

The Adventures of HIGH COTTON

HIGH COTTON is a year 2000 Camano Troll, a trawler that was originally designated as 28' but is now known as 31'. HIGH COTTON is powered by a single Volvo TAMD41P diesel engine and is equipped with a bow thruster. There is no onboard genset, but there is a four battery house bank and a 2000 watt inverter. The galley is equipped with a refrigerator and a three burner propane range with oven and broiler. Cruising at 2000 RPM, she makes 7 knots over slack water and burns about 2.0 GPH.

The following is an account of a cruise south on the Intracoastal Waterway to Jacksonville, FL and then up the St. Johns River as far as Sanford, FL and back.

Captain's Log, day one (May 25, 2024)

"Better late than never" is what they say. Folks who follow our travels know that we usually leave on our cruises on May first. Well, Kiki, the ship's puppy had some medical issues and we had to get them taken care of before we left. It's difficult to find a veterinarian when you are travelling by boat.

She had some tests to make sure she was OK to travel this past Tuesday and we were waiting to hear the results. We decided to go to the boat this weekend and be ready to take off when we got the results. We finally got the call and she is fine. Unfortunately, by this time, we were trapped in our slip by the current and had to wait for slack current so we could safely leave.

We finally got underway at about 4:45 PM, pretty late to be leaving. We did make it to one of our favorite anchorages at about 7:45 PM so that was three hours underway.

We hadn't been underway for five minutes when a gust of wind hit the bimini top and the frame blew apart. Captain Ron had to hand the helm over to Patti and get the allen wrench set from the bottom of the tool box. The head of the screw was stripped so he had to get a screw out of another fitting until he could get the spare allen screws out of the spare parts box. Anyway, repairs were made without interrupting the trip and we continued south on the ICW.



Leaving Charleston, heading south

Since this was a holiday weekend and the traditional beginning of the boating season, there was a lot of boat traffic until we got several miles south of Charleston. There were two dozen or more boats gathered around a sandbar just south of the Limehouse Bridge. There were several different music systems competing for attention.



Party at the sandbar

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The current was against us for the entire three hours today so our speed was reduced by about one and a half knots. Once we turned into Toogoodoo Creek, our speed increased, but we only had a couple hundred yards to go before we stopped and anchored. Kiki did get to see some “big fishies” today. As mentioned, we saw lots of local boats on the water, but not a single cruising sized boat. We are sharing our anchorage with two sailboats.



Are we there yet?

We plan on getting underway early tomorrow and hopefully get a space at the Beaufort, SC free dock. There is a festival at the waterfront and it should be fun if we get there early enough. We will leave the dock (overnight stays are not allowed) and anchor just south of the city for the night.



Sunset over Toogoodoo Creek, SC

Captain's Log, day two (May 26, 2024)

Shortest boat cruise ever!!! No, actually a few years back we left our marina and only made it to the boat repair yard about five miles away before we had to leave it for repair and get a ride back to our vehicle and drive home until it could be repaired. But, this cruise was cut very short, at least for now. Here's the explanation:

Last night, before we went to bed, Patti put something in the microwave. After a few seconds, it made a strange noise and smoke came out of the vent. The inverter (that converts the boat's 12 volt battery power to 120 volt AC for appliances and such) showed an error message, but when Captain Ron turned it off and back on a few seconds later, it seemed OK. We went to bed thinking that at the worst, we would have to get a ride to Walmart from the next marina stop and buy a new microwave.

This morning, we got up at first light, hoping to make it to Beaufort, SC for the Gullah festival in time to get a spot on the free dock. Captain Ron loaded the coffee pot and pressed the power button. The light came on for about a second, went off and the inverter went into error mode. There was also a burning smell. Not good!

Captain Ron got out his tools and opened the panel where the inverter is located. It was too hot to touch! Also, the GFCI receptacle that protects the circuits on the boat would not reset and pass current to the receptacles. Our diagnosis; the inverter, microwave and GFCI receptacle are all “kaput”. At this point we decided that with only three hours completed of our cruise and West Marine not stocking the inverter we needed, the best plan was to turn around and head back home where we could round up the parts we needed and make the repairs in our own marina.

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So, we did our engine checks, tried making coffee by pouring water heated on the stove through the coffee maker (that did not work well), pulled the anchor and headed back to our marina in Charleston.

We had the current with us most of the way and had an uneventful trip. Kiki got to see more big fishies on the way back.

Once we got docked and tied up, Captain Ron noticed that the swim ladder on the transom was dragging in the water instead of being stored under the swim platform. When he pulled it up, it was covered in marine growth. Apparently it has been hanging in the water for some time. We haven't used it so our best guess is; the diver used it and forgot to put it back up. However it happened, Captain Ron will probably have to use a pressure washer on it to get the growth off. And dragging in the water, it probably cost us a bit in fuel economy.

So, we got back to the marina at about 9:00 AM, did some further testing on the electrical stuff, and drove home. A replacement inverter is supposed to be delivered tomorrow and we went to Target and Home Depot for a microwave and GFCI receptacle.

Hopefully, we can get everything replaced on Tuesday and resume our cruise either Tuesday or Wednesday.

Captain's Log, day three (May 28, 2024)

So if at first you don't succeed, try, try again! So, we are back on the water.

A replacement inverter was ordered Sunday morning from the big Internet book store that has grown to sell anything and everything. Not quite the best price, but next day delivery. Monday we

took the hound for an unscheduled, but much needed grooming, shopped for and purchased a replacement microwave and a replacement GFCI receptacle. We went back home, gathered up the Sea Dog and went to the boat where we made sure the microwave would fit in the space provided and Captain Ron replaced the failed GFCI receptacle. The holders that capture the feet of the microwave and keep it from sliding off the shelf had to be modified and remounted in new locations so they came home where Captain Ron could modify them.

This morning we got up and dressed, gathered our boating stuff and fought the rush hour traffic to the marina. Captain Ron mounted the holders for the microwave and replaced the inverter. Since it was the same brand and model, this was relatively simple. All the mounting holes and cables fit perfectly. Everything was tested and the mess cleaned up and tools put away in a little over two hours. So, for \$700 and change, we are ready to cruise again!

We got out of our slip and underway at about 10:30 AM and headed south (again).

Today was a beautiful day on the water, mostly sunny, but not too hot and the water was calm. We stopped several times for Kiki to watch the big fishies. One even swam with us for a short time.



Our view of the world today

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A pelican gives his approval to HIGH COTTON passing by

Unlike this past Saturday, we passed several cruising sized boats heading north. Some seemed to be travelling together in a “flotilla” (a bunch), while others were like us, travelling alone. Towards the end of today’s voyage, we were attacked by swarms of green headed biting flies. Patti found the fly swatter and began a counter attack. Fortunately, it wasn’t long before we reached our anchorage, got ourselves anchored and were able to retreat to the inside of the boat where screens separated us from the attacking horde.



A bald eagle along the waterway

Dinner tonight was bratwursts, sauerkraut and baked beans, all left over from Sunday’s dinner at home. The new inverter and microwave warmed them up just fine. No need to heat the boat with the propane stove.

We travelled a little over five hours today and are anchored just before the ICW enters the Coosaw River. It should take us about three hours to get to Beaufort, SC tomorrow where we will look for a space on the free day dock so we can visit the town.

Captain’s Log, day four (May 29, 2024)

We slept well at anchor last night. Went to bed at 87 degrees and woke up at 67 degrees! It’s a good thing we didn’t put the covers away for the bed. Even the Sea Dog slept through the night. We have mentioned this before, when the puppy has to “go potty” and we are on the boat, she goes in the cockpit on the back of the boat and we can rinse it down the drain. So, first thing after we all got out of bed, she went out and did her business.

It was supposed to take us two and a half hours to get to Beaufort, but it took a bit longer than that because we stopped a couple times to watch the dolphins (Kiki writes: *“Pawpaw stopped the boat and let me watch the big fishies playing. I like to watch them and I talk to them. They don’t talk back though.”*).



The ship's puppy on dolphin patrol

Docking at the Beaufort day dock didn’t go as smoothly as it should have, but we did get docked

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with no damage. We may be a little out of practice from the long winter layover. In our defense, there was a strong breeze blowing us away from the dock.

Kiki was glad to be on land and two poop sacks were used in quick succession. Once that was taken care of, we walked through the park to the main street and to the little restaurant where we had ice cream for a late breakfast (11:00 AM). Of course, the hound had to stop every few feet to sniff and make her mark and that slowed us down. Then we walked down the main street and visited several of the shops. The pup worked her magic, extracting dog biscuits from the shop workers and getting petted by nearly everyone she came across. (Kiki writes: *"I know I am cute and people like to pet me and give me dog biscuits. I like when they do that."*)



Kiki gets her ice cream

We headed back towards the boat, stopping in the waterfront park to swing on the swings and watch the people and boats go by. Eventually, we ended up back on HIGH COTTON where Captain Ron began watching TV and the ship's puppy lay down for a nap.



The HIGH COTTON crew in Beaufort, SC

Patti decided to head back to the main street and check out the rest of the shops. Captain Ron fell asleep.

Patti returned to HIGH COTTON after doing her best to help the local economy. Her return woke Captain Ron.

There was some more dog walking and then the humans left the hound to guard the boat while they went to an early dinner. It is Captain Ron's opinion that the actual food did not live up to the description on the Internet. Patti liked her dinner though.

Since overnight docking is not allowed at the Beaufort day dock, we had to move the boat so there was one more dog walk then we returned to the boat, fired up the engine and moved to an anchorage just off the ICW about three miles downstream from where we had been. It's an anchorage we have used before and it is secure and just a couple hundred yards off the ICW. Tomorrow, we just head straight south on the ICW to Thunderbolt, GA (a suburb of Savannah) where we have a reservation at Thunderbolt Marina.

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Captain's Log, day five (May 30, 2024)

Last night's sleep on the hook (anchored) was not quite as good as the night before; there was some rocking and noise from the current rushing past the boat. Our berth is in the bow of the boat so the noise from the current can be noticeable. But, we did sleep and so did the hound. We got underway at about 7:00 AM and arrived at Thunderbolt Marina a little before 1:00 PM. Along the way, we passed the Paris Island Marine Base and the back side of Hilton Head Island. We also crossed the Savannah River after waiting for an inbound container ship to pass. Kiki did get to see a few big fishies, but they didn't put on a show, they were apparently just passing through.



We waited for a ship to pass on the Savannah River

We pulled up to the marina fuel dock and were met by the dockmaster. Apparently the entire staff has changed since we were here two years ago. That's a good thing because service had really declined in the last few visits. Unfortunately, they no longer give visiting boats a box of Krispy Kreme donuts each morning. Apparently the donut shop closed and the next closest one is a long way away.

We took on fifty four gallons of diesel fuel and then moved to our assigned space on the dock. We are on an inside dock for the first time, but it was easy to get to and the dockmaster caught our lines and

tied us up. Apparently, they need the face dock for larger boats that will show up later (note: it is now "later" as this is being written and the other boats did not show up. We could have stayed on the face dock).

Patti had been waiting for a nice hot shower so she headed for the shower building while Captain Ron and the pooch stayed on board. We broke the latch that holds the swim ladder up under the swim platform yesterday so we wanted to walk to the marine store next to Tubby's Tank House (the nearest restaurant) before it closed. Once Patti returned from the shower, we set out for the marine store. They didn't have what we needed but suggested trying the canvas shop at the marina where we are staying. We will try that in the morning.

We had a nice dinner at Tubby's and then walked back to the marina. Captain Ron took his shower while Patti and Kiki waited in the gazebo. Once Captain Ron was finished, Patti took his towel and washcloth and the rest of the things that needed washing and put them in the washing machine. Captain Ron went to the boat, got a phillips screwdriver and returned to the shower to attach the handle so it works properly.

Kiki wanted to check out the other boats so she led Captain Ron up and down all the docks, inspecting boats as she went.

We topped off the potable water tanks in anticipation of another night on the hook tomorrow. We will soon hit the sack.

Captain's Log, day six (May 31, 2024)

We had considered waiting until 8:00 AM for the canvas shop at the marina to open so we could buy

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the part to fix the swim ladder, but we woke up early and decided to go ahead and get under way.

We got the puppy walked and Captain Ron was rolling up the power cord when the dockhand came by and asked if we were leaving and offered his help. We accepted his offer and were soon out of the marina and heading south through the high end suburbs of Savannah, GA. Apparently, the waterfront homeowners here have some political clout because there are several long no-wake zones on the ICW here for no apparent reason other than the large homes and docks on shore.

Since we were in calm water, the ship's cook (Patti) offered to make breakfast sandwiches, egg, cheese and bacon on toast. They were good!

We continued south and after a couple hours found ourselves at a traditionally shallow spot on the ICW, "Hell Gate". Unfortunately, it was dead low tide. We made it through, but just barely and with several "shallow water" warnings from our depth sounder.



The Georgia portion of the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway

Once we got through the shallow area, we had a pretty routine voyage. We stopped a couple of times so the ship's puppy could watch the big fishies. Each time there were a dozen or more, apparently feeding. Kiki loves the big fishies. (Kiki writes: *"Yes, the big fishies are fascinating. They*

jump out of the water and make a blowing noise. Sometimes they swim alongside the boat but they didn't do that today.")



The Sea Dog watching for big fishies

We did have some rough water in the sounds today, but nothing we couldn't handle. We have seen much worse. We saw a few cruising boats headed north, but not as many as we would have expected. We are beginning to think that most of the "snowbirds" have already headed north and are home by now.



Patti takes the helm

Today ended up being a nine hour cruise and we are anchored in one of our usual anchorages on the Darien River in rural Georgia, just a couple hundred yards off the ICW. Someday we may go on up this river about nine miles to Darien, GA, but not today.

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Dinner tonight was the remainder of the leftover bratwurst, sauerkraut and baked beans from the other night. Tomorrow we will hit a restaurant in Brunswick.

From our anchorage, we can see the Sapelo Island Lighthouse. That and a few channel markers are the only signs of human habitation in sight.



The Sapelo Island Lighthouse in the distance

Tomorrow it should take us about four hours to get to Brunswick, GA where we have reservations for two nights at Brunswick Landing Marina.

Captain's Log, day seven (June 1, 2024)

Timing is everything! More on that later.

We had a good night's sleep on the hook. It was relatively cool with low humidity, great for sleeping. It was a bit breezy in the morning so we decided to get underway and hopefully avoid any windy conditions later in the day.

Coffee was made, the hound was fed and the engine checked. (Kiki writes: *"Sometimes the humans skip breakfast, but not me. I need my breakfast every morning."*) Patti went to the flybridge, started the engine and uncovered everything in preparation for our day's journey. Captain Ron went to the bow to raise the anchor.

