



My trip to Bimini Bahamas By Joe McFarland

This is the second section of Joe McFarland's fascinating trip to the Bahamas—Editor.

Onward bound, but wait, where am I? My bearing was gone and I had no idea what part of the island I was now approaching. Checked the chart plotter and then knew why. The GS had carried the Rover approximately 2 miles in about 30 minutes. I calculated the numbers and it was a 3.78 knot northern current. If I would have been wise to the ways of the Stream I would have turned into the current and left the motor running in gear. "You live, you learn"

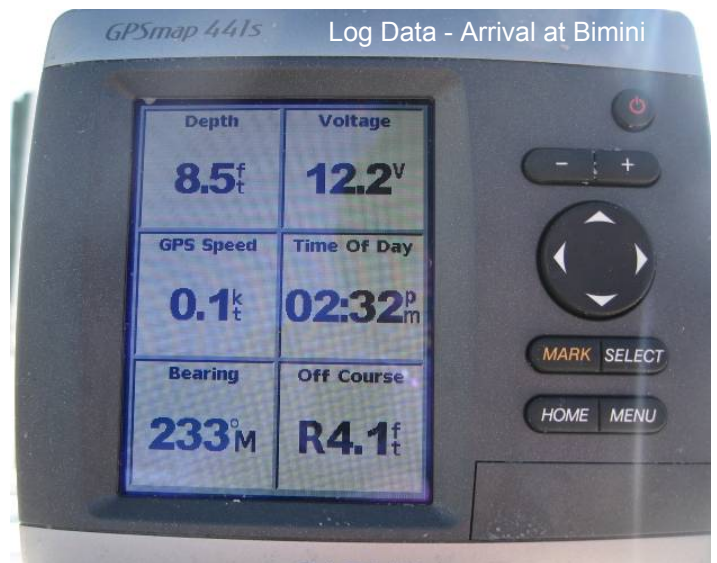
Once close to shore, the waters turned bright aqua blue green as the sands reflected off the bottom. Mild breakwater was seen and heard as I snaked my way around **the shallow sands into the main entrance.**



Dead ahead to point

1430 - It was a great feeling of accomplishment and well being once in the harbor. I tried not to think of the trip back for it being just a few unknown days ahead. My plan was simple; get to Weech's marina, go to Customs &

Immigration then take a nap. I did just that.



1700 - I woke and still found no dock master. The showers were locked however the dock water was on. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure this one out. Yep, I washed down the Rover. A thick deposit of salt covered most (if not all) of the boat and was abrasive to the touch. The black faced solar panels took the brunt, accumulating the spray throughout the day as thick slurry then, as the seas calmed, baking this slurry into pure crystalline sea salt.

Once the desalinization was complete on the boat, I did the same for me. With everything cleaned and soaking wet I grabbed the shore power cable to open the port settee and what a shock I received, OUCH! Apparently there are no ground fault interrupters on the dock's shore power. Anyway, now for the body – beer. I just love a good day on the water, come back, get everything secured, and become intoxicated from one downed beer to your dehydrated body. Next I needed some food to counteract the buzz (no pun intended). Below and dry I grabbed the single element 120 VAC stove and plugged it

in and “HELLO” another nice shock - compliments of the Bohemian Electrical Safety Association (if such a department even exists). Note to self: Touch nothing made of conductive materials while at the dock.

To the best of my knowledge, no activities were in play on the island. I chose to eat, drink, and sleep.

1/3/11 Monday

1000 - Slept like the dead and woke to a slightly overcast day. More of a haze maybe since by noon it was all gone and the sun beamed most brilliant on the land. I took shelter in the local patio bar that just so happened to have wireless internet. With Mouse in one hand and Captain & Diet Coke in the other, I took steps to procure a boat trailer. It was like work but in a much better atmosphere and after a few drinks, it wasn't like work at all. Also checked the weather and the high pressure was still high holding the favorable conditions.

who can accomplished the impossible Vince K, a good friend at my home port & boat surveyor Greg G, and the original “owner” / friend from whom I acquired the Rover Carl H.

All were a great help but ultimately, Mike B had directed me to the company “Boaters Exchange” which caters to the Catalina 22 racing program in Rockledge FL. I did purchase the new trailer and all worked out well in the end.

My extreme Thanks to you all for your help in my time of need. I will always be obliged to return the favor if ever an occasion should present itself.

On leaving the “office”, I met a couple in the street. They



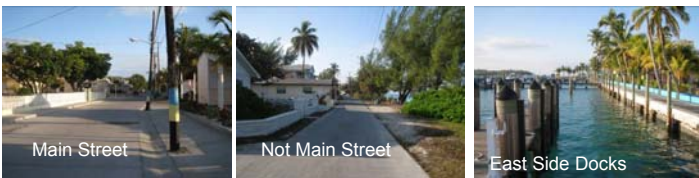
On the night I put to sea and while still in cell phone range, I sent a SOS call (so to speak) to all the friends and neighbors I knew who might be of assistance in my trailer quest... On the list were the ever offering Catalina 22 members Erv Z & Mike B, my Cleveland connection

were just in and were out and about for a morning walk. Having few establishments on the island I invited them to the “office” for a drink, “Rum & Cokes for all” – I really like these people. We spent the rest of this day strolling the docks, spinning the yarn with other boaters, and taking / giving tours of ones boats. I accomplished very little this day and night came quick, I just love boating.

1/4/11 Tuesday

0700 - Woke to blue skies and calm seas. Went to the "office" to check weather. The end of good fortune was in sight. Thursday the North winds would return and for me that meant I had to leave this day for my southern passage to the lower Cays.

