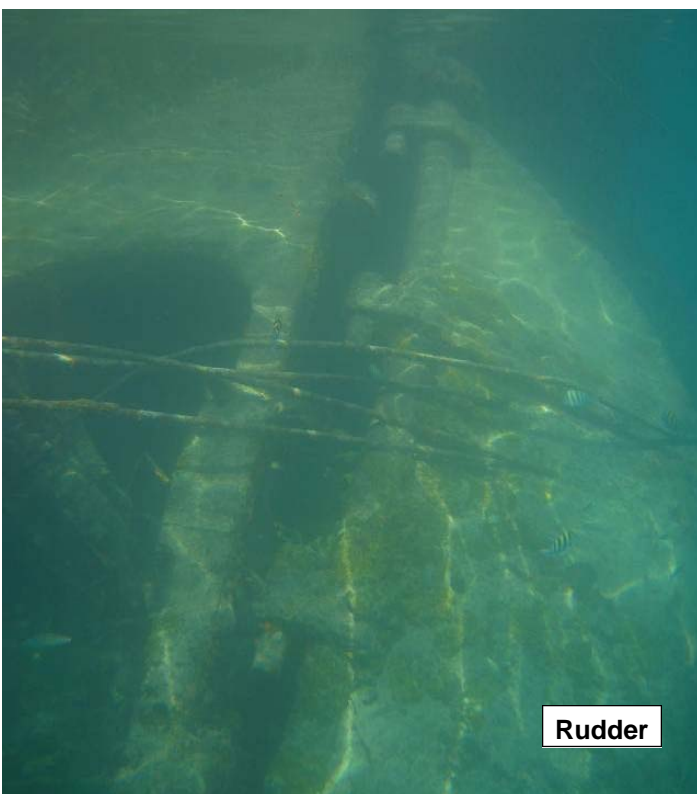
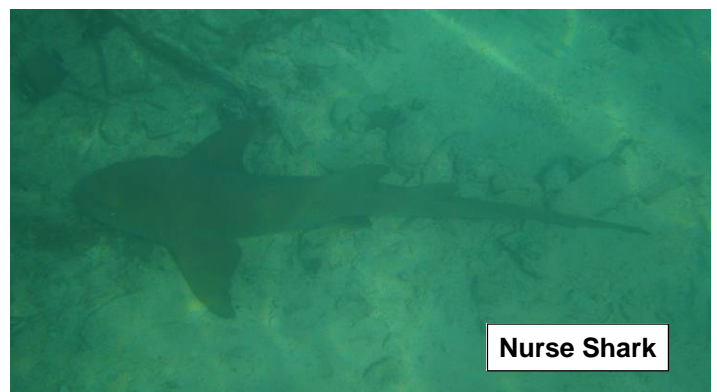




My trip to Bimini Bahamas By Joe McFarland

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

Ahhh, back outside where I can breathe once again. I circled the ship and paid special attention to the propeller and rudder. Being a mechanical engineer by trade, these are a few of my favorite things. Wait, isn't that a song?



I wanted the ship's propeller but I wasn't able to figure out a way of unbolting it from the shaft. I didn't even try since it would have been impossible to squeeze it into the back seat of the Blazen-ator.

While rounding the rudder I ran across a nurse shark. At first glance it's always a shocker (for me at least) to see any shark; especially one that's a couple feet longer than I am tall.

