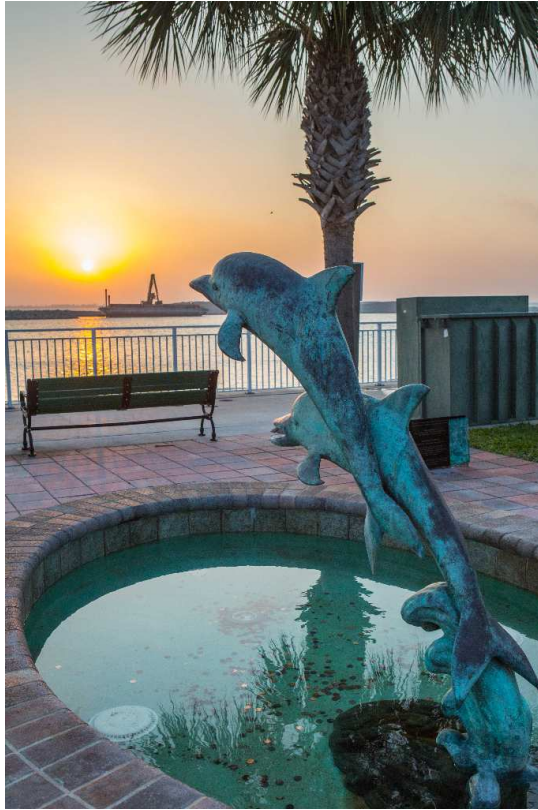


FORT PIERCE TO COCOA BEACH

March 2013



We were up early just in time to watch the sun come up. We had moved over to the fuel dock late yesterday to fuel up and then spent the night there so we wouldn't have to tie up again. That meant we needed to be gone before they opened. The earth movers were already chugging around in the early morning darkness by the new breakfront they're building for the marina. The town is determined to get it done before hurricane season and I'm confident they will as they are working hard and putting in long hours.

BEASTLY HOT

It was unbearably hot and humid. We had the A/C on all day yesterday and last night. We never do that. We both felt sticky and drained from the heat. We're not used to this kind of weather and amazed to see people out in it having a good time. How in the world do they do it?

The boat is damp and wet, even the carpet feels wet from the humidity. The windows are sweating and beginning to fog up so Larry turns the window fans on. It will be better when we get going out on the water with some wind blowing through the boat. Right now it is dead calm and beastly hot.

LOVED FORT PIERCE

We really enjoyed our stay at Fort Pierce. The town is thriving and very active. They are proud of their marina and waterfront project which will considerably increase the number of boat slips available. I love the idea of the breakwater being landscaped islands instead of an ugly concrete wall. 100's of birds have already claimed the islands as a mass resting place even though at the moment they are in constant transformation, just mounds of sand and boulders being reshaped and moved by the hour. The birds are great entertainment for people strolling along the water front as they throw food to them and the birds perform acrobatics trying to catch the bits and pieces before they hit the water. Something about watching them is mesmerizing for young and old as seem to be entertained with this simple act for hours.

This little marina is teeming with bird and sea life. During our stay we were

rewarded with daily encounters with manatees. They slowly lumber their way into the marina during the day and then seem to vanish at night. They don't do much, mostly sleep and lounge around among the boats, providing great viewing for people walking along the docks.



MANATEES

One afternoon as I was at the computer I heard a strange sound, like someone coming up for a very big breath of air with a very bad stopped up nose right outside the swim step. It was a manatee hanging out by the boat. A family of them stayed there for hours and at times I thought one was scratching it's back by rubbing on the bottom of the boat. The boat would even rock a bit back and forth from the movement. It was a strange but wonderful experience to have them hanging out so close.

They are bizarre looking creatures, like gigantic overweight monster slugs, some weighing as much as 3000 pounds! Their skin is brown and leathery looking and covered in algae and other growths which the fish like to nibble on. So you always see a group of fish hovering around them

munching away. PS - Bet you didn't know that manatees leave quite a few farts. We are eye witnesses to this remarkable feat! Coincidentally a manatee educational center is nearby too.

The marina was also filled with schools of fish, not sure what kind but powerful fish that would at times literally slap the side of the boat so hard and loud that it startled us several times not knowing what it was. They would stir the water up so much like were fighting with each other. If you threw some food out they would fight over it like they hadn't eaten for weeks.

PELICANS

We also got a kick out of watching the pelicans who were so comical. We laughed at their smooth landings gliding across the water leaving a streak behind. Their dive bombs were hilarious, some right by the boat. Take offs were equally funny. To gain enough momentum for lift off, they hop and flap across the water, making slapping sounds their wide duck feet on the water.

