

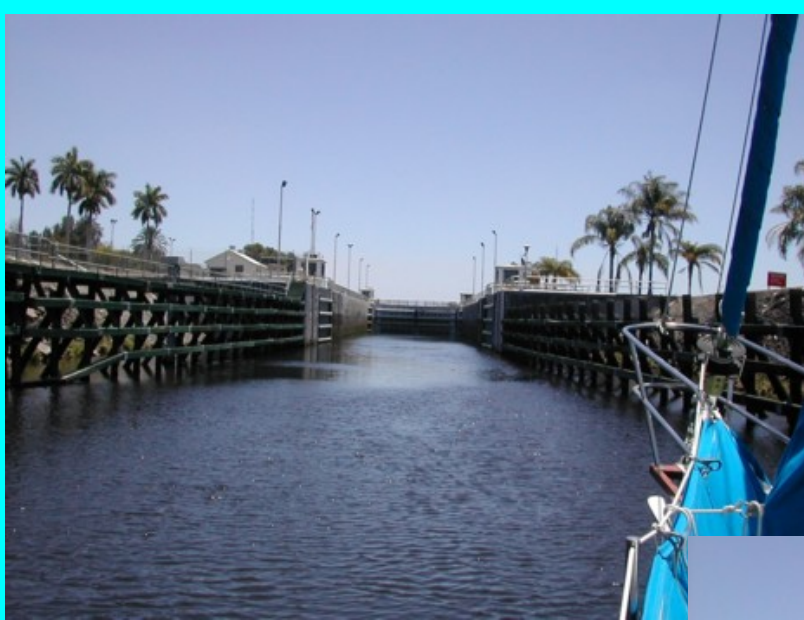
June 8, 2004

We finally pushed off from our boat slip in St. Pete Beach at 8 a.m., Sunday, May 23. What an exciting feeling it was to at last be off, especially as this last month had been quite exhausting finishing up necessary boat and condo projects. Thinking we'd be able to sail, we went down the outside coastline rather than along the Intracoastal Waterway. But, since the wind came from the direction we wanted to go, we ended up motorsailing. Ten hours later we anchored for the night in Venice Inlet, looking forward to a good night's sleep.

We left our anchorage at 7 a.m. Monday and continued on down the coastline. We entered the Intracoastal Waterway at Boca Grande Pass and then 35 miles later arrived at Fort Myers. We anchored for the night around 8 p.m. in the Caloosahatchee River just east of the I-75 Bridge and Fort Myers.



Tuesday morning the air had that wonderful smell of cool fresh river water. How refreshing it was! We departed at 7 a.m., and as we traveled along the Okeechobee Waterway during the day we uplocked a total of 13 feet: 2 feet in the Franklin Lock, 8 feet in the Ortona Lock, and 3 feet in the Moore Haven Lock. All these locks were small and could be handled by just one lock tender. Upon entering the locks we went alongside the chamber wall, grabbed two of the lines, and tied them fore and aft taking in the slack as needed while uplocking. These locks were flooded (or drained) by opening one of the lock doors just a crack and slowly letting in (or out) the water. We rarely felt the change. This wasn't the case at the Ortona Lock when we were quite startled for a moment to encounter a mini-waterfall coming in through the opening in the lock doors.



*Locking Through*



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This day was like a visit back into “old” Florida, a little bit of Americana rarely now encountered. All was at a much slower pace. Always to be remembered will be the friendliness and relaxed pace of the lock tenders and the peacefulness of the surrounding landscape. At first, we passed by many beautiful homes and farmlands along the Caloosahatchee River. Further inland, the scenery turned to swamp grasslands as we traveled along the Caloosahatchee Canal. During the day we saw river turtles sunning themselves on rocks, enjoyed hearing the sounds of the various river birds, but were disappointed in not seeing any manatees or alligators.



*Drawbridge*



*Swingbridge*

About 52 miles and 10½ hours later we arrived at the fuel dock in Clewiston. We had decided to use most of our dirty fuel acquired in Cartagena, Colombia, before taking on new fuel, and when we arrived at 6:30 p.m. we were down to our last few gallons. Unfortunately, the fuel dock at the Roland Martin Marina in Clewiston was already closed. As it had been a very long day and we were totally exhausted, we could no more think of moving and returning the following morning. So, we stayed at the marina, enjoyed a hamburger ashore, and waited for the fuel dock to open. We departed Clewiston at 8 a.m. on Wednesday and traveled across Lake Okeechobee. After two hurricane-spawned floods in 1926 and 1928 devastated the communities bordering Lake Okeechobee, the Army Corps of Engineers built the cross-state Okeechobee Waterway and the Herbert Hoover Dike that encircled the lake with its flood channels and control gates. By 1937, all was completed. Today as we looked over the lake project, we were quite impressed with the engineering that went into the undertaking. We arrived at noon at the Port Mayaca Lock on the opposite side of Lake Okeechobee. As the lake was down one foot, both doors of the lock were open and we traveled right through.



