

## **A Sail to Cedar Key 2025**

Planning a cruise requires lots of preparation, crew, and yacht in excellent mechanical condition. This is a story of such a cruise.

Captain Bundy, an experienced licensed sailor wished to take 3 people sailing to Cedar Key, FL. He has sailed this region for over 50 years with his late wife. This remote island community, a fishing village with a dozen islands, is considered a difficult and dangerous route to sail. He was gifted to find 3 people, 2 women, 1 man wishing to make the sail. After a major Hurricane many navigation aids were inoperative and destroyed.

Preparation begins 2 to 3 weeks prior to the sail, this is first assuring that the vessel is seaworthy, and that the engine and sails are all in excellent condition. Why you ask? Because the open sea, far from shore, is a very hostile and rough area. The rigging that holds the mast must be strong, the running rigging that works the sails must be shipshape, which means operationally sound. We will be out of communication range for most of the voyage. We must be capable of fixing and repairing all manner of things, and have the tools to do it with.

Then there is the food provisioning for all meals at sea, times four people, water, medical supplies, cooking facilities, propane fuel for cooking, toilet paper, wash clothes, towels, and cleaning supplies. Our Third Officer, Diane, offered to update the medical kit, she had EMT training which I will be eternally grateful for. First Officer Astrid, ensured all loading was balanced, and the food provisions were adequate for the voyage. While Second Officer Scot was doing all navigation, ensuring all charts, flags, Coast Guard equipment and GPS equipment was working properly.

Next clothing for all, since our sail is taking place in spring, means both winter and summer clothing, and severe weather gear. Selecting crew positions is very important, my first officer is Astrid, responsible for all loading, balance of vessel, provisions water, and food. My Second Officer is Scott, responsible for all safe navigation of vessel, flags, route of sail and my Third Officer is Diane, Meteorologist, EMT, and medical. Each has its responsibilities, and I as Captain must be capable of all positions.

With all preparation done, a departure date must be chosen, tide height, weather, fog, all must be taken into account. Captain Bundy had to cancel, i.e., postpone the sail 3 times, before a very small weather window appeared, this represents good weather for a short period of time.

The crew arrived and the vessel was off on an ebb tide, just before sunset. Just as the vessel passed the outer channel marker, it was found that a squall line was approaching. Captain Bundy called the crew for conference, and the decision was made to anchor off the sand bar until the thunderstorms passed, then raise anchor and sail north on the cool air.

This worked well, as the squall line broke up with the night air, and the crew raised anchor at 8:30 PM setting a 130 jib, and full mizzen for the night. This provides the vessel with an easy steering and we sailed at 4 knots comfortably. Crew watches now officially began, those off duty went below for rest.

The small moon now showed bright, and the stars were beautiful offshore away from lights. Several hours slipped by, hot coffee was brewed, the air now getting chilly. Now the conversation was about shooting stars, when Scot said, "Look to the east, a rocket launch," there in bright rocket tail was the scheduled launch seen off shore, a most beautiful sight.

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Late into the night, past midnight, dense fog now rowed in, so dense a bright spot light could only illuminate 4 feet away. The vessel was now covered with water so wet one would think it had rained heavily. The loons now were heard frequently, as they swim on the water surface. No fishing or commercial vessels showed on the radar set at 6 miles. We are well offshore now, no cell phones or vhf radios work here!

The night passed as the miles ticked off, the coffee being consumed on a regular basis. Night treats were distributed to the watches. Cold weather gear now being put on to keep warm. Estimates were now being made as to land fall in the morning with hopes that the fog would clear.

Land Ho was called loud and clear! Soundings were carefully watched. The Captain began a crew briefing as to how we would conduct ourselves going in. A strong hurricane had struck this area a few months prior and it is likely the navigation aids, and the bottom would be changed; extreme caution had to be planned on. With the briefing done, crew assignments complete, the dingy was secured on the port quarter. The jib was now furled and engine started, and all crew were on high alert function. One on steering, one on engine, one on navigation, and the Captain working as harbor pilot, a person intimately familiar to the area. The channel twists and turns, we were on the flood tide which helped our speed inbound. An hour later we had the anchor deck crew get ready, found a nice location and lowered the anchors in tandem. The engine was shut down and we rested today catching up on sleep. Porpoise by the dozen came by, just feet from the boat, doing all manner of high jumps, playing with the young, this was amazing to watch as it went on for hours! Birds flew by in large flocks, pelicans, gannets, seagulls, all manner of bird life. It was heavenly.

Second Officer Scot installed a barbecue grill port side, and began grilling hot dogs, soon we had a great meal, our first in Cedar Key aboard Talisman.

Discussion now changed to going on liberty, visiting the town village. Renting a golf cart, and seeing the area and having lunch ashore. A lovely dinner was prepared on board, and we watched the sun set, and the fog roll in, dense and wet again. Some lights were seen ashore, with other structures without electricity.

We slept like babies that night, with the only noise, that of the shrimp feeding on the bottom of the yacht. It was very quiet, no sounds at all, silent.

The next morning, we sipped hot tea and coffee, and discussed our plans. Second Officer Scot prepared the dingy boat, the electric outboard motor, battery, lifejackets, anchor, and boots for mud. The plan was to drop 3 off at a land dock and for one to take dingy to the mud beach.

That did not happen! Seems the Hurricane destroyed all the docks. Plan B now in effect, we motored, then rowed the dingy until she struck the mud. Then each of us removed ourselves from the dingy, then pulled the dingy high ashore as the flood tides were in progress. The beach was a shallow grade which made pulling the dingy ashore easy. We secured it with a short line tied to a palm tree.