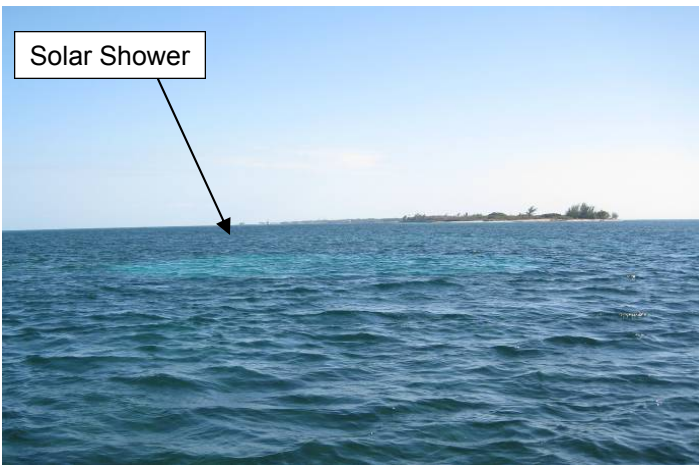
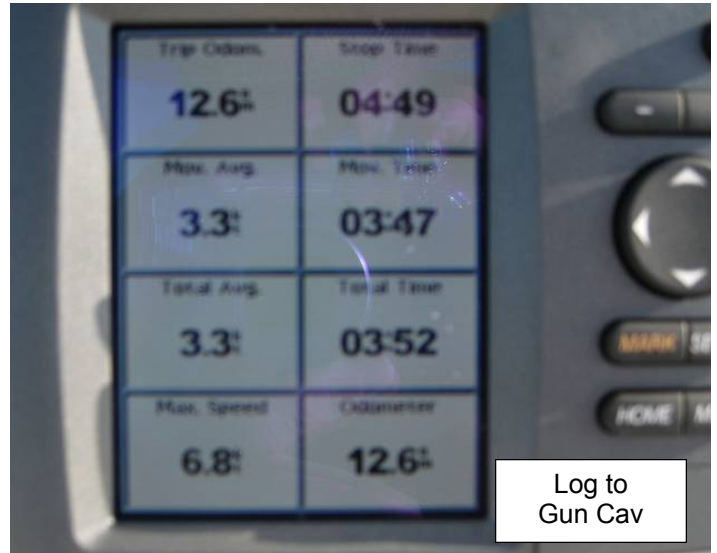
Back in the Rover I rinsed off with my portable (homemade) solar shower had lunch and weighed anchor for the night's anchorage on Gun Cay approximately 12 miles south. This anchorage would give me a jump on the GS for the passage home.

Little did I know I was being followed. A 31 foot ketch rig about 2 miles behind was tracing my steps to safe anchorage. They must have wondered why I went back out into open water then directly back in towards the sandy shores of Honeymoon Harbor. This out and back trip was needed to generate "tracks" on my chartplotter in preparation for the night passage out.

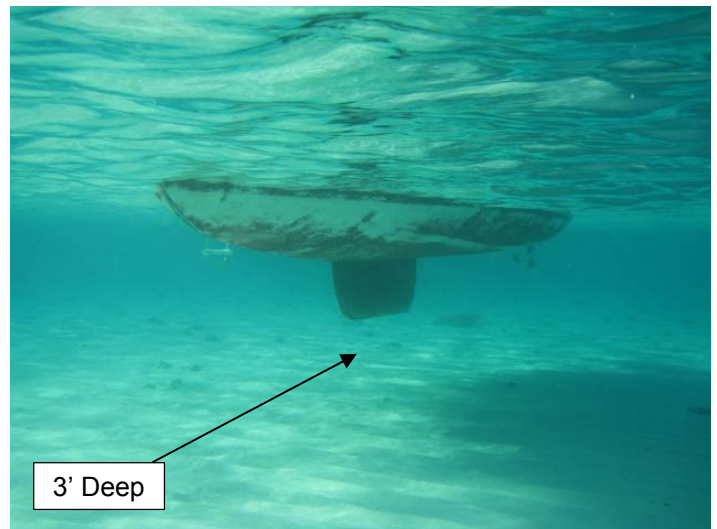
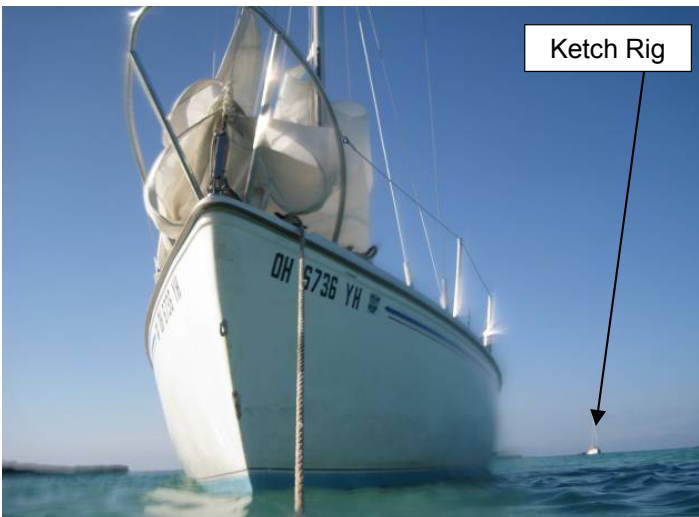
With the keel up I made my way through the shallows and past the wonderfully uncharted coral heads which reside about 1 foot below the water's surface. They are