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*Rim Canal Lake Okeechobee*



On Tuesday, we didn't have to wait for any drawbridges or swing bridges to open or wait at any locks. On Wednesday, we did quite a bit of waiting. Right after the Port Mayaca Lock came the Port Mayaca Lift Railroad Bridge with a maximum height of 49 feet when open. With the various instruments on top of our mast, our total height was 51 feet. Billy, a local from the nearby area, had created an ingenious system to tilt sailboats up to 55 feet high so that they could pass underneath that bridge. We acquired his services but had to wait 2 hours for him to show up. When he and his two helpers arrived, they put huge cans on the starboard side of our boat and then started filling them with water. He used a gauge which he attached to our mast to let him know when we were tilted over enough. Once tilted, our boat with his attached alongside, motored slowly underneath the bridge



*The Bridge We Cannot Get Under*



*Billy To The Rescue*



*Kuhela Heeled Over And Ready To Go Under*

Nine miles later we had to wait almost 25 minutes at the Railroad Swing Bridge for an Amtrak train to pass by before that bridge was opened. Then 15 miles later, we had to wait at the St. Lucie Lock while boats came through from the other side. In the St. Lucie Lock we downlocked 13 feet. Around 8 p.m., just as the sun was beginning to set, we dropped our anchor in Stuart. We had crossed the state of Florida from Fort Myers to Stuart in two days, and during much of the transit had had very little water underneath our keel, often only 2 to 3 feet, which was definitely not a comforting feeling.

Thursday, May 27, we traveled up the Intracoastal Waterway to Fort Pierce and the Fort Pierce City Marina, arriving there around 2 p.m. At the channel entrance into the marina, much silt buildup had occurred causing us to touch bottom briefly. Luckily we were able to quickly get the boat off. We thoroughly enjoyed our five nights at the marina. It was the perfect place to relax, catch up on needed sleep, and buy last minute supplies before heading out to sea. The marina was located in "historic downtown" Fort Pierce, its location adding a special touch to our stay. Mary especially enjoyed the small manatee center and museum nearby.

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On Tuesday, June 1, we pushed off for Bermuda. We departed the Fort Pierce City Marina around 12:15 p.m., but unfortunately this time we went aground in the silt buildup at the marina channel entrance. There was a strong 5 to 6 knot current setting us onto the sandbar and we became stuck. Luckily a small outboard boat with a 75 hp motor came to our rescue. After almost 45 minutes and after much trying, the small boat was able to get us off. At 1:30 p.m. we passed the sea buoy at the entrance into the Fort Pierce Inlet and were officially on our way.

With just two foot seas and no swell, we enjoyed a great sail our first afternoon at sea, although we were having to sail more north than originally planned as the wind was out of the east and not southeast as stated in the weather reports. By evening the wind had come around more to the southeast, but now the Gulf Stream current was giving us a 3 to 4 knot northerly set. It was quite exciting at times to see our GPS log showing 8 to 9 knots, a "rare" speed for KUHELA.

During the evening, we could see lightning at times over the Florida coast, and throughout the night we encountered a few squalls plus confused and lumpy seas caused from the Gulf Stream current. KUHELA wallowed in these conditions. However, by Wednesday morning KUHELA was once again gliding ever so smoothly through the water, just skimming the surface.

Except for the lumpy and confused seas encountered Tuesday night, this passage ended up being a classic trade wind sail with almost perfect sailing conditions. It was one of the best sails we have ever had. Definitely more people would go to sea if all passages were like this one. The weather was beautiful the entire transit. Only for a few hours on Friday afternoon (besides the first night out) did we have some squalls. Also, to a mariner's delight, we enjoyed a full moon for part of our passage. During this transit we noticed slightly cooler temperatures. We rarely encountered ship traffic. And, Jimmy Buffett music could often be heard playing from our boat stereo as we glided ever so peacefully through the water.

Wednesday to midday Thursday we sailed a close reach (main, jib, staysail) with S to SSE winds 7-15 knots, 2 foot seas, no swell, and ½ to 1 knot favorable current. For 6 hours starting midday Thursday, we sailed a broad reach (main, drifter, and poled-out jib, wing on wing) with wind SW 5-7 knots and 3-4 foot seas. Only for a couple of hours on Wednesday evening and again on Thursday evening did we motorsail due to very light airs.

From late Thursday evening to midday Monday (3½ days in all) we never changed our sails as the wind came consistently from the SSE 10-16 knots. This entire period we sailed a close reach and had seas mostly 2 feet with little to no swell. Half the time we sailed with ½ to 1 knot favorable current; the rest of the time with little to no favorable current. With the wind just forward of the beam, the apparent wind also gave us an added lift. KUHELA was making fantastic time. Two of these days our total nautical miles traveled each day was around 150, a great run for our boat.

This dream sail came to an end midday Monday when we lost most of our wind and had to start motoring. In the afternoon, some beautiful white-tailed tropic birds (also known as the Bermuda longtails) came out to greet us. These ocean birds used Bermuda's shores as their nesting site from March to November. In the evening we could see the illumination of Bermuda off in the distance.

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We contacted Bermuda Harbor Radio around 3 a.m. Tuesday morning to let them know about our impending arrival. Due to the many reefs around Bermuda, especially on its northern side, Bermuda Harbor Radio tracked all boats and ships in its area. As we were approaching from the south, the reef issue wasn't a major problem. Around 4 a.m., just before daylight, we arrived at the sea buoy marking the channel entrance into St. George's Harbor. As the channel into St. George's was very narrow, all ship traffic was coordinated by Bermuda Harbor Radio as large ships, such as a cruise ships, took up the entire channel. Upon calling, we were immediately given permission to enter with Bermuda Harbor Radio's last words being "Welcome to Bermuda."

Tuesday, June 8, as we approached the narrow channel into St. George's Harbor, the land smells of the island were full of the fragrance of flowers, a beautiful smell. We anchored around 5 a.m. (E.D.T.), immediately put up our quarantine flag, moved our clocks forward 1 hour to Bermuda Daylight Savings Time, and waited for customs to open at 8 a.m. From Fort Pierce, Florida to Bermuda we had traveled 885 nautical miles in 6 days and 15½ hours.



*Kuhela At Bermuda Customs Dock*

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