Today, and a couple other times recently, the anchor rode slipped off the roller and wedged itself between the roller and the side of the bracket that holds the roller. This requires stopping the windlass and tugging on the line to free it.

This can be traced to excess space between the roller and the bracket. Captain Ron will have to see if he can fix this tomorrow when we are at a marina. It hasn't been right since someone apparently hit the bracket with their boat a couple years ago at our marina.

We got the anchor up and headed back to the ICW for a four hour cruise to Brunswick Landing Marina in Brunswick, GA. We went through a historically shallow part of the ICW but it was mid-tide and we had no problems. We exited this section just before another trawler entered heading north.

We saw a few dolphins along the way and Kiki watched the "big fishies". We also encountered hordes of green headed biting flies. So many that Kiki and mawmaw had to go down and ride inside for a while. We have worn out our fly swatter and need a replacement ASAP!



The Sidney Lanier Bridge, Brunswick, GA

As projected, we arrived at Brunswick Landing Marina just before noon and got tied up in our slip with the able assistance of two dockhands. We normally dock with the stern of the boat towards

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the dock, but today we docked “bow to” so Captain Ron could work on the anchor roller while standing on the dock.

Brunswick Landing Marina (BLM) is a nice marina with floating docks, little current, nice heads and showers, free laundry and FREE BEER! Unfortunately, this is where the “timing” thing comes in. The free beer is on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. We are here Saturday and Sunday. Also, our favorite restaurant for breakfast is closed on Sunday so we will miss out on that. And we did laundry two days ago in Thunderbolt, GA so we have no use for the free laundry.

It was time to change the oil and filters on the engine and transmission. Patti and the puppy went for a walk while Captain Ron got to work. Once he got finished, he went looking for Patti and the pup. He found them in the marina office directly in front of our slip, where the Sea Dog was entertaining the staff and using her charms to secure dog biscuits.

Back to the “timing” thing, the marina does not accept used motor oil but the adjacent boatyard does. Unfortunately, it is not open on Saturday or Sunday.

Captain Ron headed for the showers to get cleaned up after changing the oil. Once he was done, the ship’s puppy was left to guard the boat while the humans walked to town for a late lunch/early dinner. There is a casual pizza/ Italian restaurant that we have enjoyed on our past visits so after checking our options, we ate there. The Jamaican restaurant that we remembered from our last visit was gone.

We learned that there would be a gay pride event in town this evening from 6:00 PM until 10:00 PM. Again, the “timing” thing.

We boxed up our leftovers and headed back to HIGH COTTON where Captain Ron started to watch TV, but fell asleep.

Shortly before 6:00 PM, we decided to walk back to town and observe the gay pride event. Kiki wanted to go too so we hooked her up and started walking.

The city had closed off the street for one block and there were vendors selling food, jewelry, etc. Patti saw some photo prints that she liked and bought two. There was a loud and obnoxious DJ playing music that we didn’t recognize and a few people wearing outfits that stood out from the crowd. Several people stopped to pet the hound and of course, she enjoyed that.



Pride festival, Brunswick, GA



The pup makes friends at the pride festival

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These boots weren't made for walking

After an hour or so, we returned to the boat and turned in for a good night's sleep. We will explore the town some more tomorrow, but being Sunday, we won't expect much to be open.

Captain's Log, day eight (June 2, 2024)

Today was a day in port so there is not much to report. Patti whipped up eggs and bacon for breakfast and Captain Ron did some trip planning.

Kiki took us to the marina office where she was petted and served dog biscuits. The assistant dockmaster took photos of her to send to his wife. We asked about taking our used oil to the boat yard and learned that they would open at 8:00 AM on Monday.

We walked into town with the intention of exploring and observing the historic sights. What we actually ended up doing was going to the Thai restaurant for a late lunch. It was very good but we had leftovers so we had to head back to the boat and put them away. At least we will have dinner for tomorrow or the next day.

Once we returned from our exploration and meal, we took the hound for a walk. Actually, there were several dog walks today; Kiki seems to enjoy the

grounds here. They are pretty nice compared to many marinas. (Kiki writes: *"Yes, this is a very nice marina. It's just a short walk to land and there are grass and bushes everywhere. And lots of interesting smells"*)

We decided to walk to the boatyard at the end of the marina just to see how far it was. It was a long way; in fact, we never made it that far. We decided to just keep the used oil and find another place to dispose of it.

On the way back, we met a couple walking their two dogs and of course they had to meet Kiki and vice versa. Continuing back to our dock, there was a fire pit with chairs at the yacht club (where the free beer is served) so we sat down and talked with the other boaters until it began to get dark.

We excused ourselves and walked back to HIGH COTTON. Patti went to take a shower while Captain Ron topped off the potable water tanks. Then he went to take his shower.



HIGH COTTON docked at Brunswick Landing Marina

Patti got into a conversation with a group of boaters on the dock and told them about our used oil problem. They volunteered to take it to the boatyard tomorrow so Captain Ron got it off the boat and put it where they could pick it up tomorrow.

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Brunswick Landing Marina is a big marina

Our plan for tomorrow is to leave relatively early, cross St. Andrews Sound and then anchor and visit the Cumberland Island National Seashore, a scenic and historical island accessible only by boat.

For now, it's time for bed.

Captain's Log, day nine (June 3, 2024)

Well, if you're going to go cruising in a boat, you have to be flexible! It's a lesson we learned a long time ago and it still applies today.

A couple days ago, Patti woke up with a pain in her upper chest. She figured it was probably a muscle sprain but had no way to know for sure. It hurt when she moved certain ways or when she lifted something. Since our plan to visit Cumberland Island National Seashore would have involved launching and getting into the dinghy and most importantly, hauling it back onboard HIGH COTTON afterwards, we decided that it would be better to put this visit off until our return trip and just head instead to Fernandina Harbor Marina in Fernandina Beach, FL and get her checked out at an urgent care facility so that's what we did.

We got ourselves up, walked the Sea Dog, got the boat ready and headed out of the slip a little after

7:00 AM. We headed back down St. Simons Sound and through the notoriously shallow Jekyll Creek. Since it was mid tide, there were no problems.

We had an outgoing current that gave us a two knot boost heading out St. Andrews Sound, but of course, we had that same two knot current against us coming back in and most of the rest of the way to Florida. We passed the Kings Bay Submarine Base, but no submarines were in sight. We passed the turn to Cumberland Island and soon crossed the state line into Florida. Next stop, Fernandina Harbor Marina.



Kings Bay submarine base



Guard boat at Kings Bay submarine base

We called the marina on the radio, got our docking instructions and were met and assisted by two competent dockhands who caught our lines, tied us up and connected our shore power.

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Patti had mentioned going to the urgent care clinic when we called to reserve a slip and the dockmaster came down to our slip with a personal recommendation. One of the dockhands mentioned that he was training to become an EMT so he interviewed Patti and asked about her pain, medical conditions and family history.

Once we got settled in and got the ship's puppy acquainted with the local turf, we called an Uber to take us to the clinic.



Patti gets checked at the clinic

Long story short (although it was more than three hours at the clinic), Patti got an EKG and X-ray. The doctor determined that she was fine, it was just a sprain and she suggested pain pills.

We called Uber again for a ride back to the marina. Once we got back, we leashed up the hound and walked to town for ice cream. We stopped in every store along the main street looking for a fly swatter to no avail. The puppy did get treats and petting though.

We decided to eat some of our leftovers for dinner since many of the local restaurants were closed today. We had leftover Italian food from the restaurant in Brunswick, GA.

The docks at Fernandina Harbor Marina are open to the public and crowds of people walk along

them to see the sunset and admire the boats. This is mainly on the outside dock and that's where we are this time. It doesn't bother us and the people are mostly polite and respectful. Of course, if we are walking the pooch, they stop and pet her.



HIGH COTTON docked alongside a larger "neighbor"

Patti walked up and took her shower, followed by Captain Ron. The showers and captain's lounge are a bit of a hike from the docks and in the public space, but that's OK. We spent some time in the captain's lounge with the pooch after our showers and then returned to HIGH COTTON. Tomorrow, the plan is to head for the free dock where the ICW meets the St. Johns River and spend the night. That will leave us about a four hour cruise to the marina just the other side of Jacksonville on the Ortega River.



Sunset looking west from Fernandina Beach, FL

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Captain's Log, day ten (June 4, 2024)

Change of plans again! We skipped the Jacksonville free dock and went all the way to the Ortega River off the St. Johns River.

We slept in a bit so by the time we walked the pooch, checked the engine, etc., it was about 8:00 AM when we headed out of the marina.

The portion of today's cruise down the ICW to the St. Johns River went according to plan. We saw a few big fishies and a couple of cruising boats headed north. We also saw a couple of shrimp boats working in the sound and had to stay out of their way. These were not the big ocean going shrimp boats we often see; they were smaller than HIGH COTTON.



Shrimp boat followed by birds waiting for a handout

Just north of the St. Johns River we saw a US Coast Guard boat stopped and we were afraid we were going to get boarded again for another "safety inspection". This has happened to us three times previously in our cruises. It involves armed officers boarding the boat, checking paperwork and safety equipment. HIGH COTTON has always passed these inspections in the past; it just seems like an invasion of privacy. Imagine armed police officers knocking on your door at home and coming in to check your smoke detectors and backflow

preventers. Fortunately, they started moving as we got there and just waved at us.



White pelicans gathered on the shore

We passed by the Jacksonville free dock, there were no boats tied up this early in the day, just some local people fishing. It's a pretty nice place to stay and we have stayed there a couple times before. There is a park, playground, restrooms and boat ramps.



Roseate Spoonbills on the shore

The current was with us as we approached the St. Johns River, but as soon as we turned to go upriver to Jacksonville, we found ourselves travelling against the current and lost quite a bit of speed, between two and three knots. That was enough to add an hour or more to our trip.

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The St. Johns River between the ICW (near the mouth of the river) and Jacksonville is mostly industrial with shipping terminals for containers, cars and other materials, but there are a few sections with nice (and probably expensive) homes on both sides of the river.



We could probably live here!



A container ship at one of the many ports

We passed under one of Captain Ron's favorite bridges, the Dames Point Bridge (officially the "Napoleon Bonaparte Broward Bridge"). This is an impressive bridge when viewed from the water. We have also driven over it by car when visiting friends and family in Florida. It carries Interstate 295 across the St. Johns River.



The Napoleon Bonaparte Broward Bridge, Jacksonville, FL

Eventually, we could see the skyline of Jacksonville in the distance, but like when approaching many larger cities, it was over an hour before we actually got there.



Approaching Jacksonville, FL on the St. Johns River

We saw a lot of construction activity along the waterfront in downtown Jacksonville, apparently things are looking up.

As we approached the city, we could see that the railroad bridge crossing the St. Johns River was up, allowing for passage of boats. Unfortunately, that was not to be. As we approached the bridge, it went down for a train to pass. The train eventually appeared and it was a long, slow freight train.

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Waiting for the railroad bridge to open so we could pass

Once the bridge reopened, we headed through with several other boats that had been held up along with us. There was one more-high rise bridge (Interstate 95) and then we headed up the river for another mile or so to where we could turn towards the Ortega River and our marina for the night.



Artwork under the bridge

We had to have the bridge at the mouth of the Ortega River opened so we called the bridge tender on the radio and he opened it for us. Apparently, this is one of the most often opened bridges in Florida. Altogether today, we passed under eight high-rise bridges and passed through three opening bridges.



The Ortega River Bascule Bridge

We called the Sadler Point Marina and were met by a dockhand who caught our lines and helped us dock HIGH COTTON. Once we got connected and settled in and walked the ship's puppy, we walked to the office to check in where we learned that the swimming pool was closed for repairs. Bummer, we were counting on a cool dip. If we had known this in advance we would have chosen the other (more expensive) marina a couple hundred yards away.



HIGH COTTON docked at the Sadler Point Marina

There are several restaurants nearby, but we decided to finish up our Thai food from Brunswick, take showers and turn in. We have shopping to do tomorrow.

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Captain's Log, day eleven (June 5, 2024)

Patti got up early this morning and did a load of laundry. She took a roll of quarters with her for the machines, but found that the machines will only accept credit cards, not coins. Strangely, they have a \$.25 surcharge for using a credit card even though they will not accept cash. Captain Ron slept in.

Once the laundry was washed and dried, we headed for the shopping center with our granny cart with the intention of getting breakfast at Metro Diner, looking for a replacement for our broken swim ladder buckle at West Marine and stocking up on groceries (mostly soda and beer) at Publix.

As we were walking on the dock towards land, we spotted a manatee grazing in the shallow water near the shore. We watched until it swam away.

We got our breakfast and headed to West Marine. They didn't have the exact replacement buckle so Captain Ron purchased a different style of buckle and a piece of strap so he could make a temporary repair (plan "B"). Then it was off to Publix where Captain Ron found a seat in the pharmacy while Patti shopped. Patti stopped in the nail salon on the way to Publix and made an appointment for later in the day to get her nails done.



Patti pushing the granny cart of provisions from Publix

Back at the boat, everything was put away and Patti went off to get her nails done. Captain Ron proceeded with his plan "B" swim ladder repair.

Eventually, Patti returned from the nail salon and we took the Sea Dog for a walk. Well, we started to walk but it started raining so we grabbed a couple of seats under the covered pavilion. There were some children already there and their mother later joined them. They live on their boat and travel, but the boat developed problems so they have been at this marina for a while.



Patti and the pup relaxing at the pavilion

Once it stopped raining, we walked the puppy back to the boat, got our raincoats and headed back to the shopping center for dinner and to pick up prescriptions at the CVS drug store.

Since we had a large breakfast rather late, we went to Wendy's for burgers and fries. It was raining lightly when we left so we put our raincoats on and headed for CVS. We picked up our prescriptions and walked back to HIGH COTTON.

Patti took Kiki for a walk and then to the bathhouse where she took a shower. Captain Ron went and took a shower also. He was lathering up when all the lights went out. He quickly realized that the lights were connected to a motion sensor that couldn't "see" into the shower. He opened the shower door and stepped out and the lights came

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back on. He did this again every few minutes until he was finished so the lights would stay on.

Back at the boat, it is time for bed. Tomorrow we fuel up and head for Green Cove Springs, FL.

Captain's Log, day twelve (June 6, 2024)

Knowing that we would be getting fuel at the marina and that the fuel dock doesn't open until 8:00 AM, we were in no rush to get out of the sack this morning. It should be noted that this marina is a quarter mile or less from the railroad bridge over the Ortega River and the trains could be heard blowing their horns throughout the night.

We did get up, walk the ship's puppy, check the engine, top off the water tanks and get underway a little after 8:00 AM. We headed up river a short distance to the fuel dock and took on about 60 gallons of diesel fuel.



An unusual sailboat anchored on the Ortega River.

