

## **Bill's Bahama Adventure of 2006**

### **The 500 Mile Odyssey**

#### **Day 7 (5/29): A Diet Coke at Flo's**

##### **Total Mileage: 14 nautical miles.**

The day began very much as the last day ended, with a colorful sky and comfortable temperatures. Today would be another short mileage day so we started the day Bahamas style; leisurely lounging in the cockpit reclined with books and breakfast as comfortable as we would be on our sofa at home, only with a much better view. When we finally overcame our inertia of relaxation, we held a short meeting and made the decision not to attempt a trip to Nassau to visit my wife and daughters who were spending the week there while one of my daughters participated in a dolphin studies internship program. The thought of adding a 40 nautical mile trip (80 mile round trip) to our cruise was very unappealing, and it would eat up our weather window for crossing the Gulf Stream back to Florida. Besides, after being in the Berry Islands we knew that other than the cool factor and nostalgia of sailing to my "bonnie lass," there was nothing in Nassau worth seeing. I've been there before. So, we came to a quick unanimous agreement that we would continue with our short hops down the Berry Islands and anchor somewhere near Cabbage Cay, home of Flo's Conch Bar and Restaurant, a famous bar and eatery. Actually it was the only bar or restaurant (actually one of the only buildings) in the central section of the Berry Islands as most of the islands are uninhabited. Matt had been talking about how good the conch fritters were ever since we left Tennessee. It promised to be a unique dining experience.



*Breakfast under the mosquito netting. I wonder if Joe left that light on all night?*

As we prepared to weigh anchor and depart, what should appear but two very large and worn looking sailing vessels. They were filled with Boy Scouts. Just like two years ago when Matt visited this same spot, another generation of Scouts were following the same path. I could see the scouts and a few fathers busily preparing to drop anchor. Many of the kids were already donning snorkeling gear, and I could hear their idle jabbering as they waited for their turn to jump off the boat. I asked Matt if he wanted to go visit, but he didn't recognize the boats or captains and he didn't care to step back into his past. Matt had graduated into a new realm of high adventure. I couldn't help but wonder if any of these young Boy Scouts would someday return with their fathers in a small sailboat.

After leaving our beautiful anchorage to the 15 or more rambunctious Scouts, we sailed a short distance to a scenic spot near a small beach that, according to my guide book, was supposed to have good snorkeling and beach combing. Here we found the best snorkeling anywhere we had been in the Berry Islands. The current was strong though, so we had to be careful in anchoring and also guard against being swept too far from the boat. To play the current to our advantage, we swam/waded to shore and worked our way up the beach to the edge of a rocky inlet. Then, we "drift snorkeled" back toward the boat, allowing the current to carry us. It was a pretty cool way to snorkel. We would just drift along and swim only when we wanted to stay in one place to check out an interesting rock, coral formation, or fish. This spot was tucked in between three or four small islands and looked, for all purposes, to be a perfect spot for pirates or buccaneers to hide out or bury some treasure. So pristine was the beach that ours were the only footprints. Lunch was, like most days, light snacks and fruit (what we had left).



*We started at the rocks in the distance and drift snorkeled back to the boat.*



*Another view from the drift snorkel site. That opening is too shallow to navigate.*

Although we had planned to go to Flo's for dinner, the mood struck us to have a late lunch there so we made way again, sailing/motoring down the coast to Little Harbour Cay and into the VERY shallow inlet where up on a low bluff sat Flo's Conch Bar and Restaurant. Reading the water the best we could, we just skittered across a shoal before getting back into deeper water where there were mooring buoys placed for the convenience of visiting boats (although I don't know how any boat other than shoal draft could ever make it in).

It was a good thing we went for lunch. Upon arrival we found that we were supposed to radio ahead if we wanted conch fritters. They were very accommodating though, and fixed us a hamburgers and fries. There was nothing special about the hamburgers other than the novelty of sitting in this out of the way place eating them. What I liked best, and will always remember, was the ice cold can of coke. After drinking lukewarm powdered Gatorade for the past 4 days, the taste of an ice cold coke was simply heavenly.