We washed our feet with a water hose, and walked to a golf cart rental, it was a self-serve honor system, where you placed the cash in a steel box, we now golf carted to a breakfast place, but found it was burned, a sign indicated a new address, we headed there next, and found a delightful breakfast.

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After breakfast we stopped at the Chamber of commerce, found out local knowledge, then headed out towards the state museum which was closed due to hurricane damage. Walked the grounds and a short foot path to the water. Saw Civil war cannons, steel pots for making salt.

The homes we saw along the way were damaged, many with no electric, and not occupied, many for sale signs were seen. A mobile home park with 6 units were swept into the sea, never to be seen again, homes as well according to the chamber of commerce. We drove all over the area, one could see roads washed out, bridges damaged, damage everywhere you looked.

Back in town, we visited the few shops open, an arts and craft shop told us that they had over 4 feet of mud to clean out of the shops before they could open. No one thought the government was of any help at all, just a hindrance to them. We visited the local garden where locals grow all manner of fruits and vegetables, then the oldest tavern in Cedar Key, then returned the golf cart, placed money in the box and walked to the beach. The shoreline now was crowded with horseshoe crabs, hundreds of them, each about 12" round, all breeding which they do once a year. It was difficult to not step on them as there were so many! We boarded the dingy, and motored back to Talisman for some much needed rest.

We all slept some, and chose to remain aboard for the evening. Porpoise played all around the yacht. Scot was going to do steaks for the evening meal, again on the grill and they were delicious. After a full meal, we slept like babes.

Late in the night, Diane said, "she was having trouble staying on her bunk!" The yacht was now heeled about 15 to 20 degrees. The yacht had shifted direction with the tides, as Scot and Don had extended the anchor rode some 20 yards before going to town, but forgot to shorten up on return. With the shifting, the vessel slid over top a nearby mud bank. The heeling continued until about 30 degrees of heel. The winds now picked up from the south at 20 knots and 3 foot waves began to pound the vessel in a perpendicular direction. Don lowered the Bruce anchor as further insurance we would not drag. We now had over 100 pounds of anchor down. Diane said, "Tides were now at flat low", soon the flood began and in two hours we would be floating upright again. In this very exposed anchorage we would need to move out soon before the winds increased more.

We rose early, and afloat once more, chose to lift anchors, and motor to just north of Atsena Otie key in a much protected spot, then re-anchor to prepare the yacht for sea. Two hours later we passed Seahorse Key outbound south, winds now running about 16 knots southerly, right on the nose. We selected the main and mizzen tight with the motor running, moving about 4 knots gently south. Watches were now set and some went for rest while others remained on duty.

Diane soon reported that #2 VHF radio was not working. She trouble shooted, and found a fuse had fallen out of its holder. We located the fuse, installed it, and we had a working radio again. The watches continued. Little to no vessels were observed on this passage, it is remote to say the least.

As the day wore on, our Meteorologist Diane, said, "we will have lighter winds shortly". And the winds began to subside just past noontime.

The coffee pot kept putting out coffee, the hot water for tea. We were running at 4 knots with the wind directly on the nose. Still motorsailing. The miles ticking off, soon past the halfway point. The seas began to drop to 2 feet, and Don suggested we increase the engine rpm. About 30 or more minutes later, a call rang out! Smoke!

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We slowed the engine, to just above idle and turned off many items on the main breaker, then opened the lazarettes, smoke billowed out, and subsided some. The compartment was full of gear, which now had to be removed, stuff all over the place. Don then went below and shouted to shut off the engine and secure the engine intake. Further investigation revealed a hose had slipped off the entrance to the water muffler, exhaust water was being pumped into the bilge, and sprayed all over the engine compartment, instead of over board. The smoke was exhaust, and steam from water hitting the hot exhaust.

Tools now were located and Scot and Don went into action. Within an hour, the engine was running and we continued south. Gear was replaced into the locker and normal ship duty was restored.

Around 4pm, a very small bird landed aboard, and soon became our little friend. It bounced on all of us, going below, and even slept with us during the night.

A wonderful spaghetti dinner was prepared by Astrid, and was so welcomed, I don't know how she kept up the stamina, after dinner she got some well-earned sleep. That bird smelled that food, and came directly outside her cooking, then on and into the vessel. It also consumed some with the rest of us.

Hours later, talk of making landfall at Tarpon was going on, estimated time around midnight. I worried that we would step on the little bird, it was always under foot, or on our arms.

Winds now began to rise once again, still on the nose, 16 knots, waves now about 3 feet. With our direction we began to close the coast, which helped keep the seas down.

Astrid now came back on duty, and Scot went in for some much needed sleep. We spoke about the bird which was still with us, running all over the place, it even flew off into the dingy and then back to the boat to join us again and again. It's appearance suggests it may have been a first year Palm Warbler.

Astrid and I chose to anchor closer to Gulf Harbors, being very tired, so I chose a favorite dive spot which I knew would be quiet, bug free and smooth water. Scot came to help with the anchor, hearing the chain coming out of the anchor locker. We were secured on the hook, and engine shut down, and in our bunks quickly. The bird as well! He roosted somewhere, while visiting all of us during the night.

As dawn came on, we rose, the coffee flowed, and an hour later we were off for Gulf Harbors.

This completed the story line, and yes, even the bird knew, because he left us or we left it but joyful it was to have the little visitor. Some cultures believe these are relatives, ancestors visiting, who knows?

It was a great tour, but like a navy destroyer on tour, the clean up work begins after the sail.

I'm so thankful that these young people would assist an old 85 year old to get out sailing, thankful the sail club supports it. Go sailing, you don't need a boat, just join the club, there are many older sailors willing to take you out, it's always a learning experience, fun and you get to meet some wonderful people. Thank you, Astrid, Scot and Diane!

Captain Don Bundy, Master of Talisman

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