From there, we made a U turn and headed down the Ortega River and through the drawbridge to the main channel of the St. Johns River. We had a helicopter from the Naval Air Station pass directly overhead and watched two planes taking off. We passed under the Interstate 295 Bridge.



Through the Ortega River bridge again

The St. Johns River at this point is very wide and pretty deep so it's pretty much a matter of staying in the middle as it heads south. A commercial tugboat and a couple recreational boats passed us heading north.

After about three hours, the city docks at Green Cove Springs came into view. There was a sailboat on an outside pier so we took an inside slip next to it. The guy on the sailboat came out to catch our lines, but seemed a bit confused as to what to do with them. When Captain Ron asked him to tie off the stern line and catch the bow line, he just dropped the stern line on the dock without securing it or handing it back to Patti. Pulling and securing the bow line caused the stern to drift away from the dock, but he finally came back and picked up the line and secured it.

Once he went back on his boat, we rearranged all the lines anyway so we could more easily get on and off the boat. The first electrical receptacle we tried didn't work, but the second did. Dockage here is \$20 per night including water and electricity, which is certainly a bargain. There are no showers though.

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HIGH COTTON docked at the Green Cove Springs city docks.

The Sea Dog was anxious to explore and mark a new territory so we all made the long walk up the dock to the beautiful city park. She did her thing and we visited the restrooms where the humans did their thing.

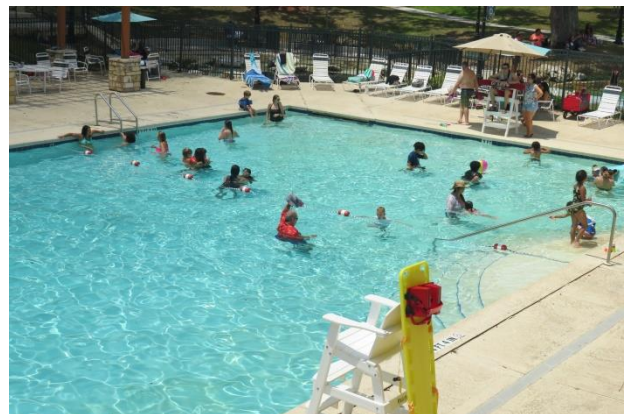


The ship's puppy finds a cool spot to rest

The city of Green Cove Springs is named for an actual spring where fresh water comes out of the ground and runs down to the river. The city has built a beautiful park around the spring, including a splash area and a large swimming pool which is fed from the spring. The water runs from the spring, into the pool and out the other end to the river. Unfortunately, today the pool was filled to capacity and there were people waiting in line to get in so we didn't get the chance to try it out. It looked very refreshing, though.



The actual Green Cove Spring



The spring fed pool

On the way back to HIGH COTTON, the Sea Dog found a place to get in the river. She waded in, walked around and then crouched down to get her belly wet.



The Sea Dog cools off in the spring water

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When we returned to our slip, there were four large manatees in the slip right across from HIGH COTTON feeding on the marine growth on the dock floats. They stayed there for several minutes while Kiki watched and barked at them and we took photos. It's hard to imagine how large and beautiful these creatures are without seeing them in person.



The pooch checks out the manatees

While we were watching the manatees, a sheriff's boat came in and docked. Then another came and then yet another. We learned that tomorrow would be a gigantic boat party "Boater Skip Day" between here and our destination tomorrow, Palatka, FL. There will be hundreds, perhaps thousands of boats, alcohol, live bands, etc. We plan to leave early and hopefully miss most of this.

We went inside HIGH COTTON where the air conditioning was beginning to cool the boat and rested from our trip. After a couple of hours, the humans decided to walk to town in search of a new fly swatter and a meal. We tried the dollar store, the drug store and a couple other stores to no avail. The store most likely to have a fly swatter, the hardware store, was too far to walk on a day in the mid-nineties.

We passed up the Mexican restaurant and two pizza places and settled in at the chicken wing

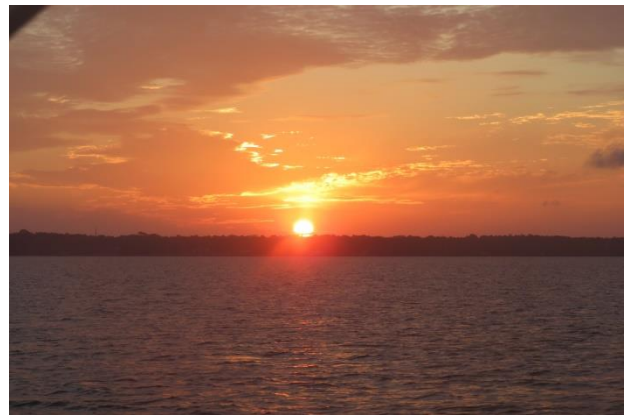
restaurant. Captain Ron had wings and onion rings, Patti had a giant chef salad and we shared an appetizer of fried zucchini sticks. This hit the spot.

On the way back to HIGH COTTON, we stopped to talk with some of the local residents who were fishing on the pier. They had been there when we first arrived today.

Since there are no showers here and there is a boat next to us keeping us from showering in the cockpit, we will shower inside tonight. As we mentioned, we hope to be out of here at first light tomorrow.

Captain's Log, day thirteen (June 7, 2024)

As planned, we were up at oh-dark-thirty. The puppy was walked, the engine checked and we pulled out of our slip at 6:00 AM. It was light enough to see where we were going, but we had our running lights on so other boats could see us. We noticed another trawler in front of us that had apparently been anchored off the town along with many other boats, mostly sailboats. It matched our speed and stayed the same distance in front of us for about an hour. We thought it was cruising up the river like us, but it turned out of the channel to the "Boater's Skip Day" gathering.



Sunrise on the St. Johns River, Green Cove Springs, FL

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As we passed Bayard Point, the location of the “Boater’s Skip Day” event, we could see a couple dozen fairly large boats that had apparently spent the night in anticipation of the event. As we were travelling south, several small boats passed us heading to the event. Once we went past the location we saw fifty or more boats headed toward it from the south. Two trawlers passed us headed north and one called us on the radio and mentioned that both of them were heading for the event and that the owner of the other trawler was also the owner of the marina we are staying at tonight.



The Seminole Electric generating plant, just north of Palatka

Four and a half hours or so after leaving Green Cove Springs, we pulled into the Boathouse Marina in Palatka, FL. There were no employees on site, it was a “do it yourself” docking, but that is what we expected. A night here is \$35 compared to the \$120 at Brunswick Landing Marina.

Captain Ron’s daughter, Robyn Harter called and said she was on her way to meet us. We walked the pooch, of course, and she found a place to get in the river to swim. That meant that she had to get a shower in the cockpit before she could get back inside HIGH COTTON. She knows that is the rule after swimming.



HIGH COTTON docked at the Boathouse Marina, Palatka, FL

Robyn arrived and we (the humans) walked to Angel’s Diner, supposedly the oldest diner in Florida. We had typical diner food, of course and it was decent. We caught up with family matters between bites.



Robyn, Elvis, Patti and Captain Ron at Angel’s Diner

Once we finished and walked back to HIGH COTTON, we asked Kiki if she would like to go for a ride in the car. She said “yes” of course so Robyn drove us to the local Home Depot to buy a fly swatter. Finally we have a fly swatter (actually two for \$1.97) but we haven’t seen a single fly for two days. At least we will be ready the next time we run into them. We also stopped at a convenience store and bought a bag of ice. This marina does not sell ice.

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Robyn had to return to her home, an hour and a half away, to feed her horses, so the crew of HIGH COTTON retreated to the air conditioned boat (it was about one hundred degrees outside) and took naps.

Eventually, it cooled down to about ninety five degrees so we took the hound for a walk around the town's waterfront park. It is a really nice park. We talked to some of the locals in the park and on the way back to the marina.

As we were getting onto HIGH COTTON, the man who lives on the houseboat in the next slip over came out and asked about Kiki. We had visited with him and his wife on their houseboat a few years ago at this same marina. We put the pooch back on the dock so he could pet her. His wife came out and we had a long conversation while the pup was getting petted.



Kiki gets some much needed love

The showers here are not air conditioned (but they do have plenty of hot water and pressure) so we will wait for them to cool down a bit and then take our showers. Our stop tomorrow night will probably be Georgetown Marina in Georgetown, FL at the north end of Lake George. It should be about a four and a half hour ride.

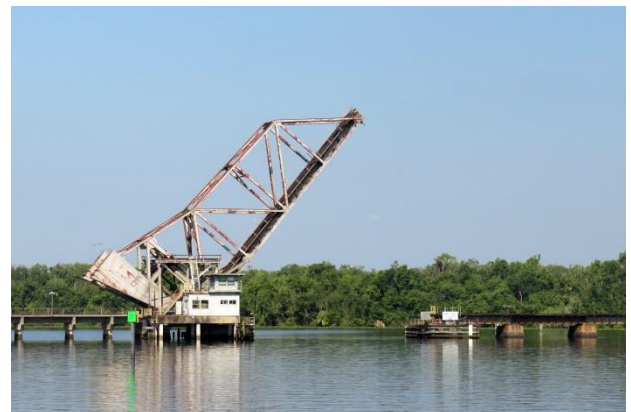
Captain's Log, day fourteen (June 8, 2024)

Captain Ron had to break out the toolbox again! More on that later.

We had no reason to linger in Palatka this morning, but no reason to rush our departure either. We walked the puppy and as we were returning to HIGH COTTON, the transient boat sharing the face dock with us was preparing to leave. We asked if they needed a hand and they said they didn't. We did end up talking to them for a few minutes. They keep their boat in Astor, FL, south of Lake George, our destination for tonight. It seemed to be a nice boat, larger, newer and cleaner than HIGH COTTON. We got ourselves underway and followed them up the St. Johns River, but they eventually pulled out of sight.

Today being Saturday, there was a lot of small boat traffic. Lots of pontoon boats and lots of bowriders. Most were courteous, a few were not.

The Buffalo Bluff Railroad Bridge was open with no train coming so we just cruised on through. Captain Ron was hoping to see a speeding Amtrak train crossing over the bridge, but that did not happen today.



The Buffalo Bluff railroad bridge

The river at this point is still too wide to see much on the shore such as alligators, turtles and such.

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We will be in the narrow portion tomorrow and the next day.

This is where the tool box part begins: About 11:30 AM, Captain Ron suggested that Patti go below and make some sandwiches for the humans and chicken and rice for the K-9. She went down the ladder, leaving Captain Ron and the ship's puppy at the helm. A few minutes later, Captain Ron heard a rattling metallic sound that he couldn't identify. It seemed to be coming from the boat but wasn't a normal boat sound. All of a sudden the sound stopped.

Well, Patti (below, fixing lunch in the galley) identified the sound as the windlass paying out chain for no good reason. Unlike the old woman who lived in a shoe, Patti knew exactly what to do; she turned off the circuit breaker that powers the windlass. Then she called up to Captain Ron and explained what had happened. Repairs could wait until we were docked; the anchor is tied up so it won't drop even if the chain is let out. And that pile of chain on the bow isn't really a problem.

Patti finished making lunch and brought it up where the entire crew was re-nourished.



We could live here

As we were nearing our marina for the night, we noticed a dark cloud off to one side. It kept getting closer and we prepared for our "rain drill" where

Patti takes the helm on the flybridge while Captain Ron and the ship's puppy head below and navigate from the lower helm while Patti covers the seats and helm and puts everything else away.

It did start to rain and Captain Ron and the pooch went below and began navigating. After just a couple minutes, it stopped raining so Captain Ron climbed back to the flybridge. It started raining again, but not very hard and the rain wasn't coming in the sides so we all stayed on the flybridge. We could see a few hundred yards in front of us where it wasn't raining, but the rain seemed to be moving in the same direction we were.

We were doing fine until we turned towards the marina. The rain started pouring and Patti had to get the docklines ready. We forgot to ask the marina which side of our boat the finger piers would be on and Captain Ron guessed wrong so they had to be moved quickly. The dockhand came out to help and of course, he got soaked.

We did get tied up safely, although we had to re-adjust the lines later. Captain Ron got the electric power connected (in the rain) so the air conditioning could run and begin to cool the boat down.



HIGH COTTON docked at the Georgetown Marina and Lodge

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We walked the pooch and went to the office to pay for our stay. There was a problem with the computer software so we will have to give them our credit card information tomorrow, either once they open or by phone if we leave before 7:00 AM.

It was just a few minutes until the rain stopped and the sun came out. Captain Ron went to the flybridge to wipe down the dash and instruments. It was then that he remembered the windlass problem so he got out the toolbox and went to work. We will leave out all the details, but one of the windlass footswitches was stuck in the “on” position. It did this all by itself with nobody near it.

Leaving out more details, Captain Ron had two spare switches, pre-wired in the “spares” box. The actual electrical connections are in the anchor locker, requiring dismounting the TV, cutting some wire ties and making splices in awkward places. Captain Ron decided to simply cut the wires off the old switch and splice the replacement on deck and then shove the wires through the hole in the deck. Permanent repairs can be made once we return home.

The Georgetown Marina and Lodge is more of a fish camp than a marina. There are a half dozen slips for boats the size of HIGH COTTON and up and a couple dozen slips for eighteen to twenty two foot boats. Fishing on the lake is a big deal here. They also have RV sites and cabins for rent.

We sat and talked to some of the locals while the Sea Dog found a nice cool puddle to lie in.

Patti went to take her shower and talked to some people who live on a houseboat here on the way back. Then Captain Ron went for his shower. The heads and showers here are best described as “rustic”. Actually, the whole marina is “rustic”. This is the only marina we have stayed at that sells

live crickets (for fish bait) in the office. We didn’t buy any.

We made reservations for the marina in Sanford, FL for Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. We were hoping to stay for a week, but at least over the phone, we were unable to do that. We might be able to negotiate in person once we get there.

Tomorrow, we cross Lake George, the second largest lake in Florida. We will leave early to avoid any wind.



This is where we are tonight

Captain’s Log, day fifteen (June 9, 2024)

We needed to wait until 7:00 AM to pay for our dockage so we were in no great hurry to get up today, but of course the sun came up and it got light and without blackout curtains, it’s hard to sleep in.

We went through our usual routine, including walking the hound and taking the boat trash to the dumpster at the other end of the marina. We stopped in the office to pay, but still couldn’t because of a computer glitch. The guy did put our credit card into the system so the boss could fix the glitch and run our payment.

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HIGH COTTON was already facing directly onto Lake George so with barely a turn of the wheel we made the eleven mile crossing in about an hour and forty five minutes. While we were crossing the lake we could see many local boaters apparently heading for Silver Glen Spring, a beautiful area that is very popular with local boaters. We stopped there for the night a few years ago. This area is so popular that some people are trying to close it to boaters. Probably the same people who want us to drive electric cars and get rid of our gas stoves and water heaters.