I also learned from Flo, who had watched our approach, that we had guessed right when coming into their harbor. One has to enter in sort of a serpentine pattern in order to avoid the shallowest areas, but even then there was one very thin spot. Thank goodness for good charts and clear water. The one technique that saved us from running aground was to reduce our 20" draft by all three of us to sitting on the port side of the boat (the side with the outboard engine) and causing the boat to heel, thus allowing us to just barely skim over the shallow bank of sea grass. Yes, it was that shallow.



*Flo's Conch Bar and Restaurant...of sorts.*



*Our mooring at Flo's*



*We had the place to ourselves.*



*The joy of an ice cold coke.*

After a hearty lunch of hamburgers, fries, and of course cokes, we were feeling quite refreshed; that is until we stepped outside to a very hot afternoon sun. It was so hot that we couldn't stand barefoot on the dock without burning our bare feet, so we quickly jumped into our modest dinghy and made haste back to the mother ship.

No sooner did we get on board when "nature called" on all three of us. I don't know if it was the hamburgers or the fact that we hadn't dumped our personal bilges for a day and a half, but our next act of the day was to find a good place to make a deposit. For those that are uninitiated to the Berry Islands, it might seem rather barbaric and inconsiderate to the ecosystem to dig a cat hole and go to the bathroom on the islands. However, the concern and fear that we might be breaking some Bahamian law quickly evaporated when we saw what was obviously a sewer pipe dumping directly into the harbor from Flo's. It's all about population density, and there is none in the Berry Islands.

Initially during our trip, I encouraged Matt and Joe to use the boat's porta-pottie. But, for some reason they both loathed to use the thing. They wanted to see if they could go through the whole trip without need for it. I, on the other hand, had great experience with the pottie and held no fear or loathing. But alas, I got caught up in the challenge and so off we went looking for an uninhabited island. These islands are very much like the backcountry of any wilderness area so we employed the same methods as used when backpacking.

First and foremost, we were always careful to keep the toilet paper dry. Each of us would, one at a time depending level of necessity, set off in search of a suitable location well inland and away from the beach. Then, backpacker style, a "cat hole" was dug with a plastic backpacking shovel. Duty was done, the hole covered, and a rock placed upon the spot so that some other unsuspecting traveler wouldn't inadvertently use the very same spot. It worked very well except for the one time that my son just happened to dig right next to the very spot that I had gone and partially uncovered my work. I guess we are just too closely related and think too much alike. We got a good laugh out of it.

Leaving the island where Flo's is located, we headed down the coast under motor power because the wind was once again light and out of the wrong direction. After about 30 minutes we ducked behind a bight and came to rest in a most beautiful crescent shaped beach. There were thick palms and scrub brush set behind beautiful white sand making a tropical scene that looked and felt like the South Seas. Best of all, we had it all to ourselves. It was here that I found my lucky shark's tooth and deposited it in the special compartment that all Tilley hats provide. The anchorage was well protected from the prevailing rolling waves from the ocean, and we would have just stayed there for the night if not for the beckoning of Flo's for the evening meal. We did stay for quite a while, though, and enjoyed swimming and just hanging out on the beach.



*Yet another beautiful deserted anchorage*



*The deserted beach felt like Gilligan's Island.*

After a good romp in the water we all three just sat at the water's edge and talked. I had talked with my son many times before, but this time was different. Matthew had always been a boy to me, but here we were, what seemed like a thousand miles from our home and our country; talking not as father and son, but as man to man. It may sound corny, but I felt a transformation occurred on this trip. Matthew had just graduated from high school and was about to leave me for the rest of the summer to teach sailing at a summer camp in Wisconsin. Then he would be gone to college and but for the occasional visit home, he would be gone from my life forever. Perhaps a bit of an exaggeration, but certainly he would no longer be a totally dependent child. The child I remember holding on my lap watching Thomas the Tank Engine on Shining Time Station (a children's television show); or the little boy sitting on the bench outside our kitchen, swinging his legs back and forth as he ate a prized cookie.

But time stands still for no one, and I felt happy and proud that Matt had transitioned through his youth so well. The way he should be. Sitting on that beach with Matt and Joe, I could almost see into the future. It was a faint glimpse. It was a vision of the time when I would become the crew and Matt the captain, both at sea and at home. It felt good to know that he would come back to fill that role. Maybe that is why we have kids.

