

Ten Thousand Islands Cruise - January - 2008 by Terry Poling

Well, we're back home in Havana with another great trip to the Everglades added to the log book. It was a great to see old friends and make new ones. I think this was the first trip that I can remember that we had everyone show up that said they were coming. We had a total of eight sailboats and one power boat. Dawn and I left home before sunup on Sunday (Jan. 6) with our Telstar 28 in tow. Our destination was Koreshan State Park in Estero. Where we planned to camp for the night. We also were planning to meet up with other members of the group. As it turned out, only Scott and Dina Dunsworth and their 10 year old daughter Jordan, from Indiana were there to meet us. Dave and Mary Forrester called from Collier Seminole State Park to tell us they had decided to stay there for the night and would meet us at Port of the Isles in the morning.

We arrived at Port of the Isles somewhere around 10:30 AM on Monday and was surprised to see two boats with our group already in the water. They were Paul Wagener from Bokeelia, FL with his Seapearl Tri, and Billy and Joyce Van Deusen with Their Seapearl 28. Paul asked us our plans. I said we would be sailing to the beach on the back side of Panther Key. It was obvious we were a ways from departing so they decided to go ahead and meet up with us at Panther Key.

Dave and Mary Forrester from Ontario Can. were the first to arrive with their Mac 26X. They had been camping at Collier SP for the past few days after sailing with the group at Elliot Key and Biscayne Bay. I think Al and Geri Holmes from Sarasota, FL and Kenny And Brenda Williams from Kentucky showed up about the same time. Al has a 1974 Bayliner 24 that looks like new and Kenny was towing his Mac 26X. Next to show were Scott and Dina Dunsworth with their 19' Belhaven that Scott had built. The Belhaven is a sharp little Cat Ketch built from plans from B & B Yacht Designs. It's sort of a modified Core Sound with a cuddly or cabin added. Everyone got busy rigging the boats in preparation for the trip. We all helped each other launch and get the boats on the water. The ramp is still the same but they have added new floating docks that we took full advantage of. We all pulled away from the docks at the same time at the request of the Manager of Port of the Isles. Lou Wanted to take our pictures as we sailed out together.

Everyone started out using the iron horses, but it wasn't long before a couple of us pulled out the jibs. We had an east wind and the Faka Union Canal runs due north and south. That should have made for a great sail south for us, but it was just not to be. The high mangroves that line the narrow canal just make the winds too flaky, so we ended up using the motors the full four miles to the end of the canal. We were able to sail the rest of the way out after getting to Faka Union Bay.

When we got to Panther Key we found the last boat in our flotilla. It was Roger and Kaye McLarry from Estero, FL on their Seapearl Tri. They had sailed down from home a couple of days before we got there. Just as I had hoped, we found the beach out at Panther Key deserted, with no tents at all.

There were about four other sailboats at anchor up and down the beach. There was a pile of firewood already so we got a campfire going and the party was started. We enjoyed cocktails while getting to know the new sailors in the group. At sunset we all watched for the elusive green flash and again it did not happen. It was getting late and we had all had full days so everyone went back to their boats for the night. Some chose to stay on anchor at the beach, while others motored out for the night.

The next morning a few of the boats that had stayed at the beach found out about how low the tides can be in the ten thousand islands. I think there were three boats setting high and dry that morning. The tide was coming in so it wasn't really a problem. It was decided at the captains meeting to do a day sail down to Lulu Key. To my amazement Lulu was the same as Panther.....no campers. We all returned to Panther for our second night's anchorage. Early Wednesday morning, before most of us were up, Roger and Kay headed back home to Estero. They had a long sail to get home and wanted to take advantage of the predicted north east winds. The rest of us decided at the captain's meeting to do a day sail to Picnic Key. The winds were light and not in our favor so there was a lot of tacking involved. Eventually, we all made it to Picnic except for Paul, who decided to head to our next night's anchorage. After a nice break on Picnic we all headed to White Horse to meet up with Paul for our next night on the hook.

Thursday was declared "do what you want day" and return to Panther Key for the night. Paul and Billy left for Port of the Isles to load up and head home. I received a call on my cell from another old friend, Roger. He said that he was on his way to meet up with us at Panther. Roger showed up with his beautiful 50' power boat. His boat draws 4' so we met him out in front of Panther and escorted him into the channel and showed him a safe place to drop anchor. After saying our hello's and getting the well needed ice that Roger had brought us, we got the evening camp fire going on the beach.