View of Lake George from the bridge of HIGH COTTON

At the southern end of the lake, there is a channel with a wooden fence on both sides leading into the narrower river. This can be a congested area so slow speed is required.



Volusia Bar, south end of Lake George

As we continued south on the St. Johns River, we kept seeing more and more boats and jet skis, apparently heading for Silver Glen Spring.



A group of Jet Skis heading towards HIGH COTTON

We passed the free town dock at Welaka, home of the restaurant “Shrimp R Us”. We have stopped for lunch here before and the food was excellent. Unfortunately, it was too early in the day so we just kept moving. We passed everything from mansions to trailers on the waterfront. The Florida sun shines on everyone, rich or poor.



A flock of Wood Storks roosting in a tree

We also passed several marinas, mostly low key and filled either with pontoon boats or houseboats.

We saw one alligator in the water with just his head sticking up. We saw one turtle on a log. We

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saw probably over a hundred small boats and jet skis and one large cruising sized boat with “St. Augustine, FL” on the stern.



A party on the banks of the St. Johns River

We thought about stopping at Hontoon Island State Park where we could have a dock, electric power and heads and showers for \$20. Unfortunately, the park was damaged in a hurricane a couple years ago and while it is more or less open for day use, it is not open for overnight dockage. Captain Ron called a commercial marina that was supposed to be nice, but like the state park, it was damaged by the hurricane and has no showers. We decided to just anchor for the night. We often wonder why it seems to take so long to get these marinas repaired after hurricanes, especially considering that they are losing business each day they are not repaired.

We pulled into an oxbow just south of Blue Springs State Park. As Captain Ron was letting the anchor down, a manatee surfaced and stared at him just a few feet from the boat. Of course Captain Ron didn't have his camera on him, that would have been a great photo. We did get a few photos of the manatee before it left the area though.



A manatee in our anchorage

It was hot this afternoon and we didn't have much of a breeze to cool us off. Dinner was leftovers from the last couple days along with a can of corn.



Yes, it was warm today

After dinner, Captain Ron showered in the cockpit and we all climbed to the flybridge so sit and watch the world go by. Two alligators swam by and we heard some interesting animal sounds. We came back down once it got dark and Patti showered.

It should take less than three hours to get to the marina in Sanford tomorrow.

Captain's Log, day sixteen (June 10, 2024)

It was hot last night, but with the fan in the V berth running, we were able to get to sleep. The K-9

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apparently doesn't like the sound of the fan so she chose to sleep in the saloon. By morning, the temperature was in the low seventies and comfortable.



Last night's alligator sighting

We got up and went through our usual pre-departure routine. Patti took the helm while Captain Ron went to the bow to raise the anchor. Today, the other windlass switch failed in the "on position" and Patti had to go back down and switch the circuit breaker off again. Captain Ron will have to repair this before we anchor again. He may just have to replace both switches with a different brand once we get back home.

We got back on the St. Johns River where we saw several alligators at various places swimming across the river. Unfortunately, they were very unsocial alligators and dove under the water before we could get close to them.

It took about two hours to get to the northern end of Lake Monroe. This is a place where two high rise highway bridges and a low rise bascule railroad bridge cross the river. Most railroad bridges across navigable waterways are open to boat traffic unless a train is coming. This bridge was closed.

Captain Ron called the bridge tender on the radio and he said there would be a ten minute wait because a train was coming. In Captain Ron's

mind, he could have opened the bridge and let us through and closed it again in time for the train, but that wasn't his plan.

So, we drifted in place for ten minutes until the "train" crossed the bridge. This "train" consisted of three cars. We had longer trains circling our Christmas tree when we were kids!



Waiting for the "train" to pass

About a half hour later, we approached Sanford and the Sanford Downtown Marina. We tried several times to hail them on the radio without success so we reverted to "plan B" (calling them on the phone).

We got our slip assignment and suggestion for which side of the boat to have the lines and fenders on. We got ready and headed down the fairway towards the dockhand who was waving us in. At the last minute, he called out that there was a change in slip assignment and we would be on the other dock. This required quickly moving the lines and fenders and making some awkward maneuvers, but all was accomplished and we got into the slip and tied up.

We had been told when we called to make reservations that we could only stay for three days, but our plan was to see if we could negotiate staying for a week. To our surprise, when we went to the office to pay, the lady asked us how long we

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would be staying. We told her we would like to stay a week and without blinking an eye, she said that would be fine.

To our further surprise, when she rang up the bill, it was only \$200 for seven days! We had paid nearly \$250 for just two days in Brunswick, GA just a few days ago.

As we were getting off HIGH COTTON to walk to the office, we were met by Chuck Stiles, half of a couple we had met and travelled with back in 2018 when we cruised to the Erie Canal in New York. He and his wife Margaret are Loopers (Boaters who are doing or have done the Great Loop), but have kept their boat in Sanford for a few years.

After paying for our stay and putting things in order on HIGH COTTON, we walked down the dock to their boat and relaxed and relived old memories for a while. We made plans to meet and go for dinner at the German restaurant in town.

We took turns showering in the marina facilities, changed into our better clothes and went to dinner. Dinner, as expected was great (but not inexpensive). At least we each have enough for another meal.



Captain Ron, Chuck, Margaret and Patti having dinner

Patti gathered up all the dirty clothes and towels and headed for the laundry room. Captain Ron started watching TV, but fell asleep.



Patti heads for the laundry room

HIGH COTTON needs to be washed and of course, the windlass switch needs to be repaired. The weather forecast is calling for rain so the boat washing may be done by Mother Nature, at least partially.

Soon it will be time for bed and there will be no rush to get up in the morning.

Captain's Log, day seventeen (June 11, 2024)

Every time it rains it rains - Pennies from Heaven.

Don't you know each cloud contains - Pennies from Heaven. (Bing Crosby and others)

Well, if that were true, we would be rich today! From about noon on, we had several periods of heavy rain and others of light rain. The locals tell us they really need the rain and one even thanked us for bringing it.

So anyhow, we took our time getting out of bed this morning, but Captain Ron was the last. Patti walked the hound and then suggested to Captain

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Ron that we go to town for breakfast, which we did.

Once we returned, Captain Ron started on "boat chores" while Patti ("extra bacon") stripped the bed and took the sheets to the laundry room. She then vacuumed the inside of the boat.

Captain Ron re-tied HIGH COTTON to make it easier to step on and off, filled the potable water tanks which were getting low and replaced the other broken windlass switch.

While docked at Brunswick Landing Marina a few days ago, the electric pedestal nearest our boat didn't work so the marina plugged our power cord in to one of their extension cords. When Captain Ron unplugged it two days later, he noticed that the plug on our cord was burned and damaged, apparently from their extension cord being damaged. This meant we needed to replace the plug on our cord.

Captain Ron had noticed that this marina had a replacement plug for sale at a fair price so he decided to go ahead and buy it and repair our cord (we have three so we had a cord to use in the meantime). So, that was accomplished.



The "guts" of a burned electric plug

Once all the repairs were completed and the inside of the boat cleaned, we decided to walk to town

and explore. The Sea Dog asked to go along so off we went. Fortunately, the humans took their raincoats. The Sea Dog doesn't have one.

We walked around the downtown area, but like many small towns, a lot of the businesses are closed Monday and Tuesday. We walked to the bakery which was supposed to be open today, but it wasn't. Captain Ron was thinking of fresh donuts for tomorrow's breakfast so he was disappointed.

We did find a shop open and Patti found some things we couldn't do without, but while she was checking out, it started raining. Raining hard!

There are awnings in front of many of the buildings, but of course we had to walk from one to the next and across the intersections to the next street.

Our raincoat (jackets, actually) protected our heads and upper body, but not below the waist. We got wet. The puppy enjoyed this for a while, but she got soaked.

Once we got back to HIGH COTTON, the ship's puppy had to be dried off with a towel and then took a nap under a blanket. The humans had to change out of their wet clothes.



The hound gets dried off after walking in the rain

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We lounged around for a couple of hours watching TV and surfing the Internet. Captain Ron noticed that he couldn't hear the air conditioner running and eventually determined that the boat wasn't getting electrical power. He checked and found the circuit breaker on the marina's power pedestal had tripped so he reset it and all was well. Perhaps this was related to the rainstorm.

We decided to go to the Italian restaurant adjacent to the marina for dinner so we changed into dry clothes and walked to it. We took our raincoats and of course, it started raining as we were walking.

We don't have room in the refrigerator for any more leftovers so Captain Ron got a cheeseburger and Patti ("extra bacon") got a salad.

Once we finished dinner and returned to the boat, we got the pup and took her for a walk (with our raincoats, of course). We met and talked to some of the locals and Kiki met another dog.

Back aboard HIGH COTTON we will forego showers tonight and just go to bed in a little bit.

Captain's Log, day eighteen (June 12, 2024)

Since today was a day in port, we slept in a bit. It was actually Captain Ron who rolled out of the sack first. Captain Ron made his coffee, then the entire crew went for a walk. The four legged one did a lot of sniffing and peeing in the grass. The two legged members did not sniff and used the restrooms.

Captain Ron has been craving donuts and we had walked to the bakery yesterday but it was closed. It was supposed to be closed on Mondays, but it was closed yesterday, Tuesday. We left the K-9 to guard the boat and walked to the bakery at about 9:30 AM, the time it was supposed to open. It was

still closed! No explanation, it was just dark and the door was locked.

We walked to the local grocery store. This is a pretty big store, but independent, not a chain like Publix or Food Lion. They carry most of the normal stuff, but also a selection of things not normally found at the chain stores like pig ears and tails and ox tails that have not yet been cut into small pieces. They also carry a wide variety of rice.

We picked up several things that we needed and headed back towards the marina. We spied a Jamaican restaurant that was open so we got two Jamaican beef patties and a bottle of ginger beer for lunch back on the boat.

The ship's puppy wanted to go for another walk so Patti took her. Once they returned to HIGH COTTON, there was a knock on the door and it was our friends Chuck and Margaret. They had borrowed a car and wanted to know if we wanted to go to the hardware store and Publix.

Captain Ron seldom turns down a chance to visit a hardware store, but he didn't need anything so he and the Sea Dog stayed aboard HIGH COTTON and Patti went to the store.

It started raining and the hound wanted out so once the rain slowed, Captain Ron took her for a walk. A short time later, Patti returned and met the Captain and the Sea Dog on the street in front of the marina. We all walked to the boat and Patti put the groceries away. She bought (among other things), a box of Krispy Kreme donuts. We will have donuts tomorrow for breakfast.

After resting a while, we all set out on another walk, a long one this time. We walked to the Veteran's Memorial Park. The pup walked through every puddle she could find along the way (and there were many).

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The ship's puppy finds a puddle to walk through

Back on HIGH COTTON, the humans took turns walking to the marina building for long, hot showers. Then Patti heated up our leftovers from the German Restaurant for dinner. They were as good today as they were at the restaurant Monday evening.

We walked the hound once more and met the paddle wheel cruise ship as it returned from one of its dinner cruises. The pup got petted and fussed over and we talked with some of the locals.



The Sea Dog knows how to work a crowd

Back on the boat, we are tired, but clean, and it's time for bed.

Captain's Log, day nineteen (June 13, 2024)

Captain Ron had four (4) Krispy Kreme donuts for breakfast today. He should be ashamed of himself but he is not. That does mean though, that he can only have two tomorrow,

Patti went shopping and returned with souvenir tee shirts and tickets to the paddle wheel cruise boat that leaves the lake and cruises a little way down the river and back. These are for tomorrow night and there will be a band on board.

We had a lunch "date" with Chuck and Margaret at 11:15 to walk to town and get the fried chicken lunch special at the Colonial Restaurant, the same place we had breakfast a couple days ago. They have been here a long time and know all the ins and outs of Sanford. Captain Ron had his chicken with black eyed peas and collard greens, Patti had mashed potatoes and a salad. Being that early in the day, we brought home enough chicken for another meal.

We walked the ship's puppy and she went straight for the marina office and once inside, straight to the desk where they keep the bag of dog treats. She got one, of course and got fussed over.



Please let me in and give me some dog biscuits

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And the reward

It started to sprinkle so we cut our walk short and returned to HIGH COTTON where the entire crew fell asleep.

Once the temperature dropped a bit, we set out on another walk, this time along the city's waterfront walkway in the other direction from downtown. We came upon a pond (they call it a lake, but next to Lake Monroe, it is realistically a "pond"). The pooch decided to take a swim along with the ducks and other birds so she did. (Kiki writes: *"Yes, I love to swim in the water. It cools me off and feels good."*)



The hound goes for a swim in the pond

We walked a little further and turned around to head back to the marina and she headed for the water again.



The pond's other inhabitants

Back at the boat, Kiki got a complete shower with shampoo. We now have a very clean ship's puppy.

Patti headed for the showers and Captain Ron followed once she returned.

By this time it was too late for dinner so we had cheese, apple slices and crackers.

Part of the main street will be closed tomorrow for a "Juneteenth" event. We will walk over and see what it's all about.

Captain's Log, day twenty (June 14, 2024)

Captain Ron ate his remaining two donuts with his coffee. Patti had a protein shake. We walked up to where the Juneteenth event was supposed to take place, only to realize that we had misread the sign and it was actually tomorrow, not today.

As we usually do, we just followed the hound and she led us up Sanford Avenue past the grocery store and the bars and restaurants, which were mostly closed at this early hour. Eventually, she got tired and we turned around and headed back towards HIGH COTTON. She had to be carried part of the way.

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We relaxed on the boat, with a few dog walks thrown in until we walked to the Italian restaurant for a pizza. Unfortunately, two ladies had brought a bunch of unruly children with them for lunch and we ended up having to move to the other side of the restaurant for some peace and quiet.

Patti had bought tickets for the paddle wheel evening cruise so we walked to the office for the tickets and then boarded the boat. There was a band playing on the cruise so after a while, they started their first set. Captain Ron (the retired musician) thought that the guitar player and bass player “overplayed” (played more notes than they needed to) and that they were too loud, but Patti liked them and actually danced once she had a couple beers.



The band



Patti cuts a rug

The cruise took the same route we took on HIGH COTTON from the lake to the St. Johns River and back. It turned around before it got to the railroad bridge.

Once the ship returned, we got off, went to our boat and got the ship's puppy and took her for her evening walk. We talked with some of the band members as they were unloading their equipment from the ship.

Captain's Log, day twenty one (June 15, 2024)

There were no donuts left this morning so Patti fixed corned beef hash with a poached egg on top for Captain Ron and eggs and sausage for herself and the ship's puppy. Since we hadn't taken showers yesterday, we went to the shower facility and got ourselves presentable.

Our friends from Charleston, Patty and Bruce called and said they would drive over and visit with us today. They live in Mount Pleasant, SC, but keep a boat in Daytona Beach, FL and were there checking on it.

