

Bill's Bahama Adventure of 2006 The 500 Mile Odyssey

Day 6 (5/28): A Short Sail Down the Tougne of the Ocean and A Blue Hole

Total Mileage: 12 nautical miles.

Ahhh, nothing like two good nights sleep in a row. The anchors had held fast throughout the night, and as I had done the two previous nights, instead of requiring an anchor watch I simply set a perimeter alarm on my GPS. Of course, if the weather had been windy or the anchorage crowded, I might have commanded an anchor watch, but I knew that to do so in the conditions we experienced on this trip would have been cause for mutiny. No sense in testing the limits of my authority. Anyway, I knew that the anchor alarm would wake us if we started to drag. I know this because the first two nights I had set the perimeter too small and we were awakened by the sounding alarm. Setting the anchor alarm with too small a perimeter can also be cause for mutiny, but certainly beat the alternative of sitting up all night.

We had but a short distance to travel today, so we relaxed in bed for awhile, each of us in our own private worlds with books in hand. Oatmeal was served for breakfast, and of course, we licked our bowls clean. It was a beautiful morning that would lead into a picture perfect day of picture taking.

Winds were out of the E/SE and very light for a second straight day so we once again had to motor sail most of the way. I was really glad to have the 9.9hp motor, but we had already burned half of our fuel and had now passed the point of no return. We would have to get fuel at Chubb Cay, or hope for better wind. Consequently, we motored sailed at a low idle to conserve fuel and took over 4 hours to reach our destination that was only 12 nautical miles away.



The slooow motorsail

Despite the slow pace, it was a very pleasant transit. We were in the Tongue of the Ocean, a deep canyon of water between island groupings. The water was deep blue with gentle rolling waves as we paralleled the shoreline of the low slung Berry Islands. Eventually, we reached the point where we would cut behind the island chain at Market Fish Cay and Soldier Cay, and make our way on the “inside” through the shallows to our next destination, the famous blue hole on Hoffman’s Cay.

As we motored behind Soldier Cay, we passed several large sailboats at anchor that could not, or would not, venture any further. As the water shoaled, we furled our sails and began picking our way through a relatively narrow channel that snaked its way through the expansive shallow flats. We put the GPS aside and used the color of the water as our guide. The water was gin clear and sparkled like diamonds.

It is interesting to note that the captain of one of the vessels we passed approached us later that day (in his dinghy) and commented that he didn’t know that the water was passable all the way to the blue hole. Ahh, the joys of a shoal draft keel. He was impressed that we had made it. It really wasn’t all that hard. I kept a crew on the bow to help read the water and kept the boat moving slowly with my centerboard (I mean depth gauge) down. I didn’t tell the gent that it was easy. It felt much too good being admired.



Boats too big to venture any further



Typical arid low slung island



Gin clear water as we pick our way through the shallows



The good life

We soon came upon a beautiful crescent shaped bay with a wonderful sandy beach...and two other boats at anchor. Motor boats no doubt. Two boats seemed like a crowd after our solitary anchorages the previous nights, but there was plenty of room for all of us. Besides, with my shoal draft and newfound confidence in anchoring in shallow water, we slipped past these power boats and dropped anchor just 25 yards from shore in very good holding sand. The nice thing about a shoal draft boat is the ability to anchor in shallow water. The anchorage was very calm and protected, but I feared the rogue storm that comes in the middle of the night, and a west wind would surely drive us onto the beach so I set a second anchor. We were far enough away from the other boats that there was no risk of overlapping, so all was well. Once again, I dove on the anchor to make sure it was set well and in short order we were set.



A beautiful crescent bay



On the left was a cool woody. The one the right had a disgusting generator.



Exploring the Beach

Besides the anchored boats, several high speed power boats had beached themselves and disgorged large families of loud South Americans that headed into the brush to see the blue hole, so instead of rushing off behind them, we decided to swim and snorkel the area, and visit the hole later in the afternoon after everyone left. Snorkeling was pretty good here, but interestingly not nearly as good as some other places I've been. It didn't take me long to explore the cove and I was back at the boat. I took a few minutes to scrub the slime from the bottom of the boat that remained from my lake back home. The salt water had completely killed it and remnants sloughed off with ease. Now that's a good way to clean lake scum off your hull; take it to the salt water!

After I finished my chore and settled in for some serious lounging, the boys suddenly appeared, pulling themselves quickly up over the side of the boat with a strange look on their faces. They were trying to act like it was no big deal, but they told me how they had been stalked by a barracuda. They claimed it was larger than the one we hooked back at Bimini. I asked them if it had a hook in its mouth. It might be looking for revenge. No hook, but they were not about to go back and tempt fate.



The Barracuda Spot

As we lazily lounged in the cockpit under the protection of the bimini and tarp/sunshade, I took to doing some much needed housekeeping. Generally, everyone onboard picked up after themselves, which is essential on a boat as small as ours, but I was still experimenting with the most efficient placement of stores. One of the trade-offs of sailing a pocket cruiser is that one must frequently move items around to get to other items. It can really turn into a shell game if everything isn't organized optimally. I think it is an art form; the optimization of ship's stores on a small vessel. Anyway, when I opened the lazarette and started digging around, egad! There was a bunch of water in it! Seawater. Yikes! Were we taking on water?

Thinking back, I remembered that I hadn't really been into the lazarette since we had made our Gulf Stream crossing. The only thing I could figure was that water had leaked back through the hole in the stern through which the fuel line and outboard motor controls were fed. Although there is a rubber boot fitted around the hole, it wasn't well sealed around the fuel and control lines. So, digging into my trusty parts container, I fished out a tie wrap and sealed the boot around the lines. Problem solved. Although some water still leaked in after particularly rough days, it was inconsequential.

Late into the afternoon, all of the island guests had departed save us. So with the island all to ourselves, we set out on a short walk to the blue hole. Matt had visited this spot two years ago while on a Boy Scout trip and remembered it fondly. He explained to us that a blue hole is simply a very deep hole in the ocean floor that is located in an area of shallow water. There are many blue holes sprinkled throughout the Bahamas, but most are located in open water areas. The blue hole on Hoffman's Cay is unique in that it is located in the middle of an island, and although it is several hundred yards from the beach, the water in it is salty and rises and falls with the tide. No one knows how deep this hole is or how it is connected to the ocean. Or so that is what Matt claimed.



Heading into the island's interior. We have the island all to ourselves.