

**Roaming around Florida's Big Bend**  
**Alternately Titled; *They Aint No "g" in Fishin'***  
**Rich and Cheryl Odendahl – 2019**



During the Fall, the majority of yachtsmen heading south for warmer climates make an overnight 160-mile passage from Carrabelle to Tarpon Springs. The November winds are often strong, with only a few brief respites. Most cruisers do not have the patience to wait for the multiple weather windows necessary to explore this unprotected coast in detail. But in April, most (but certainly not all) days offer light to moderate winds and pleasant passages between the remote towns on the Big Bend.



Caladesi Island State Park is at the southern end of the Big Bend. Shoal-draft vessels can have the marina and the beach to themselves when the ferry boat is not running. It's a great place for shell pickin' and natural sponge findin'.



The Gulf of Mexico waters in the Big Bend area are very shallow. Getting to the towns requires negotiating miles-long, shifting channels. The Army Corps of Engineers has given up on dredging the Suwanee River channel that has shoaled to 1.8 feet. We opted to not try to get in, but made several other stops.



The vegetation changes as we entered the Crystal River.



Welcome to town after a ten-mile detour!



The Crystal River is the only place in the country where it's legal to swim with manatees. They collect here in the Winter to enjoy the warm spring waters. But remember, no riding the manatees.



But the manatees mostly leave in Mid-March. On April 1<sup>st</sup>, the restrictions are lifted and buoys marking the prohibited area are removed.



Cedar Key is a funky town with an interesting history and strong arts community.



The anchorage is not well protected from the east and we did not sleep well after the wind shifted at night.



Steinhatchee (“Stein” rhymes with “bean” in the local parlance) is a busy place with people from the Southeastern states hostin' endless fishin' tournaments; both formal and informal. It's ironic that people in southern Florida speak with a northern dialect, and people in northern Florida talk like Southerners.



There can't be many good ol' boys left in Georgia. They all came to their fish camps in Steinhatchee.



Dog Island is the barrier island where the intra-coastal waterway restarts. The locals call this area the “Forgotten Coast.” We spent the night anchored in dense fog.



Cheryll added to her shell collection at the lonely Dog Island Beach.



On Dog Island, we started to see some leftover debris from Hurricane Michael six months earlier.



Most cruisers consider Carrabelle to be the northern end of the Big Bend. In the Fall, they host many “Chicken Parties” for the people who do not consider the conditions acceptable for the southbound crossing to Tarpon Springs.





Carrabelle claims to have the “World's Smallest Police Station.”



Sunrise on the way to Apalaciicola



We spent three nights docked at the Water Street Hotel and Marina while we returned to Leesburg to retrieve the truck and trailer before we headed north to Michigan.



The Apalacicola economy is built on oysters. This pile of oyster shells is destined to become mulch.



After a record 101 nights aboard Roam, it was time to retrieve the truck and trailer from Rich's parent's place in Leesburg. The only way to get to Leesburg is with a rental car, and the nearest rental car agency was in Tallahassee, almost a two hour drive away. We were fortunately connected to a member of the city commission who was traveling there for a dentist appointment. She made the drive because she was annoyed by the local dentist asking if she would also like some Botox in addition to having her teeth cleaned.

Not only did she drive us to Tallahassee, but she educated us about the local economy and culture. As we drove past the town of Sopchoppy, she explained that worm gruntin' is a technique to extract worms from the ground by driving a steel stake into the ground and vibrating it until the worms flee to the surface. The worms are then gathered for later use. We didn't dare ask if the worms were subsequently consumed by humans, either directly or indirectly.



On return to Apalaciicola with the truck and trailer, we detoured to Mexico Beach where the eye of Hurricane Michael struck six months earlier. We thought that we'd support the local economy and stop for a drink. But there were no permanent businesses in operation. The devastation will take many years to repair. A few tourists sat on the gorgeous beach, looking out to the Gulf of Mexico and trying not to gawk at the grim scene behind them.



Our trip back to Michigan was uneventful with the possible exception of when Google Maps took us on a couple of shortcuts on rural roads where the road is only eight feet wide with no shoulder. Roam is eight and a half feet wide.

We don't yet know where Roam will bring us next, so stay tuned at;

<http://odendahls.com/roam/>