Patty and Bruce arrived and after spending some time on HIGH COTTON, Patty drove us to town for the farmer's market. The farmer's market was a bit disappointing, there was only one stand selling vegetables and they were in larger quantities than we could use on HIGH COTTON. The rest of the stands were selling miscellaneous stuff like soap, body oils and cheap jewelry. And it was hot! Brutally hot!

The German restaurant has a German deli with meat, sweets and other food items. We walked in to get out of the heat, but we didn't need any of those things today. They also sell packets of seasoning for German dishes and we have bought some of these in the past, but the ones in the store

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today had the instructions written in German so they wouldn't be much use to us. We didn't buy anything.

Patty drove us around Sanford for a few minutes just so we could be in the air conditioned vehicle. Then we drove to the waterfront restaurant adjacent to the marina.



Captain Ron, Patti, Patty and Bruce in Sanford, FL

After lunch, Patty and Bruce said their goodbyes and headed back to Daytona Beach. The rest of us retreated to the air conditioned comfort of HIGH COTTON for TV, Internet surfing and naps. Mostly naps.

The skies darkened and there was thunder, but just a sprinkle of rain. The K-9 is afraid of thunder and rain so she had to join Captain Ron in the V berth.

It was finally time for the Juneteenth event to start so we hooked up the pup and walked over. There was a pretty big crowd with lots of food vendors, other vendors and a stage with a live band playing.

We walked around for a while and the Sea Dog met a lot of people and got petted. The band seemed to be pretty good but we didn't recognize any of the songs they played. We weren't hungry or thirsty so we didn't buy anything.



The Juneteenth festival in Sanford, FL

Once we had seen it all, we headed back to HIGH COTTON to turn in for the night. We leave here Monday, but we haven't made plans yet for where we are going. It will be somewhere along the river though.

Captain's Log, day twenty two (June 16, 2024)

One thing we always try to do on our boat cruises is make them educational. That is, try to learn something each trip. So far, we have learned that it can be hot in Florida in June. Very hot!

Captain Ron woke up this morning to find the entire crew gone. He looked around and noticed that the towels and dirty clothes were gone also so he deduced that Patti and the ship's puppy must have gone to do the laundry. He relaxed and made himself a cup of coffee and then worked on a problem he has been having with YouTube on the amazon Fire stick connected to the TV. He seems to have solved it with a little help from the Internet. He just has to wonder why the answer to a YouTube problem is presented on a YouTube video.

Patti and the pup returned to wait for the laundry to finish. Patti went back and got the clean and dry

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clothes, brought them back and fixed breakfast again.

We have been looking at the weather forecasts, especially wind forecasts, and may have to stay here a couple extra days. We will decide in the morning. We have to cross a fairly good sized lake and have tentative plans to visit a city on another lake and lakes and strong winds are not a good combination.

There were more dog walks and some TV watching and naps during the day. It was hot outside! Eventually, the skies darkened and it poured down rain for a while. HIGH COTTON got a free boat wash, but not a very good one.

We called the German restaurant to see about a reservation, but they don't take reservations. We decided to wait for the period after lunch but before dinner so we got there at 3:30 PM or so. We got in line and were told that it would be a forty-five minute wait, but we could go next door for the same food in more of a "bar" atmosphere.

We went in, waited for a couple to finish and leave and sat down. Someone came by and collected the tip and picked up the dishes but nobody came by to wait on us. Patti asked one of the staff to send a server, but nobody came. Then a soccer game came on the TV and the sound was turned up. We decided to leave and go back to the restaurant side and wait for a table.

For some reason, a table was available right away and we were seated and were able to place our orders and receive our food promptly. We had a nice conversation with the people at the next table who live about a half hour away. They said they come to this restaurant often.

We brought our leftovers back to the boat and relaxed a bit. Then the K-9 asked to go for another walk. We hooked her up and got her off the boat

and she walked up the dock, through the gate, turned left, walked to the street and turned left again. She walked straight to the pond where she went swimming a couple of days ago. Once she got there, she walked right in and swam back and forth. (Kiki writes: *"Yes, I love to swim whenever I can. The water cools me off and it's fun to swim."*)



The hound swims again

This pond has a large flock of birds including ducks. A man pulled up in his car and got out and all the birds flocked to him. He started feeding them and we can only guess he does this on a regular basis. We are talking a hundred or more birds.



Duck feeding time

Eventually, of course, it was time to leave so we headed back to HIGH COTTON. Kiki got petted several times on the way to the pond and back. Even the seemingly crazy guy who rides a bicycle

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back and forth along the river walk, screaming at the top of his lungs all day long stopped to pet her and comment on how pretty of a dog she is.



Kiki making friends in Sanford, FL

Back at HIGH COTTON, Patti and the pooch headed for the showers. The pup is getting her shower in the “big girl’s” shower tonight, not on the back of the boat. Captain Ron was next and now it’s time for bed.

Captain’s Log, day twenty three (June 17, 2024)

Well, we may have to apply for Florida drivers licenses! We set the alarm for 7:00 AM this morning and got up with every intention of leaving today. Captain Ron topped off the potable water tanks and put the hose away. He also did his engine checks.

We checked a few different weather forecasting websites and discovered that we would be dealing with some pretty strong winds for the next three days. This would be especially uncomfortable when crossing Lake Monroe, Lake George and Crescent Lake, a side trip we had planned to make.

We called the marina when they opened and they said we could stay a while longer. As it stands now, we will leave Sanford Thursday morning.

Our friends down the dock, Chuck and Margaret had borrowed a friend’s car and offered to take us to breakfast at a restaurant they knew and to Food Lion for groceries, so we accepted. Breakfast was decent and we stocked up on what we needed for the next week at the grocery store.

Back aboard HIGH COTTON, Captain Ron and the ship’s puppy got out of the way while Patti put everything where it belonged.

The Sea Dog wanted to go for a walk so we headed for the waterfront. She met some new friends and got petted. We got to the boat ramp that faces the lake and she jumped off the wall and ran down to the water. Since this ramp faces the lake and the winds were up, there were waves so she just ran in and back out. She doesn’t like waves.



Kiki makes more new friends

As we started back to the boat, it started to sprinkle, but then it stopped.

We went out for several more walks around the waterfront, watching the wind kicking up waves on the lake. The Sea Dog took us to the pond again and went in for a swim.

Back at the boat, dinner was left over chicken, mixed with condensed cream of chicken soup and served over rice, along with a can of succotash.

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Captain Ron went to take a shower and was met afterwards by the rest of the crew strolling along the parking lot.

We will decide tomorrow what day we will be leaving here.

Captain's Log, day twenty four (June 18, 2024)

Today was another unplanned day in port so there is not a lot to report. Captain Ron slept in while Patti and the pooch went for a walk. Once they returned, Patti warmed up a leftover pancake and half a sausage patty for Captain Ron while she had a protein shake. Kiki had chicken and rice.

We decided to return to the grocery store for more pork cracklins and candy. Captain Ron noticed that along with the usual beef and chicken bouillon cubes, they also carried "goat" bouillon cubes (this is a Latin grocery store). We also got two bananas and ate them on a bench before we returned to the boat.

Back aboard HIGH COTTON, there were dog walks, TV watching, web searching and naps. We also did some Internet research looking for a place in town to eat dinner that was open and suited our tastes.

Eventually, we settled on a place that was once a railroad station, but is now home to several food counters and has dining tables. It's pretty much like a food court in a mall. The advantage is, each person goes to the counter they choose and gets the food they choose. In our case, Patti got a brisket platter from the BBQ counter and Captain Ron got a catfish basket from the seafood counter. The ship's puppy, of course, did not get to go. She had chicken and rice aboard the boat.

We did stop by the market on the way to the restaurant for more pork cracklins, candy and a

small box of goat bouillon cubes. Captain Ron will make some goat noodle soup when he gets home.

It started to drizzle as we left the restaurant so we were a bit wet by the time we got back to the boat. We took turns taking showers and went to bed, planning on an early departure tomorrow.

Captain's Log, day twenty five (June 19, 2024)

The alarm sounded at oh-dark-thirty. In days gone by, one had to have an alarm clock. Now, of course, it is the cell phone, but it works just the same.

We looked at the various weather forecasts and debated whether we should leave today or wait two more days. We decided to leave today.

The engine checks had already been done a couple days ago and the water tanks were topped off yesterday evening so it was a matter of walking the puppy, dropping the marina keys off on our friend's boat (so they could return them for us), unplugging the power cord and untying the lines. The K-9 was anxious to go for a boat ride, waiting at the bottom of the ladder and wagging her tail in anticipation.

We pulled out of our slip at 6:20AM with enough light to see where we were going. We turned on the running lights to make our boat more visible to any other boats that might need to see us.

Lake Monroe was calm and our crossing was just a matter of following the track we made coning into Sanford. We got to the railroad bridge and found it down (as we expected). We called the bridge tender and were told that a train was coming and the bridge would open after the train passed.

A few minutes later, the same, silly three car (including the engine) train went by, this time

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running backwards with the engine in the rear. Captain Ron thinks a bus or two might have been more efficient.



The bridge is closed again for the "train"

The doom and gloom in the weather forecast didn't materialize. Winds were light and although it did start to drizzle several times, forcing us to the lower helm, each period of rain was just a few minutes long. A couple of times, the rain stopped before Patti could finish covering things on the flybridge. The ship's puppy thought going up and down the ladder all morning was fun.

We saw a lot of alligators for the first few hours, swimming across the river. We probably saw more than a dozen. As it got later and we got closer to civilization, we didn't see any more.



An alligator swimming across the St. Johns River

We did begin passing boats, more and more as it got later in the day. We passed through a few clusters of waterfront homes with docks and then under the bridge at Astor, FL. Astor has a couple of low key marinas and waterfront restaurants. There are also waterfront homes built only two or three feet above the normal river level. There are signs declaring "no-wake when flooded".



Yard art on the St. Johns River

We had planned a six hour cruise to the last possible anchorage before Lake George. Winds were predicted to be near seventeen miles per hour this afternoon on Lake George so crossing it today would have been possible, but unwise. We will cross it tomorrow morning early before the winds get too strong.



Captain Ron at the helm

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Crabbing on the St. Johns River

One of the “repaired” windlass switches self-activated yesterday so Captain Ron had to cut the wire to the switch. Anchoring today was done by controlling the windlass with the switch at the upper helm. This is not as convenient or accurate as using the deck mounted switches because Captain Ron has to ask Patti to operate the switch.

Captain Ron got on the phone and the Internet and ordered replacement switches from West Marine to be delivered to the store in Jacksonville, FL where we expect to be in a week or so. Hopefully, they will arrive in time.

In the meantime, Captain Ron came up with the idea to connect the switch wires to two washers installed with the original switch screws. All he has to do to operate the windlass is touch an additional washer to these two washers. That completes the circuit and operates the windlass.

Our meal today was leftovers from various restaurants. Captain Ron had salmon and spiced shrimp while Patti had brisket. The hound had chicken and rice. Perhaps we should explain here that Kiki is on four different medications and the easiest way to give them to her is in her food. She loves chicken and rice (with some chicken broth) so that’s what she gets. She also gets prescription dog food.

Today was supposed to be cooler than the last few days and this morning it was pretty comfortable. At 6:00 PM this evening, the thermometer read ninety two degrees. That is cooler than it has been, but it’s still a bit warm. At least there is a good breeze.

Patti saw some manatees behind the boat, but Captain Ron missed them.

Two guys were fishing in a small boat, along the shore and they didn’t let our anchored boat bother them, they went on between HIGH COTTON and the shore line. Throughout the afternoon several boats went up and down the creek. They passed slowly and without much of a wake. There is a small run down marina just up the creek from where we are anchored. Supposedly, we might have been able to tie up there with power for \$20, but we didn’t bother to call.



Fishing on the St. Johns River

It has begun to cool down and we will turn in soon for another early start tomorrow.

Captain’s Log, day twenty six (June 20, 2024)

Another “oh-dark-thirty” morning! Lake George has a reputation for being rough with significant

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winds and significant winds were predicted for today.

We got up, got dressed and did our engine checks. Since we were anchored in the middle of a creek, there was no dog walk.



A turtle on a log beside the boat



Sunrise at our anchorage

We got everything prepared and the anchor up by 6:20 AM and headed for the Lake, about ten minutes away. It was a bit choppy already. Nothing we couldn't handle, but a bit annoying. It took an hour and a half to cross the lake and get into calmer water. It rained for a minute or two while we were on the lake and then the sun came out. There was a nice rainbow off our port bow.



A nice rainbow on Lake George

Patti went down to the galley for our morning food and noticed that the battery monitor (for the boat's house batteries) was showing an ever lowering remaining capacity. That means that the boat's alternator was not recharging them. Not good!

Without going into great technical details, the charger that interfaces between the boat's alternator and the lithium house battery bank was not functioning correctly. We needed a new plan.

We backed into a slip at the Welaka Town Dock. Patti took the puppy for a walk while Captain Ron got out the owner's manuals for the charging equipment. According to the troubleshooting guide for the DC to DC charger, the power light should have been blinking an error code. It wasn't blinking, it was lit.

Among the possible faults was "Self-diagnosis of faults." (Whatever that is supposed to mean.) In the notes, it said that the charger would be "locked" and power must be removed and restored to correct this condition.

With nothing better to try, Captain Ron disconnected the power connections for about thirty seconds and then reconnected them. The battery monitor still showed a discharge so we

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loaded the crew and got back underway with a revised plan.

Instead of spending tonight on a free dock without power and tomorrow on a free dock in Crescent City without power, we decided to head for Palatka and try to get a slip at the marina with electrical power and come up with a solution to charge our house batteries.

We called the marina and left a message. An hour or so later, we called again and left another message. We decided that if we couldn't contact the marina (this marina has no actual employees on site, they just take bookings and payment over the phone from somewhere else), we would just take an empty space and deal with it later.

After another hour had passed, we called the marina again and this time the owner answered and said we could stay. So now we had a plan.

Captain Ron called his brother Dick and daughter Robyn to let them know where we would be in case they could come by and visit.

Docking didn't go quite as planned (there is no help here), but we got tied up and connected to power. Captain Ron looked at the battery monitor and the house batteries were now up from 60% to 100%. Apparently, disconnecting the power from the charger reset it and caused it to work again. This is something Captain Ron will have to look into once we get back home.

The marina does not sell ice so we walked to the nearby bait store and bought two bags. The puppy went with us, of course.

Captain Ron's brother Dick and his wife Teresa decided to drive from their home in Palm Coast to Palatka to visit and go to dinner so Captain Ron and Patti took turns showering to take the worry out of being close (we had no showers yesterday).

Dick and Teresa showed up and we had a nice visit and went to a restaurant for dinner. After dinner, Patti did a load of laundry and the Sea Dog got a walk to the town park.