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easily spotted in the day since they light up as green dots on the blue water. In the harbor, stingrays swoop along the white sands and are as well simple to detect. I dropped anchor in 3 foot low tide, put on my snorkel gear, and stepped into the water. I walked hunched over in search of the elusive creatures never finding a single one. Walked to the beach and took a few photos. I noticed the 31 footer dropped anchor about 200 yards out.



Back on the Rover and again rinsed off; dinner, plotting, checking the tides, and listening to the weather occupied the late afternoon's events. My plan was to be in bed at dusk and up at 0000 to set sail for Biscayne Bay. Winds were light at 5-10 knots out of the SE. They were

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expected to switch to the south and build in the afternoon. Waves would be 2-3 foot as before but this time I would be following seas.

My new neighbors launched their inflatable for a welcomed rendezvous at the Rover. A family of three; man, wife, and ~5 year old daughter – all high spirited to say the least. If memory serves me correct, they were from Maine and decided to take a year off work to sail around a bit. Now that sounds like a great idea! We chatted awhile as they sat comfortably in the dinghy.

Yes they were in pursuit of the Rover looking for a guide through the shallows. The chase ended once they watched me step into the water and walk to shore, being their boat drew 6 feet and would for sure run aground if they continued. Eventually the daughter was eager to get ashore for some exploration. Who could blame her; there was not another sole in sight, just a lighthouse off the southern tip of this tiny spit of land. Soon they were on their way.

I carried on my duties and around 2000 filled and lit my shiny new lantern then hung it from the boom vang and was soon off to sleep.



1/5/11 Wednesday

0200– Oversleeping my internal alarm clock, I woke to the again empty moonless black night. I did not turn on the lights as to not disturb my well rested night vision. I opened the hatch and found the “little lantern that could” now pouring an immense amount of light onto every reflective surface the Rover had to offer. The night sky was so filled with stars I never did find the North Star. “Should I have been looking for the Southern Cross?” The GPS would point the way.

With the GPS on and after dimming the screen to the lowest setting for even the “night screen” was far too bright, I checked the tides once again. Of course I was 10 minutes from low tide which seemed to play a significant role in my journey. The water was now ½ foot lower than when I came to anchor. I readied the sails and weighed anchor. The light wind filled the head & main sails and I skirted the GPS tracks I had laid the day before. This was invaluable information as the night was so black that the only two noticeable items outside the lamps luminous power were the anchor light on the ketch rig and the sound of the surf washing onto the unseen shoals. Under sail alone and with no motor or autotiller to distract me, I entered the shoals which would unleash us to the open sea. It was an eerie on-edge experience I will not soon

forget.

Past the dangers of shallow waters and jagged rocks we were free to sail once more. Wind and waves were at their best behavior. Under jib & main we sailed at a comfortable 5 knot pace - heading about 250 degrees.

