enough as I cruised up to the bridge on Route 1 where Gilberts is, there were lots of power boats docked there and a big party going on with a live band. There was also a cool looking pirate ship in front of a riverboat also docked there. But the bloggers also said the rooms were dirty and run down so I didn't book rooms there and instead went to the Rock Reef Resort which was nice, clean, and the room was recently renovated. As much fun as it looked to stop at Gilberts just to check out the party, I was pushing on to meet WCTSS friends at Alabama Jacks where I had heard it closed at 5 PM. Although it turns out the restaurant closes at 7pm every night but the live band stopped playing at around 5.



With my little Florida Bay detour, I logged another 22.7 miles on the way to AJ's and then the red track shows my course out of Alabama Jacks, exploring around Middle Key and then finally taking the cut through Short Key into Manatee Bay. I'll write more on that on the next page. This was my first time to Alabama Jacks and I



decided to go through the cut where the depths are maybe 3-4 foot. There was a fairly strong current so I figured if I got stuck, I could always lift the motor a bit and let the current push me through the shallows. I used to be so scared of shallow water when I had my keel boat; this was one of the reasons I got the Macgregor. A large boat with a shallow draft and the centerboard and

rudders are like the canary in the coal mine because they start singing when the water starts getting too thin. So, I pushed through the cut but when I got into the channel, as expected, there



was no parking at the dock. So I rafted onto Stin's boat and his smaller Potter got sandwiched between my Mac 26X and Phil's Blue 26M.

Alabama Jack's is an interesting open air type country place. Some people said their food wasn't so good, but my conch chowder and grilled chicken sandwich were excellent...as well as



the corona with lime which seemed appropriate for the Key's attitude!



Here is what the table decorations looked like.

There was a live band, called something like the Little Card Sound Band, they were pretty good and had a fiddler too. The interesting thing was that the girls who were dancing were more like your grandmother's. age I guess that is where Grandma likes to go to par tee' You can get some sound from the band and see the dancing if you click on any of the links below which will pull a video down from an internet site.

Some Alabama Jacks dancing videos:

1. http://smg.photobucket.com/albums/v342/Dimitri2000X/2012%20Keys%20Trip/?action=view¤t=100_0251.mp4
2. http://smg.photobucket.com/albums/v342/Dimitri2000X/2012%20Keys%20Trip/?action=view¤t=100_0252.mp4
3. http://smg.photobucket.com/albums/v342/Dimitri2000X/2012%20Keys%20Trip/?action=view¤t=100_0253.mp4





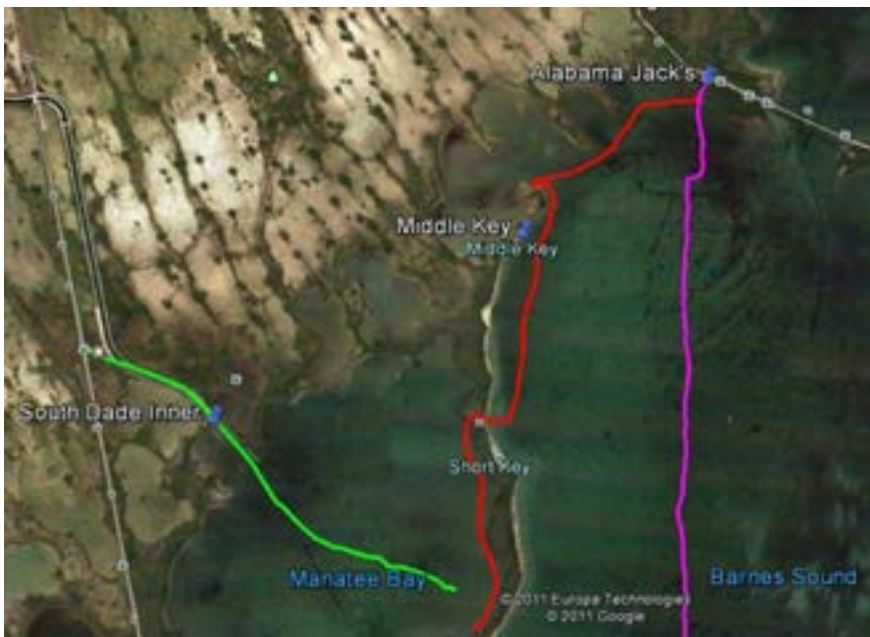
There were 5 boats left out of the original fleet, Dave & Teresa, Ken, Phil, Stin and myself who met up at AJ's. Although I had only been in the restaurant for about an hour, it was now after 5, the band stopped playing and everyone started clearing out fast. We paid our bills and got out of there knowing that it was getting dark soon.

We all went to our boats and pulled out through the cut. Some

tried to sail a bit, but I went exploring for an anchorage. I took a couple pictures of this boat that was on a mooring right outside the AJ cut. I guess this fellow must have dinghied into AJ's and never came back! I always hate to see neglected boats either up on the beach or sunken at a mooring.



I tried to get in the lee behind Middle Key but it was pretty much all mangroves and got



shallow so I turned back around and went towards the Short Key cut.