Dick, Teresa, Captain Ron and Patti at the nearby restaurant

We plan on staying in Palatka another day so Robyn can come for another visit.

Captain's Log, day twenty seven (June 21, 2024)

Captain Ron awoke to an empty boat this morning. It seems the Sea Dog wanted to walk so Patti gathered up the rest of the laundry and the two of them went to the laundry room and then for a stroll around town.

Once they returned, Patti suggested breakfast at Angels Diner so the K-9 was left to guard the boat while the humans walked to the diner. It was drizzling so they wore their raincoats.

Breakfast was good although Patti surprised Captain Ron by not ordering extra bacon with her breakfast. She did ask Captain Ron to order an extra pancake so she could have one with her meal.

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Patti's breakfast at Angel's Diner, Palatka, FL

It was drizzling when we left the diner so we put on our raincoats. Halfway back to the boat the rain stopped and we had to remove them because of the heat.

The ship's puppy was happy to see the humans when they returned to the boat and even happier when she learned that they had brought her back some scrambled eggs.

After the hound ate her eggs the entire crew went for a walk. This time, instead of heading for the waterfront, we walked the other direction through part of the historic district. There are many historic homes in Palatka, but unfortunately, not all have been kept in pristine condition. Hopefully, that can be corrected.

Robyn called and said she would come to visit us at about 1:30 PM and we could go to lunch. Captain Ron did some research on fuel and marina accommodations for the next few days. Unfortunately, the weather is messing with our plans again so another of our side trips has been scrapped. We will stop for fuel on the way back to Jacksonville tomorrow. We will be staying at a different marina in Jacksonville this time. It's more expensive, but nicer, with a large pool and a hot tub. It is a short walk to the shopping center and

West Maine where if we are lucky, our windlass switches will have been delivered.

The refrigerator/freezer on HIGH COTTON was in need of defrosting so with the aid of Captain Ron's handy dandy heat gun, that was taken care of.

Robyn showed up at about 1:30 PM. It's about an hour and a half drive from her horse farm in Dunnellon, FL. Once again assigning boat guard duties to the K-9, the humans rode with her across the bridge to East Palatka where we had a nice and tasty lunch at Corky Bell's Seafood at Gator Landing. It's a popular restaurant in the area and one we have been to by boat on previous trips. They have a dock where boaters can tie their boats up and come ashore to dine. (Kiki writes: *"Yea, they keep telling me they need me to guard the boat but nobody ever tries to do anything to it and it has a really good lock. I think they just don't want to take me to restaurants."*)



Patti, Captain Ron and Robyn

Robyn had to get back home to take care of her horses so she dropped us off at the marina and headed home. It was great to see her again.

Once we got back from lunch and got the leftovers put away, we decided to explore the historic downtown business district and check out the shops. The hound wanted to go with us so off we went. Unfortunately, even though Palatka has

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gone to great efforts to make the area nice with renovated streets, sidewalks and buildings, there are very few shops or other businesses occupying the buildings. There are some real estate and law offices, but we found only two open shops and one would not allow the ship's puppy inside. We bought nothing and headed back towards the marina. The Sea Dog ran out of steam on the way back and had to be carried for a couple blocks. It was very hot out.



Wall art in Palatka, FL

Once we got back to the marina, we took the pup to the bathhouse where she likes to lie in the wet shower stall. Then, it was back to HIGH COTTON where everyone cooled off and rested.

The ship's puppy's diet consists of mostly chicken and rice or dog food and rice (she loves rice) and the rice was all gone so Patti cooked up a new batch while Captain Ron took his shower. Then Patti took hers.

The hound will get her usual before bedtime walk and then we will all turn in in anticipation of our rather long cruise down the river to Jacksonville tomorrow which will include a side trip to replenish our diesel supply.

Captain's Log, day twenty eight (June 22, 2024)

OK, this waking up before sunrise to get an early start has got to go! It is beginning to remind Captain Ron of his teenage years when he got up before dawn and rode his bicycle delivering the morning newspaper before school.

But, we did it again. Captain Ron had gotten a bit lax in his fuel planning and making it all the way to Jacksonville on the diesel fuel remaining in HIGH COTTON's tanks seemed questionable.

There was a marina just about a half hour north of Palatka that sold diesel fuel (the same one that previously offered us a transient slip with no electric power), but the price was \$5.40 per gallon. There was a marina about five hours north where the price was \$4.00 per gallon.

We decided to head for the \$4.00 marina even though it was a few miles out of the way and it would be pushing our fuel range a bit beyond what Captain Ron was comfortable with.

We keep a one gallon jug of diesel fuel on the boat in case we have to change fuel filters. This is best done by filling the filters with fuel before reinstalling them so that's the reason for the jug of fuel. Captain Ron dumped the extra gallon of fuel into the tank and we headed north at a slightly reduced, more fuel efficient cruising speed. Our goal was to stop for fuel but still get to our destination marina before the office closed at 3:00 PM. We would still have been able to stay, but we wouldn't have had help docking or personal information about the marina.

About four hours into our voyage, we came upon several dolphins doing "dolphin stuff". The Sea Dog saw them also and was on high alert, watching and talking to them. (Kiki writes: *"I love to watch the big fishies jumping out of the water and*

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playing. That is one of my favorite parts of these boat rides.”)



The ship's puppy on dolphin alert

We called Mandarin Marina (our fuel stop) again on the telephone to make sure they actually had diesel fuel. Several years ago we stopped there for fuel when heading south and ended up spending the entire day and night there because their fuel pump was not working and took until late afternoon for them to get it fixed.

They assure us that they were able to actually pump fuel so we made the turn and cruised the extra few miles to the marina. Captain Ron swung a 180 degree U turn and backed HIGH COTTON into the fuel slip.



Yep, just back into that fuel dock

We took on a bit over seventy five gallons of diesel fuel. With a total capacity of ninety gallons, that was cutting it a bit close in Captain Ron's opinion.

Patti took the hound to shore while Captain Ron was pumping fuel and she made lots of new friends. We got back on HIGH COTTON, started the engine and headed back out to the St. Johns River.



Downtown Jacksonville in sight again

It took about two hours more to get from Mandarin Marina to Port 32 Marina where we have a reservation for three days. This is a lovely, first class marina with floating docks, a nice swimming pool, a hot tub, nice heads and showers and beautifully landscaped grounds. It is also just a short walk to the shopping center with a Publix grocery store, West Marine and restaurants. We made it about a half hour before the office closed so we had help docking, the ship's puppy got treats and the humans got donuts.

Captain Ron got the water hose connected and washed off the worst of the bugs we brought with us from Sanford and Palatka. Then he changed into his swimsuit and headed for the pool and hot tub. Patti covered the flybridge and then cleaned the coolers, restocked them with free ice and organized our medicines for the next few days.

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We asked for a slip near the pool



Captain Ron had to check out the pool

Captain Ron called the West Marine store to see if the two windlass switches he ordered had arrived. Well, one arrived but not the other. This is a bit puzzling because they are identical switches. Hopefully, the other switch will arrive on Monday.

We walked to the shopping center and had dinner at the Metro Diner. As we finished and were leaving, it began to thunder and rain. Not heavy rain, but rain. We walked as fast as we could back to the boat.

A few minutes after we got back aboard HIGH COTTON, the thunder and lightning began and it rained hard. We would have gotten drenched.

Once the rain stopped we saw a lovely rainbow over the river. We took the pooch for her evening walk and she got to ride the elevator to the second floor deck of the marina clubhouse and back down again. She likes riding in elevators.



A rainbow at Port 32 Marina

We have three days booked here and although it's a bit expensive, we might chose to stay longer. We shall see.

Now, it's time for bed after a very long day.

Captain's Log, day twenty nine (June 23, 2024)

Captain Ron woke up at about 8:30 AM this morning, but apparently the Sea Dog woke Patti up at 5:30 AM wanting to go "do her business".

Captain Ron made his usual cup of coffee and ate his leftover raisin toast from the other day. Patti had a protein shake. Then she decided to vacuum the inside of the boat so Captain Ron stayed out of her way. He cleaned some "dock rash" (from rubber dock edging) off the port side of the boat with acetone, then rinsed it clean.

Later we decided to go to the pool where we swam and floated around on "pool noodles" talking to some of the boaters who live on their boat here at

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the marina. Captain Ron spent some time in the hot tub working on his aching bones and joints.

Eventually, we began to wrinkle from being in the water so we returned to HIGH COTTON to rest.

We decided to walk to the shopping center for Mexican food and then to the CVS drug store for a few things we needed. We heard thunder in the distance but nothing ever materialized. Walking through the neighborhood was interesting with varying house styles, sizes and level of upkeep. No HOA here!

Back at the marina, Patti took the pup for a walk. They ended up on a bench near where some boaters were cooking dinner on one of the marina's grills and of course, the hound begged for and got some food. Captain Ron changed into his swim trunks and spent some more time in the hot tub.

After the hot tub, Captain Ron took his shower, followed by Patti. Needless to say, the showers here are very nice, private and comfortable.

Time for bed.

Captain's Log, day thirty (June 24, 2024)

Once again, it appears that the four legged crew member is setting the schedule for the entire crew. Daylight found the Sea Dog sitting at the edge of the bed waiting for a human to take her for a walk. As usual, that task fell to Patti while Captain Ron rolled over and went back to sleep. Apparently Patti and the pup went back to sleep once they returned from their morning walk and everyone got up at about 8:00 AM.

Breakfast for Captain Ron was two cupcakes and coffee. Patti had a protein shake and the ship's puppy had chicken and rice.

After "breakfast", we took the pooch for a walk through the neighborhood. We were heading for the park, but never made it. There were several other people walking their dogs and of course we had to stop and talk and the dogs had to sniff each other's back end.

Eventually, we all returned to the marina. The K-9 decided it would be fun to walk the entire length of the dock instead of getting on HIGH COTTON. We think she was looking for a nicer boat. (Kiki writes: *"No, I am happy with HIGH COTTON, I just wanted to see where the dock went and sniff a few things."*)

We left the K-9 on the boat and headed to the shopping center where Patti got a mani-pedi and Captain Ron got a pedicure. Captain Ron then walked around the corner and got a "senior haircut" from a very large woman who talked constantly the entire time. It was a decent haircut though and a large pile of grey hair was left on the salon floor.



Patti gets her mani-pedi

Captain Ron returned to the boat to keep the hound company while Patti finished with her mani-pedi and then stopped in Publix for green beans for the four legged one and a box of donuts for the humans. Some donuts were consumed

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immediately while the rest were saved for tomorrow.

Captain Ron called West Marine to inquire about his other windlass switch that he ordered. The person who answered the phone looked it up and reported that it was “out for delivery”. Hopefully, that means today.

We changed into our swimsuits and walked the few steps to the pool. There were a few boaters in the pool so mostly we just floated around and talked about boats, destinations and boat repairs.

Eventually, we returned to the boat and got the Sea Dog off for a walk. We decided to go to KFC for fried chicken so, leaving the hound to guard the boat (or take a nap, which is what we suspect she does), we walked back to the shopping center and got our fried chicken. We ordered a little extra for the ship’s puppy.

Captain Ron called West Marine and the rest of his order had arrived so we walked the one block or so from the KFC and picked it up along with a tube of sealant and some electrical connectors to aid in installation. Of course these switches have a different screw pattern than the two previous switches so there will be an additional set of screw holes in the deck. Captain Ron has the tools he needs.



It isn't a boat cruise without a trip to West Marine

Biscuits came with our meal, but rather than eating them this evening, we stopped at Publix for a package of frozen chipped beef and gravy. We will have this over the biscuits tomorrow for breakfast.

We walked back to the marina with the thought of walking the puppy, but as we were stepping onto the boat it began to rain. Locals we have talked to have said they need the rain so they are getting it.

It rained and thundered hard enough to upset the ship’s puppy so once it stopped, she had to leave the boat and go for a walk.

We skipped our showers and went to bed.

Captain’s Log, day thirty one (June 25, 2024)

Well, we are moving to Jacksonville! No, not really, but we went to the office yesterday to see about staying a couple more days and it turns out the weekly rate is only about \$75 more than what we have already paid for three days. Captain Ron couldn’t get his credit card out fast enough! So, we are staying a whole week. As we already stated, this is a beautiful “resort” style marina and close to almost everything we might need.

The ship’s puppy has been “scooting” on her butt some lately so Patti thought it would be a good idea to take her to a veterinarian and have her anal glands emptied. This morning, she was acting like she had a stomach ache and her belly was gurgling so Patti made an appointment with a vet that was within walking distance for the humans, but questionable for the K-9. Patti was talking to our boat neighbors and they offered us the use of their car so Kiki got to “go for a ride in the car”. Of course she wasn’t so happy once she figured out where we were going.

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The doctor examined her and said everything seemed fine, but to keep an eye on her and call back if she had any problems.

Once we got back to the boat she drank a lot of water and threw up so Patti called the vet and made another appointment so they could do further tests.

Captain Ron began installing his new windlass foot switches. They are a different brand so of course they needed new mounting holes. It was very hot out while he was doing this and he needed a couple breaks to cool off. Once he finished, he changed to his swimsuit and cooled off in the pool.

Back on the boat, it started raining so he had to hurry back out and gather up his tools and put them away before they got wet.

We still had the boat neighbor's car so we took Kiki back to the veterinarian for further tests. It turns out she has pancreatitis, something she has had before. She got fluids and medications and we left with more medications to give her. We have a few more days here to make sure she is OK and if not, we will extend our stay.

Dinner tonight was leftovers from the last few days.

We took our showers and walked the pup. There was thunder in the distance so we didn't walk far. Our boat neighbor brought his car key back in case we needed to take Kiki to the emergency vet. People here are very nice.

Captain's Log, day thirty two (June 26, 2024)

Today was another day in port so nothing special happened. Kiki slept well last night and seems to be doing well. She is eating her food and getting her medicine. She hasn't been drinking water, but

she will drink watered down chicken broth and drank some watermelon juice.

For breakfast this morning we had the frozen chipped beef and gravy we bought at Publix over biscuits. Heated in the microwave, it was decent and a lot simpler than making it from scratch, especially since we don't have milk on the boat.

When Captain Ron picked up his new windlass switches at West Marine the other day, he bought more electrical connectors and a tube of sealant. When he got ready to install them, he realized that he already had two tubes of sealant on the boat so he didn't use the tube he bought.

After breakfast, we walked to West Marine to return the tube of sealant and to Publix for chicken breasts for the ship's puppy. We picked up a container of fresh fruit for our lunch as well.

We returned to HIGH COTTON and ate our fruit. The pup had chicken and rice with her medicine mixed in.

After lunch, we took the Sea Dog for a walk. She led us to the marina office where she hoped to get petted and get a treat. She got both. She likes to lie on the cool floor in the marina office.

