

## K W to DT #2

### Day 1

We had floorloaded Kevin's truck, so it was a small task to prepare and provision LITTLE T while she was on the trailer. Oceanside Marina, on the South Side of Stock Island was happy to store trailer and truck while we were gone. We were in a hurry because the weather was right and our game plan was to make maximum use of any weather window for the passage toward the Marquesas (25 miles) and Fort Jefferson (45 miles further). We had lots of stuff because there was no provisioning anywhere west of Key West, and we had no idea how long we might have to wait at any particular leg of the journey. 10 gallons of plastic bottles stored easily in the bilge and lasted the whole vacation.

A quick try at the Lakes Passage, a shallow passage as far as Boca Grande, convinced us that we would be better going the long way South along Kingfish Shoal. We turned around at Mule Key, surprised that the water was so shallow, nearly everywhere. The efficacy of privately maintained buoys marking such an intricate channel wasn't the best way to make time on the first leg of a long voyage. By the end of the trip we were pretty good at intricate channels, but ones marked by government markers were more likely shortcuts. The water was so shallow, that even a Catboat had to mind her way and actively navigate. My GPS lacks a chart chip but was surprisingly detailed at all the recognized passages.

0930 Left Oceanside Marina

1030 Departure Key West Passed Man, Ballast, and Woman Key

1330 Boca Grande abeam

1530 Anchored in Mooney Harbor, Marquesas

1730 Moved to a passage anchorage to the West of Marquesas for early departure. 30 miles Moonie Harbor, center of the Marquesas atoll is a beautiful, protected all weather harbor that is entered from the Southwest. Fish and birdlife are plentiful, and it would make a welcome change from the sometimes boisterous Boca Grande Channel which can pick up a chop in wind against tide situations. We just about settled in for the night when we realized that it would be difficult to exit before dawn, so we moved out side to a passage stop just west of the group. A larger boat is anchored nearby, probably for the same reason.

### Day 2

0445 Awake and underway in a light to moderate Easterly; steering by the stars. The JetBoil stove is great for quick coffee before an early departure. Boil time is so quick that you just hold on to the stove for a couple of minutes. No need for gimbles.

0515 Nasty surprise. Passed five large unlit buoys close aboard and another unlit target tower from the bombing and strafing area immediately west of the [Marquesas](#). I guess we are getting into a real remote area, it's called the Quicksands. We are surprised that there were no lights and eager for sunrise. We take turns at the helm in quite a pleasant morning. We had tied in a reef before starting but quickly shook it out.

0830 Passed flasher at western tip of New Ground Shoal, north of The Quicksands. Weather report is fair, so we choose to continue toward [Dry Tortugas](#). Moderate chop as we get into the deeper water of Rebecca Channel

1315 Land! First the [lighthouse at Loggerhead Key](#), then [Fort Jefferson](#) in sight. East Key's white sand is very visible in the bright sunlight.

1525 Anchored, Garden Key, 48 miles from Marquesas. The Rangers decided that, since we are small, we can pull LITTLE T up on the dinghy beach instead of anchoring off in the Garden Key anchorage.

### Day 3

We spent the day wandering the fort and enjoying the shady spots . They let us anchor the boat at the dinghy beach. When the passenger ferry, Yankee Freedom II was at the pier, we were welcome to buy a thorough lunch for \$5 apiece. Cold sodas, Money well spent.

1400 Upanchor for a quick visit to Loggerhead Key. We anchored on the West side for a walk and a swim, but I soon turned around, anxious about the possibility of the anchor dragging and leaving us stranded. Back at Garden Key by 1720.

### Day 4

0730 Out the channel to plot GPS waypoints so we are ready for a possible pre-dawn departure. Back before 0930. Spent a hot day swimming and exploring the shady passages in Fort Jefferson. We made our goodbyes to the park rangers who announced that we were the smallest to make the passage since at least the early 80's. Two years ago, A Hobie cat had made the attempt but had turned around at Boca Grande.

### Day 5 24 Feb Leg 3

Woke to a light southerly which is great for our important leg 3 of the passage. I would wake and look to the northern star, then pound my pillow and drift back to sleep.

