

Bill's Dry Tortugas Adventure

The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly (Wait, there was no Ugly)

Sitting in my study one cold and rainy day in February, I contemplated the prospect of the long drive to Miami. My daughter, Lindsay, would be completing her freshman year at the University of Miami and would need a way to move a year's worth of dorm room accumulations back to Knoxville, Tennessee at the end of May. Hmm, this could just be what I have been looking for; a way to take my Rhodes22 on another adventure. On this cold and dreary day, the prospect of the warm idyllic pristine waters of the Florida Keys beckoned. The idea sparked inside my head.

"So you think you want to sail to the Dry Tortugas on a small sailboat?" my wife quizzed.

"No big deal," I replied. "After all, hadn't I sailed to the Bahamas and back just a few years ago?"

"And how are you going to carry all of Lindsay's stuff home when you have a vehicle full of sailing gear?"

"The suburban is a big vehicle. And if I have to, I'll put some of her stuff in the boat."

"And what about the weather, and your daughter's propensity to seasickness?" (she always refers to Lindsay as "your daughter" when I want to take her on some adventure).

"She can wear a patch, and I will watch the weather carefully and change our plans if it is too rough."

"Well I'm certainly not going," she retorted. "And if anything happens to my children you might as well not come home either!"

To which I replied, "They're my children too, ya know."

End of conversation.

In the end, my wife was very supportive, or perhaps tolerant is a better term. She knew that this "little" idea would plunge me into planning...and gear buying. Ahhh, the joy of one of these trips is in the planning and gear shopping.

So the plan was hatched. I would drive to Miami at the end of May with the boat in tow. I would drive straight through, a 14+ hour trip, and hopefully get there before midnight. My son, Matthew, would fly down on a \$39 ticket from Knoxville to Ft. Lauderdale the following evening. I wondered if he had talked his friend into having his wedding on my day of departure so that he could avoid the long drive down to Miami with me. Oh well, at least he would be coming. It gave me great comfort knowing that another competent sailor would be on board; or at least one competent sailor would be on board. My reputation as a sailor isn't exactly stellar. Little did I know the comfort having him along would provide.

Matt, who is now 22 years old, is an experienced sailor who had accompanied me on my Bahamas trip. Since that trip, he acquired EMS training and had matured into a level headed young adult with a calming disposition. My daughter, the catalyst for this

trip, had chosen the University of Miami for its marine science program and was happily engaged in all that UM and southern Florida offer. She loves the ocean and was quite excited about the prospect of sailing to the Dry Tortugas before heading home for the summer. She was undaunted by the prospect of getting seasick. Her focus in life since the age of six has been to study marine mammals so she looked at this trip as an opportunity to site some species she hadn't seen yet, and to just be close to mother ocean. Seasickness be damned. She would just deal with it.

The Rhodes22 being a small vessel, I kept a fairly flexible float plan with several alternatives. Plan A would have us launch from Key West and sail to the Dry Tortugas. This was the most preferred plan, but also the one fraught with the most risk. It was the longest trip and would require a good weather window for both comfort and safety. Plan B would have us drive through the Everglades National Park and launch at Flamingo on the northern edge of Florida Bay. We could then sail south on the Gulf side of the keys or north along the uninhabited southwest coast. Plan C would be to sail Biscayne Bay and/or the Florida Keys. It all depended on the wind direction and forecast.



The Crew: Matt and Lindsay