Back on board the boat, the hound got more chicken and rice while the humans headed for the pool. As usual, we did not do much swimming, we mostly talked to a couple who live on their boat here at the marina. They retired and moved here from Ohio.

Captain Ron spent some time in the hot tub, treating his aching bones and then we returned to HIGH COTTON to rest and research dinner options. It wasn't long before the thunder and lightning started and the rains came. Kiki was not happy about this so she went to the V berth with Captain Ron to hide from the noise.

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Once the storm passed, Patti took the hound for a walk. Captain Ron had decided that we should go to the Jamaican restaurant, but by the time Patti and the pup returned, it was decided that it was too late in the day to eat spicy food.

We started out walking towards a restaurant near the other marina (the one we stayed at on the trip south) to get a burger, but we decided that we might just as well get a burger at Metro Diner. Once we got to Metro Diner, we decided that a dinner was about the same price as a burger and we would have leftovers so Patti got a steak tips bowl and Captain Ron got the roast turkey platter. And yes, we each have enough for another meal.

Back at the marina, there was another thunderstorm lasting a half hour or so. Once that was finished, Captain Ron entertained the pooch while Patti went for her evening shower. When Patti returned, she took the pup for her evening walk and Captain Ron headed for the showers. As we mentioned, Kiki seems to be doing well and improving. She took Patti for a long walk.

Captain's Log, day thirty three (June 27, 2024)

As has been her custom lately, the ship's puppy was ready for a walk at first light this morning. Patti took her for her walk, then once they returned, Patti fixed her "breakfast" and then they both climbed back into bed.

We all rolled out of the sack a couple hours later and began our day. Patti called the veterinarian and made an appointment to have the Ship's Puppy certified to travel Saturday when our week is up. Actually, Captain Ron could be persuaded to stay another week.

Kiki hasn't wanted to drink water since she got sick, but she will drink the water her chicken is cooked

in (chicken broth) so that is what we have been giving her along with rice and her medications.

We mostly just lounged around the boat and marina until about 3:00 PM. There were several dog walks and visits to the office for treats and petting.

We walked to the Jamaican restaurant, a bit over a mile away. It turned out to be as much of a take-out place as a restaurant, but there were tables and a server. The place was very busy, at least for take-out. Captain Ron had a jerk chicken platter with rice and peas, cabbage and plantains. He said it was very good. Patti had two beef patties. She said they were "OK". Captain Ron has leftovers, Patti does not.

We started our walk back to the marina with a stop at CVS along the way for some necessities. Leaving CVS, it began to rain so we got wet. Not drenched, but wet.

We decided to hit the swimming pool so we changed into our suits and walked the few yards to the pool where we swam and talked with another of the resident boaters. Captain Ron hit the hot tub while Patti took a shower.

A few minutes after we returned to HIGH COTTON, we heard a knock on the window and it was the lady we had met at the pool a day or two ago. She handed us her boat card (and we handed her ours) and we talked for a bit. As we posted before, it's a pretty friendly bunch around here.

It's now nearly dark and time for bed. Kiki has a doctor's appointment at 9:00 AM tomorrow.

Captain's Log, day thirty four (June 28, 2024)

Yep, the puppy woke up first and Patti took her for a walk. She has an appointment at the

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veterinarian at 9:00 AM so we got up and had a healthy breakfast of apple snack pies and cookies!

Once again, our kind boat neighbors loaned us their car so we drove to the vet's office. Kiki was examined and cleared to travel. We were given some extra medicine "just in case".

We stopped at Publix on the way back to the marina and Patti went in for some last minute necessities including a bowl of fresh fruit for our lunch. Captain Ron and the Sea Dog stayed in the car and entertained each other.

We got back to HIGH COTTON and fed the hound. Then the humans changed into their swimsuits and went to the pool for a swim. As usual, we spent most of the time talking to other boaters, not actually swimming.

Back onboard the boat, we ate our fresh fruit. It started raining so we were pretty much stuck onboard, watching TV and surfing the Internet.

After the rain stopped, we walked the pup and then left her to guard the boat while we walked back to the Metro Diner for dinner.

Back at the marina, we walked the hound, then took turns showering. Patti wanted to do a load of laundry, but other boaters were using the machines so it will be rather late once she gets finished.

We leave here tomorrow, headed north.

Captain's Log, day thirty five (June 29, 2024)

Rollin', rollin', rollin' on the river. Yep, we are back on the river this morning. As hard as it was to leave Port32 Marina and its resort quality amenities, we do have a home in South Carolina and things to do there.

Everyone woke up at about 6:30 AM this morning so we got our morning chores done and headed out. The ship's puppy went for a walk and did what dogs are supposed to do. Patti filled the coolers with free ice from the marina (an unusual perk) and uncovered the flybridge while Captain Ron topped off the potable water tanks and checked the engine. We headed out of the marina at about 7:30 AM.

We hailed the drawbridge operator on the VHF radio and he opened the bridge to let us through. We headed east into the morning sun until it was time to turn north on the St. Johns River channel.



The Ortega River Drawbridge opens for us again

Today, the railroad bridge in Jacksonville was open so we zipped on through. Actually, that part of the St. Johns River is a "minimum wake zone" so "zipped" might not be the appropriate word. We did get through without delay though.

The dolphins were out in force this morning and the Sea Dog got to watch them. In fact, she sat on the dash looking over the windscreen for much of the morning. (Kiki writes: *"Yes, I love watching the big fishies swimming and jumping out of the water. That is my favorite part of boating."*)

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The Jacksonville skyline and the open railroad bridge

This morning we had the outgoing current in our favor and this added two to two and a half knots to our cruising speed. We passed several cargo terminals and the cruise ship terminal where people who don't own their own boats can board a ship and go for a cruise.



Art work on a silo at one of the ports



A Carnival cruise ship loading passengers for a cruise



A container ship being loaded at one of the ports

Almost before we knew it, we reached the point where the Intracoastal Waterway crosses the St. Johns River. Actually, it was nearly three hours. We made the turn and headed north.

Our original plan was to stop and spend the rest of the day and the night at the free city dock just north of the junction, but it was early and a great day for cruising so we changed our plans, reserved a slip and continued on towards St. Marys, GA.



Cruisers at the Sisters Creek free dock

Being a Saturday, the small boat traffic picked up as it got later in the day. As we passed the paper mill in Fernandina Beach, we were downwind and got a whiff of what the locals call the "smell of money". The paper mills (there are two) provide employment for the townspeople, but the smell is not great.

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Small boat traffic as we approach Fernandina Beach

It was bright and sunny as we crossed the state line from Florida into Georgia, but we could see dark clouds in the direction of our destination, St. Marys, GA. Sure enough, as we approached the marina, it began to rain. We called the dockmaster on the radio and he rode his golf cart from the marina office to the dock and walked out in his raincoat. The crew of HIGH COTTON, for some reason, neglected to put on raincoats. In the end, we only got moderately wet, not soaked.



HIGH COTTON at the St. Marys Intracoastal Gateway Marina

The marina here is best described as a “work in progress”. The docks are brand new and the highest quality concrete floating docks, manufactured by one of the best known dock manufacturers.

The office and amenities, on the other hand, are in a converted house a little over a block away from the docks. Judging by the plumbing and electrical fixtures, this house was built in nineteen sixty or earlier. The showers are what would have been installed during that time period, a bathtub/shower combination. Everything was clean though, and air conditioned. The dockmaster talked about a proposed hotel in the empty lot between the docks and the house. Hopefully, that would include modern facilities for the marina.

Once we had a tour of the facilities, we set out to explore the town. The hound found a large puddle, a few inches deep and decided to wade in and cool herself off. A lady sitting on a bench nearby though that was hilarious.



The ships puppy finds a deep puddle

Once she got herself good and wet, she found a place on the sidewalk where some kids had been drawing in colored chalk and rolled in it. This resulted in a wet, orange dog.

With our wet and orange dog, we explored a couple of the local antique and craft shops. The Sea Dog was feeling her oats, exploring every nook and cranny and begging for treats and petting.

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The wet dog and the orange chalk



Kiki finds someone to give her dog biscuits

We walked around the town a little more and then headed back to the boat. Kiki got a shower on the back of the boat, leaving her her normal color, but still wet.

The humans gathered up their shower bags. The pup went along for the exercise. Patti showered in what must have been the master suite and Captain Ron took the other bathroom. Kiki stayed in the room with her mawmaw.

Although the restaurants here look tempting, we had two days' worth of leftovers so we had dinner on HIGH COTTON. Turkey with all the fixings for Captain Ron and steak tips and rice for Patti. The pup had chicken and rice and dog food. She

begged a bit of turkey and green beans from Captain Ron.

While walking to and from the showers, we heard a live band playing at one of the bars. We considered going back to town after dinner to have a couple drinks and listen some more, but decided not to. When it was time for the K-9's evening walk, she walked us to town (two blocks) so we saw and heard that band and heard another playing at a different bar (the bands play outdoors). The one we saw seemed pretty decent, but we were all too tired to stick around so we walked back to the boat. Kiki had her evening meal and medicine and it's time for bed.

Looking at the weather forecast, we may just stay here another day. We will decide in the morning when we get up and look out the window.

Captain's Log, day thirty six (June 30, 2024)

Well, we didn't leave today, we decided to stick around and explore the town some more.

We woke up and rolled out of bed at about 8:00 AM. We went through our usual routine. The Sea Dog wanted to go for a walk so we set out along the waterfront to the other end. St. Marys has a really beautiful waterfront with a pavilion (no dogs allowed), a nice boat ramp and a couple beautiful parks with a playground, benches, swings and public restrooms. The grass is neatly mowed and everything is landscaped with bushes, trees and flowers. Kiki went down the sliding board in the playground. She also got petted by several people. We met some people and the hound met some other dogs. This is a really nice town.

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The waterfront park in St. Marys, GA



The crew of HIGH COTTON in St. Marys, GA

Once we returned, we did some research on weather forecasts and made plans for the next few days. We contacted the marinas and made reservations.

Two other boats came into the marina today, both of them larger than HIGH COTTON. There is also a large sailboat in the marina but the owners are out of town so we haven't met them. One of the boats that came in today is a Louisiana shrimp boat that is supposedly doing the Great Loop. Watching them dock, they don't seem very experienced.

The ship's puppy went on several more walks with her mawmaw while Captain Ron guarded the boat (napped).

The humans walked to one of the local restaurants for fried oysters for Captain Ron and fried shrimp for Patti. We stopped in one of the shops on the way back and bought a few things.

All three of us walked again to the house for showers. Well, the humans took showers, the K-9 sniffed around and waited.

Tomorrow we will head for Jekyll Island for one night. We have to cross St. Andrews Sound which can be unpleasant in high winds. Hopefully, we will get across before the winds increase.

For now, it's time to hit the sack.



Sunset, St. Marys, GA

Captain's Log, day thirty seven (July 1, 2024)

Somehow, the Birthday Bunny managed to sneak onto a locked HIGH COTTON and leave birthday cards for First Mate Patti! She is celebrating her thirty ninth birthday again this year.

Perhaps in anticipation of receiving birthday cards, Patti had her alarm set for 5:00 AM this morning so it was another early start. The hound was walked, the engine checked, coffee made and the flybridge uncovered. Then the shorepower cord was disconnected, the docklines released and we were on our way by 6:20 AM. The sportfish boat we

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shared a dock with yesterday left after us, but passed us before we got to the ICW. They were taking the ocean and planned to be in Charleston this evening. It will take us several more days to get there at our cruising speed on the ICW.



A dredge boat on the ICW

The ship's puppy was on the lookout for big fishies today, but we saw none. We did see a few wild horses on Cumberland Island as we passed by, but at a distance, we were not up close.



A feral horse on Cumberland Island

Shortly after we made the turn onto the ICW, we looked behind us and saw another trawler. Since it, like HIGH COTTON, was equipped with an AIS transceiver, we could see that it was travelling about a half knot faster than we were. It took about an hour before it caught up with us and the

captain called us on the radio to arrange a pass. For the next hour it slowly pulled away from us.

As we were approaching St. Andrews sound, it turned to port and began heading up a side creek. Patti was at the helm of HIGH COTTON and wondered if they had made a wrong turn. She thought about calling them, but didn't.

Once we had passed the creek, we looked back and saw them turn around and head back out of the creek to the ICW. They fell in a quarter mile or so behind us. We figured they would be too embarrassed to call us and ask for another pass, but we made it to our destination, Jekyll Harbor Marina before that happened. They went past as we were tying up to the dock.

We had the option of topping off our fuel tanks here and being sure we had enough fuel to get to Thunderbolt, GA or waiting and hoping we had enough fuel to get to Thunderbolt, GA. Captain Ron added up the approximate number of hours we had run the engine since we got fuel south of Jacksonville on the St. Johns River and figured we had burned about twenty five gallons of fuel so we decided to top off the tanks here. HIGH COTTON took exactly twenty five gallons of fuel.

One reason to get fuel here was the hope that they would let us simply walk the boat back along the dock for the night's dockage. That is exactly what happened, but when we went to the office for our fuel receipt, the dockhands called and said we would have to move. So, we walked back to the boat, started it up and went into the interior of the marina to a slip.

By this time, Captain Ron was hot and sweaty so he changed into his swim trunks and headed for the pool for a cooling dip. Patti stayed behind to keep the hound company.

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This marina loans out golf carts to transients so we got the golf cart and headed for the shops in the historic district. This time we had a gasoline powered golf cart, not the usual electric powered one. Every time it came to a stop, the engine stopped and then it started again when the accelerator pedal was pushed. This created a hesitation and it was a bit tricky to drive.

Normally, we head first to the Dairy Queen for ice cream, but with the puppy's recent sickness, we decided that that would not be a good idea.



Patti and the pooch in the golf cart

We rode to the shops where Patti did her best to help the local economy. We went into one shop and the guy said “no dogs allowed” so we walked back out. He will have to find customers who don’t have dogs with them.



Patti doing her best to help the local economy



The Sea Dog finds some people to pet her

We rode around a bit more, but the golf cart is only available for an hour and a half so we headed back to the marina, skipping the other shopping area and the beaches.

The marina has an on-site restaurant so we walked over and had our evening meal, a hamburger and fries for Patti and a fish sandwich and fries for Captain Ron. And beer for both.

We returned to the boat, got the ship's puppy and went for a walk. After that, Patti went for her shower. Captain Ron topped off the potable water tanks and then went for his shower.

Tomorrow, we have no particular destination in mind. We will either anchor somewhere, or if we feel like going that far, take a slip at Kilkenny Marina. For now, it's been a long day and it's time for bed.

Captain's Log, day thirty eight (July 2, 2024)

We didn't really have to get up early this morning, but somehow we did. Not extra early, but we got our pre-departure chores done and headed out at about 7:20 AM. Actually, “headed out” wasn't as simple as it should have been.