Minutes, then hours, then boredom. Nothing to see or do accept take pictures of the lantern and GPS. Eventually the sun did rise and it was time to put on my “game face”. Two fishing rods in hand, four new lures, fighting belt strapped across my waist, and my dock pole posing as a gaff hook - I was ready to “slaughter the ocean”!!!

Yea, it never happened. Maybe I have the wrong lures?

Back in reality the Rover and I were doing nicely. The course was good and the weather (amazingly) followed the forecast. Onward the heading was adjusted pinching further and further into the changing wind. Then came the point where my COG was at less than 1 knot; this would not do. I would have to bite the bullet, fall off, and point directly towards Biscayne Bay which means I would loose ground to the GS. I had read about this and now it had come to fruition.

Changing course to 270 my ETA improved (for awhile) then over the course of the day the winds did increase, now 15+ knots from the south. With it brought heavier seas although there was little to no chop just big rollers. The Rover remained very dry bobbing up then down and all in perfect peace.

About 30 miles from FL a tanker was in route and bearing down on me from the north. He passed to my stern close enough I could see the windows in the bridge. Shortly afterwards the USCG sent out a PAN PAN call to all boaters to “keep a look out for an unseaworthy craft, possibly overloaded spotted in the Florida Straights”. This was repeated throughout the day every hour on the hour at which time I would stand on the cabin top and scan the horizons. I never did see the distressed vessel.

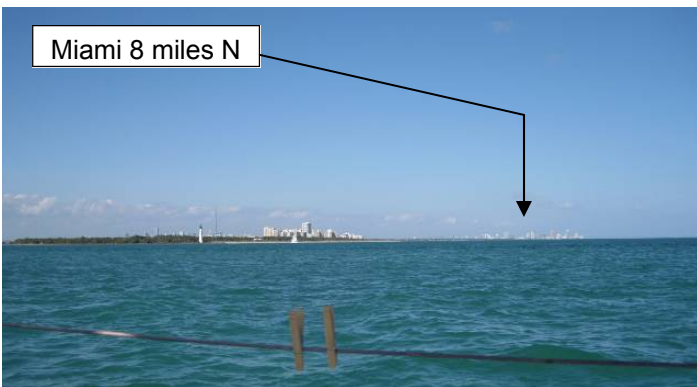


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The winds continued to build but had never reached 20 knots. This was good since the Rover started to get a bit squirrely towards the end. I reach FL about 8 miles north of my mark and now in front of Miami. I doused the sails and went back to motor power. Head-on for 2 solid hours into the wind & chop and wet once again, I finally reached the channel I had left days before. Nothing was familiar accept the stilt houses which now looked friendlier than ever.



I made the Matheson Hammock Park Marina at low tide (of course) and ran aground just to make sure I still knew



how to do it. The best thing about running aground is you have time to think about your mistake. It's like being "super anchored" plus no one is going to plow into you.

They're going to take special notice and say "look at that idiot" as they sail past and send out a friendly wave. Good thing with the swing keel is a few cranks and you're on your way once again.

Then again, running aground on the Florida shore must

Trip Odom.	Stop Time
58.8^m	20:22
Mov. Avg.	Mov. Time
4.0^k	14:42
Total Avg.	Total Time
3.9^k	15:03
Max. Speed	Odometer
8.4^k	58.8^m

Log back to FL

have meant I made the trip to and from Bimini "successfully". With this passage, as small as it was in comparison to true blue water sailing the great oceans, I felt somewhat delivered from the class of coastal navigator to the very early (possibly smallest) ranks of blue water seamanship, a life I hope to someday arrive to in earnest and maybe even forever.

As to the question of will a Catalina 22 make to Bimini and back, the answer is yes - if the wind and seas are in your absolute favor. The new question is will I do it again? The answer is no - not in the Irish Rover. My videos while on the Bimini trip: <http://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=1267436757&sk=photos#!/video/?id=1267436757>

IRISH ROVER - OUT