I walked the island in search of a warm meal and to see the sights. Found a quaint little establishment offering coffee and a breakfast sandwich. The coffee looked and smelt atrocious; watery black and with a foreign foul smelling odor. Bilge water, what gives? But like the blood pudding I met with in Ireland, I forced it to my lips. And like the blood pudding, it was in fact quite excellent. It was unlike any coffee I had ever consumed, I took a "cup to go".



The few sights on my list to visit just so happened to be near one another. The Dolphin House and the Earnest Hemingway house (now a pile of burnt rubble). The locals are still saddened by this unfortunate event.



On my way back to the Rover I ran across a couple of veteran boaters I had met the night before. They were quick to voice their concern with the oncoming weather. I replied "I'm leaving now" and walked on. At the Rover, I changed the spark plugs and checked the fuel filter.

Everything was in order, however, the Old Johnson still had its ailments. This didn't matter since I planned to sail back and wouldn't need the motor much. I would however need it to battle the tide / current at the docks. Fast in 3 feet and fast out 3 feet was the norm at this harbor.

The dock master (Kemmini) was now with me and holding the bow line as we rotated the Rover in her slip. Now facing out, head on to the ~5 knot current, I started the temperamental motor and at about 3/4 throttle was able to leave the slip. (At full throttle Rover moves at 7 knots). Onward to the gas docks (only 2 on the island) for a cool 12 gallons of gas and 2 quarts of 2 cycle oil.

\$85 USD's later; I headed back into the GS with two fishing rods down and under full sail. I made a impressive 6+ knots hull speed in the SSE winds. I tacked repeatedly into the GS current and after an hour I was still in the same spot; and with no fish for supper. I dropped the sails, fired up the iron jenny, and headed towards the



reefs to rid myself from this incessant tide.

The southern Cays on the "Outer Islands" are a nasty violent chain of what appears to be volcanic rock. Woe to those unfortunates that have landed these unexpectedly. I kept distant the breakwater and made my way along cautiously. With "Ugly Stick" still down, I could see fish swarming but none would attack. I must need more lures!

Soon the Sapona was in sight east about 2 miles behind the reefs. Checking the charts I found one entrance lie to port and one further south in deeper water. At the cut nearest, water depths were questionable and I was now in ebb tide, not a good combination. But with the trusty 500 LB solid steel swing keel down and my depth



sounder in place "What the hell could possibly go wrong?"

Under motor I made way for the open cut thru the narrow

shoals (maybe four boat lengths wide). The water was now almost invisible and the current on the bow. I focused on the channel awaiting the inevitable thud / grind of the swing keel on the sharp rocks below. Something is wrong, I can stand in this water "Why has my keel not hit???" A quick look at the sounder, I'm in 3 feet of water!!! Instantly my kick up rudder hits bottom and pivots up, hard on the tiller the rudder grinds as the Rover veers sharply starboard. Now the current helps me along where my course over ground (COG) has doubled in a direction I hope is the way I just came in and free from any sudden protrusions from the sea bottom. There was no time to view the chart plotter and even less time to act, just go.

Yes, this was a rush. One good factor with a Catalina 22 having a swing keel, if you do manage to breach the hull and sink, there's a very good chance you're going to walk to shore. The problem I had here was "operator error". I had raised the keel to get the boat off the dock and forgot to put it back down; That's twice this year. Humm, maybe that's why I went nowhere when fishing earlier today? In any case I took the southern route in and all was fine.

Inside the reef was a new world. Calm glass covered water as far east as a person could see. 18 feet deep and never varying more than just a few. I motored like a ghost over the detailed bottom. I saw very few fish, only once in a pocket at the sea bottom where they found shelter from the currents. I spotted the largest turtle I had ever seen with its shell 5-6 foot in diameter resting or maybe

On the Sapona's port I dropped anchor on the sandy bottom then dug out my dive gear settling on the mask, snorkel, booties, fins, and gloves. Affixed the swim ladder and with flashlight and camera in hand, jumped into the water. Note to self: Better tether flashlight to wrist.

First order of business: Swim down and retrieve flashlight, Check. Inspect the Rover's hull for damage, Check. Next photo Rover and the Sapona, Check. Now swim into the "Death Ship", Not so Check. This thing is scary as hell. I wasn't this terrified even in the belly of the Rover as I set out for Bimini in the dead of night.

In the water and just outside the holed boat, I could see inside the wreck - dark and bottomless. "Who knows what could be down there; Jaws, Jason, Freddy, Michael, Satan?"

I swallowed my fear and headed for the largest entrance hole in the boat. Once inside (and to my total disbelief) I spotted just a few fish. I refrained from touching anything since it all looked pretty gross; Plus, I think this ship may be haunted...

"During World War II, the wreck was used for target practice by the Air Force and Navy. The legendary Lost Squadron of Flight 19 disappeared in the Bermuda Triangle on December 5, 1945 while returning home from a practice bombing of the Sapona. It is said that the bombing of the Sapona was stopped shortly afterwards."

<http://www.concreteships.org/ships/ww1/sapona/>

I swam to the engine room (my favorite) and entered through yet another hole. This room was better lit but had less room to maneuver since it was filled with debris from what use to be the rudder house. Out I went snapping a few photos on the way. If I would have watched the movie "Shock Waves" prior to the trip, I would have never entered this wreck. And now since watching this movie, I can never go back in this ship. The Sapona was home to a squad of underwater WWII Nazi Zombies. I'm just glad they didn't see me. *The conclusion will follow in July.*



feasting on the sea grass below.

NOW FOR THE SAPONA - THE SCARIEST PART OF THIS JOURNEY.

The history is online however the Hulk's remains are just 20 yards off my bow, solidified in 18 feet of water and



forever joined with the sea.