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We mentioned that we were originally docked on the face dock, but were told to move to an inside slip. The inside slip was actually against the dock that leads up to the office and restaurant. Captain Ron woke up in the middle of the night, worried that if the current was running out towards the sound, that would tend to pin the boat against the dock and it would be difficult to actually leave the slip.

Well, that is exactly what happened. The bow thruster was not strong enough to combat the current and since boats steer from the rear, not the front, it was impossible to turn into the current because the stern was already against the dock.

Another boater suggested cleating a bow line and powering the boat against the cleat which in theory would have turned the boat and allowed us to back out against the current. Unfortunately when we tried that, the cleat broke loose from the dock. In the end, the bow thruster plus a strong push from the boater got us off the dock and facing the right direction to leave.

The reason for leaving early was to miss the forecasted rain today. As we headed north out of Jekyll Creek and through St. Simons Sound, it seemed like there was blue sky to the east and west of us, but a dark cloud overhead. It didn't rain though and it stayed relatively cool. Cool enough that we both considered changing into long sleeved shirts. We didn't though.

We were doing fine until about 1:00 PM when we were approaching Sapelo Sound. The wind picked up and it began to rain. We headed down to ride and drive from inside. The tide was coming in so the tidal current brought our speed down to about five and a half knots and the waves had is bouncing up and down with sea spray coming over the bow and coating the windshield.

We could see what looked like a sailboat in the distance, but it wasn't getting any closer. Checking the chart plotter, we saw that it was transmitting an AIS signal and was actually going the same way we were, but just slightly slower. Not wanting to try to pass it under these conditions, we slowed HIGH COTTON down just a bit to match the sailboat's speed. The rain stopped and Captain Ron started back up to the flybridge, but the wind and the rocking made it uncomfortable so he came back down.

Once we both exited the sound, Captain Ron called the sailboat on the radio and arranged for a pass. We were able to resume driving and riding on the flybridge by this time.

Not long after we passed the sailboat, we came upon a similar sailboat anchored outside of the channel. The sailboat we had just passed apparently pulled off and anchored there as well. We motored on.



The hound checking for big fishies

We considered continuing on to Kilkenny Marina, but realized that it would take us until 5:00 PM to get there. We decided on an anchorage that we have used before and pulled in at about 3:15 PM.

Patti had frozen our leftover German food from the restaurant in Sanford so she got that out of the freezer and let it thaw. That was our dinner.

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There is a nice breeze blowing through the boat so that should make for comfortable sleeping tonight.

Captain's Log, day thirty nine (July 3, 2024)

Well, it seems we spoke too soon about comfortable sleeping last night. First of all, that "nice breeze" had the boat rocking and slapping against the waves. Then it started raining and we had to close all the windows so it was hot. Once the rain stopped, the breeze stopped as well so there was no more rocking, but no cooling breeze.

About 11:30 PM, the anchor drag alarm sounded. We weren't dragging anchor, Captain Ron had simply not set a large enough circle on the chart plotter.

When Captain Ron got up to check the anchor drag alarm, he turned on a light and Patti saw a roach. She tried to hit it with the fly swatter, but it got away. An hour or so later, Patti found it crawling on her in the bed! This time she didn't miss and it met its doom and was tossed overboard.

So we woke up at about 6:30 AM and decided to get underway because it was supposed to rain at about noon in Thunderbolt, GA, our destination for the day.

After a while we looked back and the boat we had shared a dock with in St. Marys was a quarter of a mile or so behind us.

After one of Patti's trips below for food and drinks, she mentioned to Captain Ron that the battery monitor was showing about 69% capacity on the house batteries and was going down, not up. Captain Ron decided to try what he had done previously so once we were in a clear area, we turned off the engine and he crawled into the bilge and disconnected the DC to DC charger and then

reconnected it. We started the engine and continued on our way.

A check several minutes later showed that the battery was still not charging. An hour or so later the monitor showed 100%. Captain Ron will have to contact the manufacturer about this.

As we approached Isle of Hope, about an hour south of Thunderbolt, we began to see dolphins, lots of dolphins. The ship's puppy was napping, but we woke her up and put her on the dash where she could get a good view of them. (Kiki writes: *"I'm glad mawmaw and pawpaw woke me up to see the big fishies. I like watching the big fishies swimming in the water."*)

As we approached Thunderbolt, the skies began to darken. We called the marina on the radio and got our slip assignment. The dockmaster came to the dock and caught our lines for us.

Just about the time we got tied up and plugged in, the boat that had been behind us called and came into the marina behind us.

We walked the hound, got checked in and got two bags of ice for the cooler. The last time we were in Thunderbolt we had gone to the marine store to see if they had a replacement web buckle for the swim ladder. The store didn't have one but had suggested that we try the canvas shop at the marina so we walked over and asked if they had one. The owner said he didn't but he offered Captain Ron a catalog to see if he could find it. He couldn't. The canvas shop owner suggested calling the manufacture of the swim step. The Sea Dog made the rounds of the shop employees, getting petted and fussed over. She is good at that. (Kiki writes: *"I am cute and everybody loves to pet me. I like being petted."*)

It did rain for a few minutes and then the sun came out.

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Patti decided to do a couple loads of laundry so she took one load to the laundry room and then took her shower. Captain Ron took a nap. Later, he went to the showers himself.

As is their custom, the humans left the K-9 on the boat and walked to the closest (only) restaurant, Tubby's Tank House.

After dinner, Patti did another load of laundry and made up the V berth with fresh bedding. The puppy had another walk.

The yacht club on the other side of the river had a fireworks show once it got dark. We watched most of it from the end of the dock.

We leave here for Beaufort, SC tomorrow morning.

Captain's Log, day forty (July 4, 2024)

July 4th. American Independence Day. The day patriotic Americans celebrate their country's independence from England by drinking beer and eating hot dogs! And boating. Everyone who owns a boat gathers his ten closest friends and heads for the nearest sandbar or beach where they can all drink beer and eat hot dogs!

Well, the Widmans are on their boat, but they are not heading for the sandbar or beach, they are heading back home from their cruise on Florida's St. Johns River. And they are not drinking beer and eating hot dogs, the plan is to dock at Lady's Island Marina and eat dinner at the adjacent Dockside Restaurant, one of Captain Ron's favorite restaurants. July 4th also happens to be Captain Ron and Patti's wedding anniversary.

We mentioned that the boat that had been following us pulled into Thunderbolt Marina behind us. That left us with a somewhat challenging exit this morning, but the captain asked

us what time we would be leaving in the morning. When we said about 8:00 AM, he said he would be leaving at the same time and would back his boat out to make it easier for us to leave.

This morning, he was on the dock as we were getting ready to leave and said he was getting ready to leave. He untied a couple of his docklines and started his engine, but didn't unplug his shorepower cord or unhook his water hose. Then he came back and said his wife was doing laundry so he wouldn't be leaving (they have a washing machine on their boat).

This left us with "plan B" which had been "plan A" before he mentioned leaving early this morning.

"Plan B" being to turn HIGH COTTON around in the fairway using the bow thruster and motoring past the other boat. This operation went as planned and we were on our way north.

Thunderbolt Marina is at the southern end of a no-wake zone that extends the entire waterfront of Thunderbolt so the engine was warmed up by the time we could reach our normal cruising speed.

We twisted and turned on the ICW until we reached the Savannah River where we exited Georgia and entered our home state of South Carolina. There were no ships in sight on the River today so we cruised right across.

The Adventures of HIGH COTTON



These tanks on the Savannah River are visible for miles

We came upon a pod of dolphins so we stopped to let the ship's puppy watch for a while. She enjoys seeing the big fishies play in the water.

The small boat traffic picked up as the morning wore on and became pretty heavy as people headed to the sandbars and beaches. There were multiple parasail boats operating near Hilton Head and large groups of jet skis trying to see how fast they could go. At times, it was like boating in a washing machine with all the boat wakes.



A boat being towed off the beach after the tide went out

We had the current against us for most of our trip today so it took a bit longer than planned to get to Beaufort. There are two sandbars in Beaufort and both were filled with anchored and beached boats. We could smell the hot dogs being grilled.



Party at the sand bar

We went through the Woods Memorial Bridge, turned into Factory Creek and headed for the marina. The dockmaster ("mistress") met us and caught our lines and tied us up. The hound was glad to get off the boat and hightailed it up the ramp to the grassy area.



The Woods Memorial Bridge displaying the American Flag

We got ourselves checked in and got the codes for the heads and Wi-Fi. The marina called the Dockside Restaurant and made "VIP" dinner reservations for us.

We walked the pup a bit more, then headed back to HIGH COTTON where we covered the flybridge in case of rain. Since today had been a hot day with little breeze, we (the humans) decided to take early showers. After the showers, we rested a bit and then changed into our "good" boat clothes and

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headed for the restaurant for dinner and to celebrate our wedding anniversary. Captain Ron got the seafood dinner and Patti got a ribeye steak dinner. We have leftovers for another day. And it was delicious.



Captain Ron's seafood dinner



Patti's steak dinner

When we returned to the boat, the K-9 was ready for a walk so off we went around the marina and restaurant grounds. She found people to pet her.

We returned to the boat, rested a bit and then Patti took the pooch for another walk. Again, she found people to pet her.

Tomorrow will be the last day of this year's cruise. It should take eight to nine hours to get from Beaufort to our marina on Johns Island. It will be

time for an oil change when we get there so Captain Ron will have to do that while the engine is still warm. He had the thought today that it's a shame there is no Jiffy Lube for boats.



Sunset on Factory Creek, Beaufort, SC

Captain Ron turned the air conditioning in our house back to the normal temperature remotely so it should be comfortable when we get there.

It has been a great trip.

Captain's Log, day forty one (July 5, 2024)

Today was another oh-dark-thirty departure. That turned out to be a bad decision as we will find out later. The hound was walked, the engine checked, the shorepower and docklines disconnected and it was back down Factory Creek to the ICW.

We stopped a couple times to let the ship's puppy watch the dolphins doing what dolphins do. We were pretty much alone on the water at this early hour, but as time wore on, more and more small boats appeared. They were going every which way, some pulling children on tubes (not the safest thing to do on the crowded ICW). We eventually came to the conclusion that many folks who had Independence Day off from work apparently took today off as well to have a four day weekend. That

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would mean four days of boating. We managed to dodge all the small boats although we had to keep a sharp lookout and got waked several times.



Party at the sandbar just south of Charleston, SC



The Limehouse Bridge means we are almost home

Captain Ron had used his boating software to look up the time and direction of the current at Clark Island Marina (our home base) so that we could dock with a favorable current. Supposedly, slack current would be at about 2:30 PM and the flood current (coming in) would last another six hours. Docking with slack current or the current coming in is easiest and safest.

We have an “app” on a tablet called Navionics Boating that is supposed to suggest the best route to take from point “A” to point “B”. It also

suggests the length of time the route will take and if you are underway, it uses your speed to calculate your ETA.

Captain Ron didn’t need a route, he already has one in the chart plotter and we have taken this trip many times, but he was interested in the time the route would take. Navionics suggested that today’s trip from Beaufort, SC to our home marina on Johns Island would take just over nine hours. Leaving at 6:15 AM would have put us at Clark Island Marina at 3:15 PM which would have given us a favorable current.

Unfortunately (and inexplicably), Navionics plotted a long detour around a normal portion of the ICW which added an hour to the estimated time. We followed the normal route and our actual time was under eight hours.

As we approached Charleston, we realized that the current was still flowing in the wrong direction for safe docking. We slowed down for the last hour or so, but the current was still flowing in the wrong direction. Captain Ron is beginning to suspect that the current predictions for our area are off by an hour or so, something to keep in mind the next time we come back to the marina.

Rather than stopping and anchoring for another hour (we had been on the water for nearly eight hours and the temperature was in the mid-nineties), Captain Ron decided to attempt to dock HIGH COTTON anyway. Bad decision!

With the current carrying the boat forward, it was necessary to shift into reverse and apply power. One characteristic of propeller driven boats is, because of the rotation and angle of the propeller, they won’t back up straight, they pull either to the right or left. HIGH COTTON pulls to the right (starboard). Our slip at Clark Island is a “port side

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tie”, meaning that the dock is to the left when pulling in.

Shifting to reverse moved the stern away from the dock and Patti could not step off onto the dock.

The current swung the stern to the other side of the slip where Patti was able to get off, but the boat was now diagonal in the slip.

Two dockhands showed up and with much difficulty and some additional lines and instructions from Captain Ron, they were able to pull the stern over and get HIGH COTTON in its proper position. There was no damage to anything or anyone and hopefully this was a lesson learned. If we had slept in until 9:00 AM this morning, everything would have been fine and this would have been a much shorter Captain’s Log.

Captain Ron finished securing the boat and plugged the shorepower cord in while Patti took the pooch to land to do her business. Captain Ron walked to the parking lot and moved the truck closer to make loading our stuff easier.

By this time, Captain Ron was feeling the heat and had to lie down with a wet towel and a cold soda. Patti unloaded the boat of food and other things that would be going home.

Captain Ron had planned on changing the oil in the engine and transmission when we got back today, but he realized that he wouldn’t be able to do this because of being tired and overheated. This can be done on the first or second day of our next trip.

We got everything loaded and set out on our forty five minute drive back to our home. The drive was uneventful and Captain Ron began to feel better after several minutes in the air conditioned truck.

The house was cool and in one piece. There was a large stack of mail and packages on the dining room table.

So, this is the end of the Widman’s 2024 spring and summer cruise. Hopefully we will go somewhere for at least a few days in the fall.

Thanks for following along.

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Epilogue

Duration	42 Days
Distance	847 NM
Time underway	121 hours
Fuel used (diesel)	242 gallons
Fuel consumption	2.0 GPH
Fuel mileage	3.5 NMPG
Nights anchored	8
Nights on free docks	0
Nights in marinas	32

For anyone else considering an extended boat cruise, we have to say “Go for it!” For us, it’s time to start planning the next trip.

People often ask us if we would do a trip like this again. Well, we have been doing this since 2012 with one exception, so our plan is to continue cruising for the foreseeable future.

All in all, we had a great time on this cruise. We visited many familiar destinations but also found some new and interesting places to visit. Weather conditions caused us to miss a couple spots we had planned on visiting.

Having a portable wireless hotspot and a laptop PC on board allowed us to pay our bills online and keep in touch with friends and family. It also allowed us to find anchorages, fuel stops and marinas and read reviews of these places by other cruisers.

Our main “online” source of cruising information was Active Captain. Cell phones, of course, made it easy to contact marinas ahead of time to inquire about slip availability and make advance reservations.

Our HOA dues cover maintaining the lawn and shrubs so that was nothing to worry about. Our friend Kim got our mail and packages and put them inside our house.