Enough nostalgia. It was getting close to the dinner hour so we swam back to the boat and cleaned up for dinner. Dressing for dinner was, of course, nothing like the turn of the century rituals that occurred every night on the great Atlantic cruise liners. No, we simply broke out the Joy for a quick ocean bath and dug in our duffle bags for a clean Tee shirt.



***Joe doesn't know it, but Matt isn't helping***

Heading back into Flo's the tide had retreated even farther so we had to do the heeling thing again, and deftly picked up a mooring under the watchful eyes of two other cruising couples already at the bar. OK, it wasn't so deft. Joe had never picked up a mooring so miscalculated the speed of the boat and missed it. The second attempt was successful, but I felt compelled to chastise him for his slovenly seamanship. Never mind that I might have come in too fast, or didn't get close enough for an easy reach. The captain is never wrong. Thank goodness Joe was so understanding and didn't forget the rule that the captain is always right.

Once again, we loaded into the little dingy and rowed over to the dock. What we found was nothing short of amazing. Tied up to Flo's dinghy dock was an inflatable dinghy, actually a RIB that had an outboard that was bigger than the auxiliary on our sailboat. By a factor of ten! When we entered Flo's we met the owners. They were a typical cruising couple that had a catamaran anchored out behind the island called Cabbage Cay. They dared not even try to get into Flo's with their big boat. They were quite impressed with our little Rhodes22 and told us that they had thought we surely would run aground in our attempt to get into the inner harbor. It was another proud moment as a Rhodes22 owner. When I told them about our technique of heeling the boat, they expressed their amazement and respect of our seamanship; and told us how they had wondered why our boat was leaning over as they watched us enter the harbor. They had surmised that we had taken on water. Flo just smiled in the background behind the bar.

It was good to talk with other cruisers. The Berry Islands are so remote that few cruisers seem to make it out to them. As we talked, I made sure to bring up my favorite topic, fuel. Again, they said that while they had not been to Chub Cay they understood that there was fuel there. Good. What a relief. Now I could relax and enjoy dinner. When our food arrived our parties separated, but I could overhear their conversation with another cruising couple at the small bar. I smiled to myself as I listened to them discuss at great length about maintenance issues with this system or that system on their large and complex boats. It was nice to know that about the only thing we had to worry about was the occasional bit of water in the lazarette.

Matt's rants about the conch at Flo's were well deserved and accurate. I don't really know if Flo's would have rated that well as a States side restaurant, and I don't really care. Given their location, and the status of our hunger and deprivation of any fine cuisine for the better part of a week, this restaurant was as good as anyone could ever wish for. It was a fine meal of conch, fresh fish Bahamas style, and Kalik. The legal drinking age in the Bahamas is 18, so I allowed Matt and Joe to try the beer of the Bahamas, called Kalik. When I ordered a second one and asked if they would like another as well, they declined. I was impressed that they had shown restraint as I sat there drinking my second Kalik...and then my third. I was glad that they didn't chug their beers the way that Chevy Chase's son did in the movie "Vacation". I couldn't guess what they might do when they got to college, and I didn't really want to think about it. But at least here they showed restraint.

Bellies full again, we headed back to the boat with the setting sun and the confidence that all was well. We would have stayed right there on the mooring but for the advice from the folks at Flo's. They said that unless the wind was blowing a fresh breeze, the mosquitoes would make the evening quite uncomfortable. We knew they were telling the truth after our experience the previous night so headed out to the vicinity of the catamaran and as far from the island as possible, but not so far as to get into the tidal chop.



*Setting up the bedroom*



*Joe just found out that Matt didn't help with the dinghy*

How the mosquitoes found us I'll never know, but find us they did. So up went the mosquito netting again. We also got a sprinkle of rain, but the boys simply wrapped themselves in the tarp and were fine. We were by now totally immersed and acclimated to the climate and culture of the Bahamas. As we drifted off to sleep, all that could be heard was the gentle gurgling of the tidal water flowing under the boat and the occasional buzzing of a mosquito trying to find its way through the netting. The boys were quickly asleep, but I lay there awhile contemplating the next step in our trip. It was with a tinge of sadness that I realized that the next day would bring a turn in direction back to the west and the beginnings of our journey home.