They can be oh so graceful too. I never tire of watching in wonder how they can sail an inch off the water's surface for so many yards without a flap of a wing and then just for fun they tip the edge of a wing in slack flat water leaving a thin line like a signature. And oh those funny positions they get into when perching on a dock post, or someone's boat railing. How can they balance on them with those flat duck-like feet and then to sleep like that? Amazing creatures that we all take for granted except for their messy poops!

HERON



Early this morning while I was taking Ziggy out I saw a large grey heron. He had caught a fairly large fish, over a foot long and was holding it tightly between his beak. The fish realizing his dilemma was madly trying to wiggle free. This did not hinder the heron one bit as he gracefully lifted off from the dock and slowly flew overhead and landed on top a nearby dinghy float all the while holding the wiggling fish.

There the heron stood, still as a statue so stoic looking and yet at that same time looking so silly with this wiggling fish in its beak. He just waited patiently for the fish to tire out. The fish had a lot of fight in him and continued for the longest time struggling to free himself. Occasionally he would take breaks when exhausted and hang like a limp rag from the grip of the heron's beak and surely I thought he was dead but he was just catching its breath as just when you thought the fight was over, he'd start the wiggling again.

Finally after about 10-15 minutes the heron tossed the limp fish upward in such a way that it fell back down straight down the heron's throat head first. The heron

gulped him down a little further with a couple swift head moves and then the fish was gone from sight. The only trace of him was how oddly reshaped the heron's throat now was and then suddenly... to my amazement... the throat began wiggling!! The fish was still at it! Still alive in the heron's throat! This action didn't even get a notice from the heron who seemed very satisfied with himself and nonchalant about his grossly misshapen and oddly



wiggling neck. It was quite something to watch.

FARMER'S MARKET

During our stay, we took many walks along the board walk and marina park. There are lots of restaurants within walking distance and two directly overlooking the marina.

On Saturday the town puts on a huge farmer's market at the waterfront park with live music and an amazing amount of booths. There are all kinds of foods to eat, from omelets made on the spot, to fresh tropical drinks delicious pastries and fresh breads to name just a few. There even is some strange guy slicing off thin dried meat from the leg of an animal! Ick!

The farmer's market is really a must and very popular so be prepared for crowds and challenges parking but well worth the effort.

MOVIN ON UP THE ICW

We had a great time in Fort Pierce and it was just what we needed but sadly when cruising the ICW you have to move on, leaving those great little stops behind only to find another just up the road aways. So today we're heading a bit north to the little village called Cocoa across from the Space Coast.

We pushed off the dock and ah, just that little bit of movement of the boat provided a bit of relief, a small breeze through the boat to break up the heat and humidity in the air.

I glanced down at my iPad chart and see Negro Cut is off to the starboard. You never could name a place that now. I like to see some of the old names on charts in places that we travel and wonder about the origin. This one, the meaning, is probably lost over the years but makes you wonder about it.

We pass green marker 170. It was marked as a recent hazard, posted on Active Captain which Larry likes to use now.

Larry says it looks like it has been replaced with a green can, he makes a note to send an email update to let them know.

Just north of Fort Pierce it looks like there are some nice old houses along the waterfront, a bit of history still there before condos set in. We pass lots of preserve areas and of course what comes with that, the manatee signs. The wind is starting to pick up a good clip but is from behind so a smooth ride so far.

Oops Larry swerves to the right! Some crab pots near Vero Beach. Watch out!

CRABBING OUR WAY UP THE ICW

Speaking of crabs, the wind and current snuck up on us and is pushing us out of the channel so we turn to get back in and find ourselves driving diagonally or crabbing up the channel to stay inside the markers.

I see a few sunken ship markers on the charts on both sides of the channel. You wonder how old that info is and what happened.

VERO BEACH AREA

I love looking at the big gorgeous houses north of Vero and glad to see lots of preserves without development. John's Island is beautiful with stately mansions and lovely landscaping.

We are getting ready to head under the tall bridge at Vero near where a marina is. We had considered coming up here to stay for a couple days as a lot of boaters really like it or say so on the chat rooms. In fact we

drove up to look at it while we had the van with us in Fort Pierce.

It's kind of a neat place, a step back in time I guess you could say, with quaint old wooden docks and big old oaks trees with moss hanging from them. The area is tucked back in the mangroves. Larry read that there's a bus that comes by and boaters use it to get to the town which is not within walking distance.