The wind was NE and ENE so it didn't look too risky to me to go through the cut with the wind on my stern. There would have to have been less than a foot of water to keep the Mac from getting through there with all

the boards and motor up and just a bit of head sail to push her through. I don't think I sounded less than 3 feet in there. I kicked up a bit of mud with the motor about 20 feet after the cut until deeper water. The sun was setting as I headed West through the cut. And the second picture is looking back East through the cut into Barnes Sound.



In hindsight, if I had known the wind was going to shift out of the NW later that night, we could have just stayed at the beach on the East side of Short Key where we stayed on Thursday night. I kept following the West bank of Short Key and then Main Key. Ken had warned that there was no beach on that side but by now it was getting very dark so people started throwing their anchors in the bay. I threw an anchor but it didn't set and came back in a ball of weeds. I tried again, not realizing that I was too close to the mangroves. But the anchor set as I got swarmed by mosquitoes in the calm winds. I decided I was safely anchored and didn't feel like relocating towards the middle of the bay where the others had thrown the hook. So I just ran into the cabin, closed up the doors and then swatted about a dozen mosquitoes before feeling secure again. Although after an hour or two, they did get less and I was able to go up top and fix my anchor light connection which wasn't plugged in well. I doused myself in bug spray first and also threw out a stern anchor which wasn't well set but I figured would keep the Mac from sailing too much on anchor.

On the radio I got an invite from Ken and Phil to raft up for some drinks since we weren't able to find a beach to gather on but decided to stay put and not have to deal with the mosquitoes. Also, although Melissa had phoned me right as I was going into AJ's that her grandmother seemed better, less than 2 hours later as I was cruising from AJ's into Manatee Bay, she phoned again that her Nannie had just passed away. Melissa was in St Petersburg, about 20-30 minutes from home when she got the bad news so it was hard for her to finish her long drive home with that kind of news. After getting rid of a couple more mosquitoes that snuck into the cabin when I went out again, I spent some time with Melissa on the phone trying to figure out how we would handle the funeral travel arrangements, the kid's exam schedules, etc. It had been a wonderful 4 days in the Keys, but this news brought us back into reality and now I knew I needed to get home as soon as possible. I watched a movie (Ironman) and then turned in for the night.

Day 5 – Monday, January 2, 2012

When we anchored in Manatee Bay, the wind was out of the NE so where I was positioned in the bay was completely protected from the wind. But the NE wind died out and sometime overnight, the wind turned out of the NW and so there was a small little chop hitting the boat. To make things worse, even though my stern anchor wasn't well set, when the wind shifted, the stern anchor line wrapped the bottom of the tilted up outboard and so the boat turned a bit beam to wind. It wasn't much of a wind and the bay being so shallow and having only a mile or two of fetch, the chop was very low and it was just making a bit of a slapping noise which didn't even wake me up. In the morning, I pulled the stern anchor right out (which is how I knew it wasn't set right) and swung around on the bow anchor about 90 degrees until the bow pointed to wind again. I also like to set a stern anchor because I don't trust these Danforth anchors when the wind shifts 90 or more degrees. I weighed the bow anchor and motored 3-400 yards to where the other boats were. If you see the end of the red track, that is where I was anchored at, and then the beginning of the green track was where Ken and Phil had rafted up the night before.

Dave and Teresa were just packing up their dinghy and getting ready to head to the boat ramp.



Ken said he was making a pot of coffee and invited Stin and I to raft up with them, so I pulled next to the white 26X and Stin joined the blue 26M and the four of us rafted up and drank Ken's excellent brewed Cuban coffee. I couldn't stay long so I said goodbye and then snapped this shot of Phil, Ken and Stin as I was pulling away.

I didn't have time to sail today so one last 2.8 mile motor run to the North side of Manatee Bay and into the Glades canal which would take me to the South Dade Marina and boat ramp.

Here are a few photos as I entered the South Dade Marina and the small single boat ramp which most of