0700 Underway under power and sail. We slept in until after dawn; no hurry in such a mild, fair breeze.

1000 Ferry passed in Westward Passage. The outboard is earning its keep. We want to maintain a good speed to avoid harbor entrance after dusk.

1050 Rebecca Shoals tower abeam, 1 ½ miles South. Some spray but making good progress. Motor off when the wind picks up but often motorsailing in close reach to make Moonie Harbour by dusk.

1150 Halfmoon Shoal tower abeam ; On the Quicksand which is deep enough for navigation, at least by daylight.

1715 Anchored just West of Moonie Harbor Key with more than an hour of daylight to spare. 50 miles.

### Day 6 25 Feb Leg 4

0800 Under power in very light SE breeze.

1000 Across Boca Grande Channel with Boca Grande close abeam.

1100 Woman Key and Ballast Key. The only house in the area is on Ballast, with dock and several outbuildings, but a modest homestead

1200 Mule Key abeam.

1430 Safe Harbor, Stock Island for fuel and cell phones and clean clothes from the truck. We then explored Cow Key Channel as far as Route 1 Bridge. Even though Key West is a crowded, the mangrove channels are peaceful and fairly deserted. Too low for housing ?

1800 Anchored in Cow Key Bight South of Stock Island. 39 miles

### Day 7 Feb 26

0730 Underway along the South shore of the Lower Keys in a brisk Southeasterly . We are glad we made our offshore passage when we did; This weather would have slowed us downbeen uncomfortable in the tide-ridden Rebecca Passage or Boca Grande Channel. Substantial spray in the Hawk Channel, but some relief inshore.

1130 Looked in at Saddlebunch Harbor, just west of Boca Chica. We find that we make the best time by staying in the Northern edge of Hawk Channel where shallow water keeps the seas down. Less hobbyhorsing than in deeper water.

1345 Approaching the entrance for Cudjoe Bay. We discovered that it is necessary to round the first gate of markers, even though it appears to be a long way out into Hawk Channel. Cudjoe Bay and Kemp Channel are enormous but shallow areas. They are well marked but some markers are missing. We notice a Blimp hovering over the island, but notice it doesn't move around at all, We decide that it must be a radar-equipped tethered balloon keeping an eye out for Cuban refugees and drug smugglers. We saw a refugee boat at Fort Jefferson, wheeled into an empty corridor. It was an aluminum launch with a six cylinder gas engine. Not much boat for a 90 mile trip. We hear reports of Cuban refugees being discovered by the Coast Guard offshore. Because Cuba is a "repressive Regeim" they won't be returned if they manage to walk ashore on American Soil.

1400 Anchored in Cudjoe Bay with fine protection from the Southeast wind. Running down the entrance we were "Carrying too much bush" and had major weather helm for the first time. The GPS registered 7.1 kts. Lots of wet gear spread over the boom to dry. Even though we use lots of sunscreen, I find that my skin is angry red and itchy in the cool of the night. I have taken to covering up, head to toe, in the time of maximum sun between 1030 and 1530, and that I feel better and am actually cooler than when baking in the sun in shorts and tee shirt. Northern climates have changeable weather, but here in the south, it is sun and steady wind that are fierce.

Day 8, February 27 A short shower in the night wet everything down, but we grabbed a tarp and spread it over our sleeping bags, so they didn't get too wet. It is worth this kind of moment to have the pleasure of sleeping under the stars all night. Jupiter and Sirius are up at sunset along with a sicle moon, and we quickly learn to tell time by the position of the big dipper circling Polaris. I thought I caught sight of Canopus in Carina. Although the dark lasts about 12 hours each night, we find that we can pretty much go to sleep at sunset and wake up again at dawn. Only one night did we talk until after eight at night. Yet neither of us has this kind of sleep habit in our daily lives. Don't know why it works, but it does leave us ready to go in the first light of morning.

0730 Underway but heading West again. We decide that our plan to head toward a possible passage under Route 1 in Niles Channel won't be much good in this strong Southeast wind, so we will reverse our course and explore to the North of Key West itself.

1400 We make a lightning speed passage around Key West and Fleming Key, down Garrison Bight Channel, but it is no place to anchor as the Southeast wind makes for no protection from Sigsbee Island, so we go back to Man-O-War Harbor and nestle close to Key West.