

John and Colette John's Everglades Trip in April

Colette and I did a 4 day, 3 night cruise out of Everglades City April 8-11. It was a great trip. We departed Friday morning and arrived at park HQs about 11 am. We got permits for Picnic Island, Rabbit Key, Pavilion Key and back to Picnic Key. Cost with a senior pass was \$26. Without the pass it would have been \$41. We went across the road and launched at the Marina. It was \$15. We could have parked there for free but parked at the park HQ grass parking area. It was also free and felt a little more secure. Since I left my rear window of the 4Runner down, it seemed like a good call. Total cost for 4 nights was \$41 or \$10/night. Not bad.

There is a bridge about 5 minutes from the marina with only 5' vertical clearance. We had to leave the sails down to get into Chokoloskee bay. We just left them down and motored out Indian Key pass, against the tide and breeze. About 7 years back, before moving to FL., and having only one night to spare, we rented a canoe and paddled against the tide to spend that night on Picnic Island. This trip we felt as smug, kicking back as our Honda 5 did all the work, as we had been proud of going against the tide to do something we wanted to do on that trip. Being at high tide we cut across the shoal at Stop Key and was soon at Picnic Key. We slept in our tent, and even with a fair breeze, anytime we left the tent we had to battle noseums from dusk till mid morning. Otherwise we had the Key to ourselves and it was a great first night.

We departed for Rabbit Key, about 7 miles, at noonish. The radio reported SE winds but we had a NW breeze and had a 4 knots broad reach to Rabbit key. We cooked and hung out on the beach but slept about 50 feet off shore on our trusty SP Tri. , the YELLOW KEY. Yes we have finally named the Tri. We did share the Key with 4 guys from Atlanta. They had flown down Friday, not knowing if there would be a govt. shutdown or not and were happy to be there with permits. After a chat, we didn't see anyone until about noon the next day. Rabbit Key is a great place to spend a night of two, with a sand bar to calm the Gulf of Mexico, and a small but great beach.

Sunday afternoon with a brisk breeze, we had a close haul to Pavilion Key. Along the way we crossed paths with a blue sea pearl 21 returning from there. We had seen it shooting across a shallow sand bar the prior evening. Of course it is always fun to see fellow sea pearl. In fact that was the only other sail boat we saw on our little journey. It was a great 4 mile sail, except for getting around the SE tip of the Island. After a couple of unsuccessful tacks and being pushed into shore by winds and currents, I cranked up the Honda 5 and we motored sailed around the tip of the Island. Some really nice fishermen moved there boat a bit to make our rounding the tip a little easier. Pavilion Key is about 1 mile long and 2/10 or less wide. The best camping is on the NE side. There can be as many as 5 camping parties on P. Key but there was only one on Sunday night and we didn't even get close enough to say howdy. It was a great night and again we slept on the YELLOW KEY, but cooked and hung out on the beach.

We departed about 9 am. and had a 4+knot run to Indian Key pass and a broad reach a ways up the pass. We were short on water and therefore, decided to forego our last night at Picnic Key. It seems that H2O expands when it freezes and I had not poured out any of the required 10 % in the 3 - gallon jugs that we froze. That left us with 5 1/2 gallons of water 2 1/2 gallons short of the recommended 2 gal per person per night. We could have traveled in and out for the water but it didn't seem to be worth the effort.

After stuffing ourselves at Cracker Barrel, we arrived home about 5 PM. I hosed off the trailer and that was it. We had a full day to clean up the boat, etc. on Tuesday. That was really nice and we promised to give ourselves a day for cleanup after overnights, when possible.

There are downsides and upsides to cruising in the park vs the Islands outside the park boundaries. It wouldn't work for a squadron cruise because of the limit on parties. The upside is the rules keep out some of the crazies, there are fairly clean portable toilets at many of the camp spots, there is no one using a chainsaw like they did when we were last at Panther Key. Most of all there is an intangible quality to being in the park, no lights, great stars, no cell phone service, no condos and limited people, most of who just want to absorb the nature just like we do.

What's Happening this Summer?

- 1. Lake Seminole Daysail - May 21st:** 9:30 A.M. (hope you get this in time) Lake Seminole Park - Park Blvd in Pinellas between Starkey Road and Seminole Blvd.
- 2. Third Annual Suwannee River Trip with Ted Jean. - June 4th - 7th.** Meet at Ted's camp on the river 22292 135th Ct. O'Brien, FL on Friday evening. For more details call Ted at 531-317-6063
- 3. Summer in the Keys - July 13th, 14th and 15th.** Sunset Cove - Bay Cove Motel, Key Largo - <http://www.baycovemotel.com>. Call to get reservations. Ted Jean is again in charge of this one. Small boats are good, because they have a beach and you can drag them out after each day's sail.

The Northern travels of Ron and Joyce Hoddinott

Once again we're taking a break from the heat and heading north for about a month. We'll be traveling in our truck with our 5th wheel trailer behind us, and will camp everywhere we go. Joyce's mother is celebrating her 85th birthday with relatives, so we'll go to Ohio first, then down to Williamsburg VA for some American History, and finally a trip to the North GA or NC mountains for a week or so before returning to the heat of Florida. Be back in July!

Be safe, wear your lifejackets and head for safety if you see a lightning storm approaching!