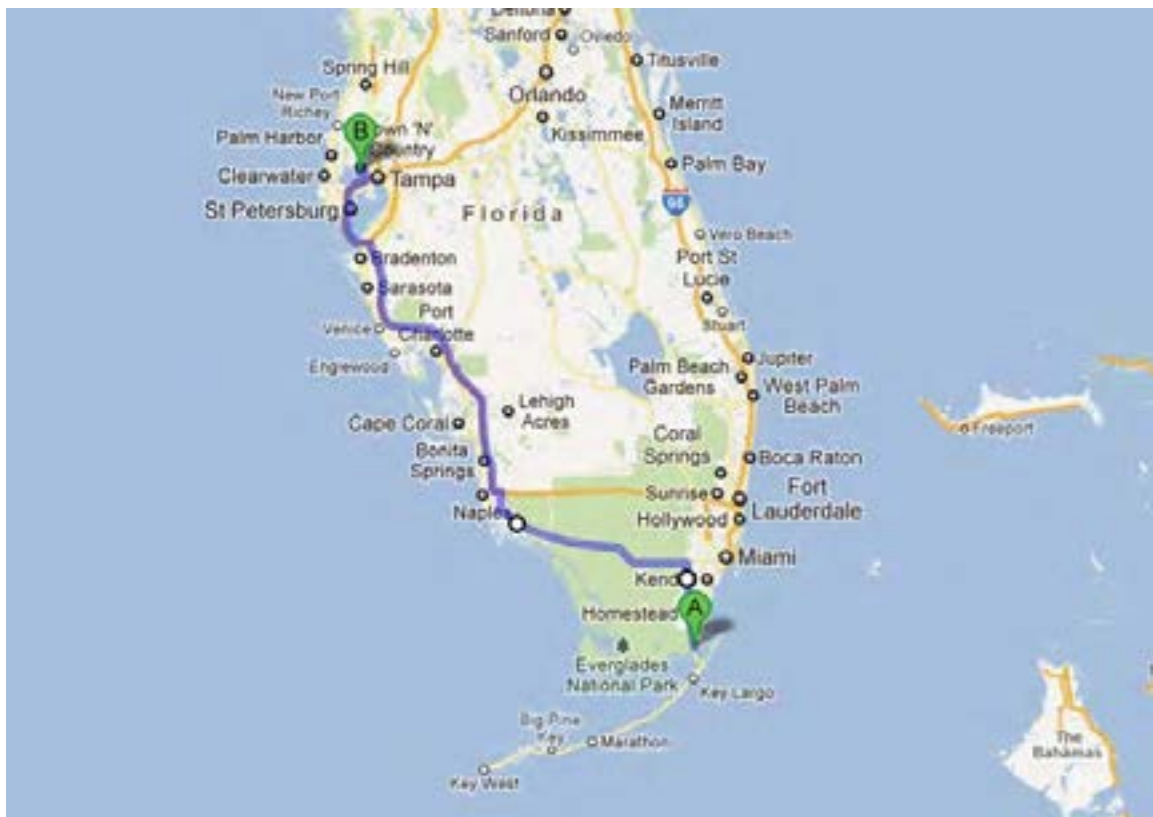


the fleet had launched from.



Dave and Teresa were just about packed up by the time I got to the ramp but they helped me get my boat on the trailer since it is such a small ramp, you have to pull the boat backwards quite a bit by hand to get it on the trailer. This is difficult to do with one person. Ken pulled in to help Phil pack up his boat but he intended to stay down in the Keys for another week and in Florida for about 3 months total sailing. By myself, it takes close to 1.5 hours to lower the mast and get the boat ready for trailering again so I was on the road around 12:15 and home safely by 5:45.

There had been a big mailing list discussion about which way was faster from Tampa to South Dade. In order to test the theories, I decided to drive back Monday on Route 41 and I had taken I-75 and Florida turnpike on the way down Thursday morning (as you may recall from the map on page 2).



This northbound routing using US-41 is 294 miles long compared to the 332 miles when I went south for a net savings of 38 miles even though you go slower for about 40% of the trip. So here are my time comparison results:

Thursday morning – departure 06:20 AM with two short stops – 5 hours 20 minutes
Monday afternoon – departure 12:15 PM with three short stops – 5 hours 30 minutes

I did get caught behind some slow pokes on Krome Ave and the first several miles of US 41 too, so I would say it is fairly well represented. On the open highway portions, I typically set my cruise control at 70mph.

The bottom line is that the extra stop I made on Monday afternoon may have been close to 10 minutes so it pretty much turned out to be a wash in terms of time. But, my truck clearly gets better gas mileage at the lower speeds and the 41 route is much more scenic (I saw over a dozen alligators by the side of the road and stuff like that). And not to mention the fact that the all-highway route cost me \$13.50 in tolls (apparently, no sunpass discount for towing my new double axel trailer)...So with the reduced gas consumption, I'm sure that the 41 route saved me over 20 bucks which is what it cost to park at South Dade for 4 nights. The conclusion is that I may certainly try that scenic route again someday.

Boat Mileage Log:

Day	Miles
1	7.7
2	32.4
3	34.9
4	27.4
5	2.8
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Total	105.2

The attendees of the New Year's 2012 Keys Cruise were:

Name(s)	Boat Type	Boat Name
Jonathan	Cape Dory	
Dave and Teresa	Mac 26X	Hot Tub
Dimitri and Larissa	Mac 26X	Lucky 7
Ken	Mac 26X	Last Flight
Phil	Mac 26M	Southern Soul
Ted	Sea Pearl 21	Hideaway
Mark	Hunter 23.5	Imagine That
Ed and Becky	Hunter 23.5	St Somewhere
Terry and Ruth	Siren 17	Whisper
Rick and Linda	Mac 26S	Mental Floss
Allen and Denise	SunCat	Sun Daze
Stin	WWP 19	Lily P

It did turn out to be quite a MacGregor event with half of the sailboats being Macs (and 2 other white 26X's like mine). Most pictures in this log came from Dimitri and Larissa but a few were shamelessly borrowed from some other folks like Dave/Teresa and Ed/Becky. Thank you!

What a great way to kick off the New Year!