

Episode 11 –The Great Southern Loop (Key Largo, Tavernier & Plantation Key

The time finally came when we knew if we were going to make it down the Keys, we'd have to leave our little paradise.

May 9, 7:52 Depart Boca Chita Key

We headed south across Biscayne Bay and picked up the Intracoastal again. We stayed on the inside until we reached Angelfish Creek and cut out to the Atlantic Ocean. The winds were not bad and we were able to put out the sails (reefed). We reached Largo Sound, John Pennekamp State Park. Although the sign says call on channel 16, we learned they do not monitor the radio – any channel. We pulled into the harbor and couldn't raise anyone, so we went to the mooring field and picked up a ball. Even though



we were in Largo Sound, there was really no protection from the wind. What a night!!!! After being safe in the calm water of Boca Chita harbor, the winds really beat us up. The next morning, we called the dock on the cell phone and said we would come around to pay the bill. They did not even come out to catch a line. We had planned to stay there awhile, but we chose to move on. We at least wanted a shower before we left. This spot does not come highly recommended.

We headed back out to the ocean and headed south to Treasure Harbor Marina on Plantation Key just south of Tavernier. The area was named Isla (island) Morada (home) in Spanish. Now people call it Islamorada. The marina is nothing fancy, but the owner/harbormaster, Pam is great. We called ahead the day before to make reservations, and then on our way down, she called us to check our ETA. She needed to go to the store and asked if we needed anything. When Doug said "milk," she asked "skim, 1%, 2%..." and he said "whole." She had it for us when we arrived. She also came out to meet us and help us with the lines. She really made us feel like part of her family. She has 25 years of local knowledge to share. There was another couple there that had flown in from Portland to charter a sailboat. Using a map/chart of the area, she spent half an hour or more showing them good places to sail and kayak. She also provided us with a pass to Founder's Park. Besides the driving range, batting cage, and ball fields, there was a great pool. We were able to use the pool for local senior rates of \$2 apiece. The local swim and dive club uses it for training, so we were able to watch them practice diving while relaxing in the cool soothing water. There was also a beach nearby, but we enjoyed the pool. On Sunday, there was a Bay Jam on the beach with local musicians, arts, crafts, and food.

We added another creature to our list here. There was a large iguana rambling around. The iguana likes to help the cats clean their bowls.

Pam also loaned us a book of pictorial history of Islamorada. She told us the history of her marina. When they were building the road down the Keys, they needed rock, so they created a quarry there. One of the treasure divers finished clearing it and connected it to the ocean to fill it with water for his exhibit of the treasures he found, thus, Treasure Harbor. When he built a museum down the road, it was turned into a marina. It is very small, so make sure you have a reservation.

We made our plan to circle back over to the Intracoastal and meander back north slowly making lots of short stops along the way. "Active Captain" provides great information on marinas and anchorages. We had a least 10 picked out to visit. As usual, Doug listened carefully to the weather and we decided, due to the winds, to just stay there a while longer. On Monday, we rented a car and ran errands. We found a Publix to renew prescriptions and visited one of our favorite restaurants, "Alabama Jack's" on Card Sound road. Then we drove up to Homestead to BJ's to restock and made a stop at West Marine on the way back down. There is always a reason to stop at West Marine. I had bent our catch pole one day picking up a ball. It got hooked on the line and when the wind blew us away, it would not come unhooked. We also checked out a few marinas along the way, including Gilbert's. There are free mooring balls there for the public.

Since the winds were still too rough, we kept the rental car another day and drove down to Key West. We thought since we were not going to be able to sail down, we would just drive down. We went to another favorite restaurant, "Hogfish" on Stock Island. On the way back, we picked up some cracked crab claws to go with some lobster we picked up Monday. We eat well!!

We returned the car on Wed, but the weatherman said Thurs and Fri would be better for traveling. So it was back to the pool for a relaxing afternoon and some diligent work on our tans.

Thursday it was up and out at 8:14 am to Snake Creek. That gave us plenty of time to get there for the 9:00 AM bridge opening. We crossed through to the bay side of the island. There were some interesting houses along the way. One had fake pirates climbing all over it (see picture) and another had a caboose in the yard.



One of Doug's favorite pass times is fishing. That has been his only disappointment on this trip. He keeps putting out a line, but so far has only caught four barracuda (ranging from 2-25 lbs.), a blue runner, numerous grunts and catfish, and five small mangrove snappers, in other words, nothing he could cook.

We stopped at Plantation Key City Marina to top off fuel and pump out before heading north. We traveled up the Intracoastal to Gilbert's where we planned to stop and pick up a mooring ball. It was still early in the day, and something told us we should go on, so we partially put out the main and headed north. About 3:30 we passed Angelfish Creek on the inside and by 3:50 we closed the loop of the circle around Key Largo, Plantation Key and Tavernier. As we passed Turkey Point Nuclear Power Plant, we partially put out the jib. An hour later it started to rain. The winds were not too bad and we were able to make it up to Boca Chita Key and safe harbor. The mosquitos and no seeums were bad, but we were safe through a rainy windy night. We were so thankful not to be out on a mooring ball. By paying attention to weather forecasts, we made the trip back up the Keys in one day, instead of the week we had planned. That is a big part of boating; you pay attention to the weather.

To follow our adventures, please go to www.Windsongsail.com, click on "Our Stories" and select our names from the list of "Cruisers".

Love to all,
Capt. Doug and First Mate Joyce

