

# S/V AT FIRST SIGHT

## Cayman Islands to Morehead City, February – July 2022



Well, well, well, look who is journaling again. If memory serves me, we penned our last chronicle in March, just as we were departing from the Cayman Islands. We've put quite a bit of time and space under the keel since then.



From Grand Cayman, we sailed northwest two days to Isla Mujeres, Mexico, a beautiful cruising stop if ever there was one. And its proximity to Cancún makes it hot spot for a day-trip and night-life jet-setters and honeymooners from the many destination resorts along the Quintana Roo coast of Mexico.

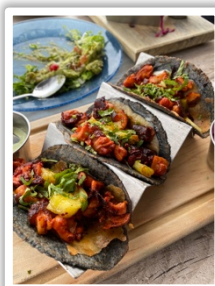
For cruisers, though, *La Isla* has a laid-back lifestyle, with good weather, pristine waters, excellent food, and a cohesive cruising community. On the other hand, it takes most newcomers the better part of two days to clear in with customs, immigration, and port authorities, much of it doing nothing more than waiting in the queue. In fact, the bureaucracy for us was such that we opted to start the check-out process while still in the midst of checking



in. Nevertheless, we also found time for several phenomenal seafood meals, a guided tour of the island, and a trip to the veterinarian to ensure Saylor's entry papers were in good order for her return to the United States. And, of course, we spent more than a few hours "head



down and butt up," doing repairs and preventive maintenance.



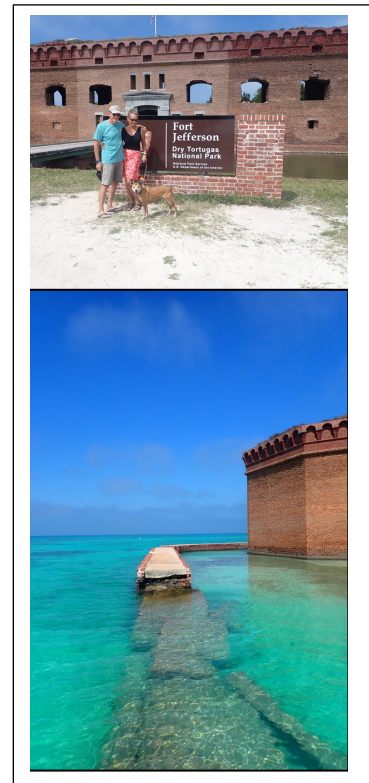


From *La Isla* we sailed northeast through the Yucatan Chanel and rode the Gulf Stream ~350nm along the NW coast of Cuba to Fort Jefferson in the Dry Tortugas National Park. Although technically not a port of entry, the park rangers seem to look the other way for a day or two when U.S. citizens cruising from Central/South America stop for a respite while in route to Florida. Like most of our national parks, Dry Tortugas is a treasure to behold – crystalline aquamarine waters, abundant marine and bird life, numerous shipwrecks in snorkel-deep water, and historic Fort Jefferson.

Although just 75nm west of Key West, the fort seems a world away.

Most people visit the Dry Tortugas by boat, either their own or on a ferry operated on behalf of the National Park Service that brings about 100 passengers in the morning and takes the majority of them away in the afternoon. Those few who remain behind are hard-core kayakers and campers, because there is little in the way of support services available inside the park. (In addition to the chartered ferryboat, there is also a chartered seaplane service that makes two roundtrips per day for those “with more money than time” as one website describes it.)

We anchored in the sheltered harbor off Fort Jefferson for 3 nights, and then set sail northward to Naples, Florida. We had wanted to go to Key West, but it lay directly upwind in fresh to stiff trade winds, that would have made for a rough ride. Since it looked like the headwinds would continue for a week or more, we jumped on Chris Parker’s Marine Weather Center recommendation to go due north on a beam reach to Naples, on Florida’s southwest Gulf coast, and then sneak back across Florida Bay to Marathon Key (where we could just fit under the fixed bridge) and then north to Miami. (This is all very much pre Hurricane Ian, of course; although I remember saying to Vicki while we were there that the built up area looked like a disaster in the making if a hurricane ever made a direct hit.)



While in Naples, we rented a car and drove 4+ hours to Central Florida, for a quick visit with siblings and with our grandkids and their parents. Once back on *AFS*, we set about to execute the aforementioned strategy – south across Florida Bay to Marathon, under the bridge, and then a u-turn up for a coastal sail up the east, Atlantic-side of the chain of islands that are the Florida Keys.

Everything went according to plan, except that we snagged a string of crab traps with our DuoGen hydro generator during the dark of night while crossing Florida Bay. No damage to *AFS*, but it put the DuoGen out of commission for a long while.

We arrived at the Venetian Marina, just off Miami's famous South Beach, in early morning, staying 2 nights there, and anchoring one night at the nearby San Marcos Anchorage. One of the highlights of



Miami, beyond its multicultural vibe and Cuban food, was a night out with Mike Fox and Didier Heiremans. Mike was a high school classmate of ours, and we reconnected with him during a Colonial High School Class of 1975 reunion a few years ago. We've since visited Mike and Didier in two of their three trendy places (Dupont Circle and South Beach),

and we're looking forward to spending time with them in the future at Didier's family homestead in Brussels.

After Miami, it was an overnight coastal transit to Port Canaveral for a family gathering at nearby Surf Studio Motel and Beach Resort in Cocoa Beach, a longtime Lane Family rally point dating back to the 1960s. We've celebrated many big events there over the decades (including Shelby and Travis's wedding), and the big event this time was Grand Nephew Everett's first birthday. We were underway the next day for an intracoastal waterway jaunt to Daytona Beach with a one-night stop in Titusville. Special guests for this journey were Nephew James Alday and his family (Roberta and daughters Zoey and Ellie), and our nephews Henry and Luke.

We had two main reasons for making Daytona a destination. The first is practical: We needed to freshen AFS's antifouling below the waterline and change the zinc anodes, and we're fond of Daytona Marina & Boat Works from our previous experiences there. The second is personal: Our grandkids and their parents were in nearby DeLand, Florida, and we wanted some quality time with them, as well as with our siblings in the Orlando area.



We thought we'd be in Central Florida a few weeks; however, we ended up being there for four months, arriving in Daytona on March 7 and departing on July 5. Frankly, the time there is a blur, especially looking back now. We split our time about 50/50 between mini refit projects on the AFS in Daytona, and quality time with Maebel, Evan and their parents in DeLand. We also sprinkled in good times here and there with our brothers and sisters, and their families.

But all good things must come to an end. We departed Daytona on July 6, with nephews Henry and Luke Jones as crew, and we arrived in St. Augustine two days later. From there we set sail on the 15<sup>th</sup> for Morehead City, NC, ~425nm to the north, docking at Portside Marina on July 18.