The day we visited it was so hot and muggy and I wondered about the bugs with the mangroves nearby as there wasn't a bit of breeze. We decided to stay at Fort Pierce where everything was handy.

"NEXT TO ME"

As we are getting ready to head through the bridge there was a trawler up ahead. He is on our side of the channel and heading straight for us. Larry keeps up our speed and course thinking this guy will move over. We keep watching and wondering if this guy is paying attention or what the heck he is doing. He's going to hit us straight on I think! Larry backs off the throttle and calls him quickly on the radio.

"Trawler heading south at Vero Beach bridge what is your intention?!"

No answer. We move more to the right and squeezing to stay in the channel. The guy moves slightly to his starboard but not nearly enough for our comfort zone. He goes right by us with just a few feet to spare between us and waves like nothing is unusual. I turn and watch him go by in shock and that's when I notice the name of his boat... "Next to Me"!!!

Larry couldn't resist, even though the guy probably didn't have his radio on to hear...

"Now I know why you named your boat what you did!"

Wow, that was crazy.

Just north of John's Island the ICW makes a quick right turn into a narrow area. We weren't paying much and almost missed it.



Guess that might be the negative of using the iPad for navigation.

Pine Island area is nice too. We are amazed that the signs say you can go 30 knots in this area but I guess they are prepared for wakes as all the boats at the docks are on lifts safely out of the water.

Coming now to a place called Wassaba. Signs say slow speed for manatees on left side of ICW, ICW exempt. Very hard to read. Too much writing..... arrgh!

STAYING ON THE STRAIGHT & NARROW

The wind has really picked up now and is pulling us out of the channel again. No more day dreaming as it's a constant fight to keep her on the straight and narrow. Where did this wind come from? Wow! Even though the wind is behind us we are getting wind waves over the windshield. It's getting a little hairy out here. We both comment on it.

LOOPY FROM NEW ZEALAND

Up by Sebastian inlet we catch up to a boat called Loopy Kiwi from New Zealand. We chuckle at the name and



Larry says he must be a New Zealander doing the great loop. On this trip we have met more foreigners cruising than ever before. Maybe it has something to do with the economy...they can afford traveling in our country more than the Americans can.

We have to slow down for Loopy and now see why, he has a sailboat ahead of him and what looks like a barge under tow.

ahead of the sailboat. Everyone is trying to figure out how to negotiate around this barge that is running diagonally (crabbing) down the channel covering the full width of the marked channel. They are slowing down to the barges pace which is so slow that we are having trouble keeping control at this slow speed. It's becoming quite a traffic pile up.

It takes a long while for the sailboat to get by the barge. Loopy hangs back for awhile and then begins his attempt to get around the barge. By now the winds are blowing a good clip. It's kind of funny to see everyone crabbing sideways.

BIG BAD BARGE!

Loopy has to go outside the channel a bit but makes it past the barge. By now we see the breadth of this guy. It's even bigger than we thought. This guy is towing several huge long steel pipes probably 100 feet long! They are bobbing up and down and swaying left and right. Geez this is scary! The captain has his hands full as he has two tugs working to tow these pipes and the barge. It's a real mish mash all cobbled together and to no fault of his is still crabbing across the channel at a snails pace.

We both are getting nervous as we can't go outside the channel as it's too shallow so will have to pass pretty close to him and he's hogging the whole channel. Larry makes a go for it. Our wake, though we are going slow, is huge because we are plowing at this slow pace. That combined with the tugs' wake and the wind waves is making for huge wakes between us...OMG! We manage to make it by this

guy but not without waking the crap out of him. I can hear the tugs and barge crashing into each other as they roll over the wakes and see some guy standing on the front of the barge at the controls trying to steady everything and keep her going.

Wow, that was nerve wracking! Now we've still got to get by Loopy in this choppy mess. Larry calls him on the radio to let him know we are going to pass so if he can slow down and move over a bit we will try not to wake him too much as we pass on the port side. We've got 2 foot waves now and the wind is nuts blowing their tops right off in a wild frenzy. Why does the wind always come up in situations like this?

We do our best to get by Loopy and the Canadian sailboat without waking them and then pick up our speed again. Those are the kind of experiences in boating that make your heart race.

iPADS FOR NAVIGATION

I take the wheel for awhile to give Larry another break. We get up to Melbourne. We've been managing pretty well up to this point using the iPads for navigation instead of the chart plotter today. We actually didn't need to depend on any charts so much as you could clearly see the markers all day until NOW!

Now they were few and far between and with the bad wind conditions you could hardly see far enough ahead to the next marker. We both struggled with our binoculars to find them and once we did, I would head to it and while we were heading towards it madly searching for the next one.



We had to really watch staying in the channel on these long stretches. The first indication is the depth, if it drops to 5 feet you know you better move over and hopefully in the right direction. We were constantly checking behind and forward to see if we were in the line with the markers of the channel. I finally ended up facing to the side of the boat and just turning my head to the front and to the back to make sure the wind, waves and current weren't pushing us off course. Felt weird but it worked.

COCOA IN SIGHT

We finally had Cocoa in sight. It's just beyond the tall bridge. We'd been here

before so we remembered the entrance was a little tricky. Larry hailed the dock master and we waited outside the entrance channel until she gave us instructions on how to come in. She was very good and gave us clear instructions on where to set our lines which I've never had a dockmaster do before (all four corners and not to put fenders up until we were in the slip and were tied).



The winds were blowing 20 knots probably but the marina is inside a concrete breakfront and large tall condos on the south side so we figured once we got in we'd be pretty well protected. You head almost all the way to shore and then at the last minute at the end of the wall make a quick turn to port and head into the marina. Last time they put us in a far inside slip which I remember being tight and difficult to get into, but this time because of the winds we got a slip in the middle area which she said was easier in these conditions giving us more swinging room.

The dock master did a great job tying us up and several others came to help as well in the wind.

NO REST YET

You never think cruising the ICW is going to be challenging but today was one of those days. It was a hard day out there today fighting the winds and passing that barge but now we could relax or so I thought. I headed down below to take a much needed nap but it wasn't too long



before Larry gets me up in a hurry. He says there is a tornado warning and should be here in a few minutes!

TORNADO WARNING!

The dock master was running around the marina, knocking on people's boats, letting everyone know about the tornado and to get things stowed. She said they were welcome to come up to the office to ride it out if they wanted.

The winds had increased probably to 35 knots. It was windy but nothing that we'd normally worry about. We both were glad

we got in a slip when we did though as a sailboat came in just after us and had a hard time and I sure wouldn't want to be out on the water right now!

We saw some people running up to the marina office and they got totally and suddenly drenched as the rain without warning was now coming down in hordes and then... the winds began! Others, like us, stayed on their boats and you could see them standing in their boats looking out the windows watching the coming storm.

A ROAR BEFORE IT CAME

It was all so quick and sudden as the winds picked up at a fierce pace. You could hear it before it came through. I never heard anything like it as it sounded like a loud roar like a train coming and then was followed by the thunder and crazy winds. It was wild like nothing we'd seen on a boat before, well except when we were on the outside once, same area, that time up by Cape Canaveral when the winds got to 50 knots. What's with this area??? Scary!

The only good thing was that it passed quickly and all was well or so we thought. The winds died down to about 35 knots for the rest of the day. We heard later that the winds got up to 60 mph at the worst.

We sure thank our lucky stars we got into port before that hit!!!

USCG WAS SWAMPED!

We turned the radio on to see if anybody was still out in it as we had passed several people that day that may still be. The USCG was busy on the radio dealing with several people having trouble but we

didn't hear the names of any boats that we passed today. We did hear two sailboats that we had passed earlier that were anchored or trying to anchor. One was dragging badly and the other was trying to help.

EVEN WORSE NEWS

It was so windy that Larry didn't get up to the marina office until 4:00 to check in. On his way to the marina office he passed a woman that looked very shaken. She worked on the local paddle wheeler that takes tourists out for a day cruise. Larry said she was totally rattled and rightly so. She said the paddle wheeler was out in those winds. He asked her how it was out there and she said:

"Terrible terrible, the seas were awful and the worst part was seeing the dead body that floated by...oh so terrible!" That's all she would say and headed off down the dock.

We found out later that apparently while they were out in the storm they saw a dead body floating by the boat. They called the USCG but they were too busy trying to help so many people that they couldn't come to retrieve the body at that moment. So the people on the paddle wheeler had to just watch the dead body float down river unable to do anything.

We heard the next day at the marina that the body eventually washed up to shore under the nearby bridge. It took a day or two to identify the body as being a man that owned a boat a couple docks down. The police were at the marina asking questions and roped his boat off with crime scene tape.

We never did hear anymore about how or why he died. It was sad to walk by the slip and see the crime scene tape. We can only image that he fell off his boat or the dock in the terrible winds. It was that bad.

**What a terrible day it was on the ICW!
We feel lucky we had no troubles.**

