

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 1.8 GPH.

The following is an account of a cruise south on the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway from Charleston, SC to Florida and up the St. Johns River to Sanford, Florida and back, beginning May 1, 2012 and ending on May 31, 2012.

Captain's Log, day one (May 1, 2012)

Since thirty days and nights on the boat wasn't going to be enough, we spent the previous night on the boat in the marina. Actually, we had a friend drop us off so we could leave the car at home and not in the marina parking lot for a month.

We got an early start at 6:45 AM and motored at 2K RPM for just over seven hours to our first overnight anchorage on Rock Creek just before the Coosaw River. It's a spot we've been to before with no sign of humans, just nature. On the way we saw a couple pods of dolphins playing but we couldn't convince them to follow us in our wake.



Bye Bye Charleston, see you in a month or so

Since it's early May and we are heading South, we encountered many "snowbirds" heading north in their sailboats and trawlers. Only one boat overtook us heading south and we didn't overtake anybody.

I noticed that the battery combiner didn't seem to be charging the house bank and confirmed this with my meter once we anchored so I rigged up a manual bypass with a couple pieces of wire and some slip connectors. This should do it.

Captain's Log, day two (May 2, 2012)

We left the anchorage about 7:45 AM, headed up the Coosaw River past Beaufort to just before the Savannah River. Testing the "manual" battery combiner, I started the engine from the lower helm even though we would be operating from the upper helm. Since it's a diesel, it doesn't have to have the "ignition" on to run, it just has to be on for the instruments to function.

I turned the ignition back off and without thinking about it, decided to check the fuel level. It was full when we left home and should have only moved a little, but was showing less than ¼ in each tank! Panic! Where did seventy

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gallons of diesel fuel go and will we make it to the next marina?

Did it leak out? Did someone steal it at RiversEdge? Is the gauge defective all of a sudden (both tanks)?

We headed for Beaufort, turning the key on at the upper helm. I went down to check and the gauge was reading nearly full as it should have been. Aha! I realize that the engine's electrical system was supplying a little power to the gauges with the key off and that was causing the faulty reading. Everything is fine.

We saw a few pods of dolphins playing and enjoyed the day. We anchored in the Wright River just above Fields Cut and the Savannah River.

Captain's Log, day three (May 3, 2012)

We left the anchorage about 8:30 AM. I see a pattern here. And if we don't do something about it, we'll be getting up at noon!

We stopped for fuel in Thunderbolt, GA south of the Savannah River. We filled the tanks with 33 gallons of diesel fuel. Not bad for one hundred miles or so. We filled the water tanks and dumped some garbage and went on our way.

Georgia's sounds are miles and miles of miles and miles, especially at seven knots. I don't think we've had a favorable current for more than ten percent of the trip. At Hell Gate, there was a sign warning of shoaling. No kidding, less than four feet of water when we went through! It was low tide. Instead of putting up a sign, how about dredging it?

Since it doesn't look like we'll make Jacksonville by the weekend, we may split the next day up into two days and take a marina slip when we get to Florida's Fernandina Beach.



Range markers - Line them up and you're in the channel

Captain's Log, day four (May 4, 2012)

I got the crew up early and we headed out about 7:15 AM. Nothing out of the ordinary today, just more GA sounds. It seems you just head down one river almost to the ocean, then take the next one back inland. Again, we fought the current most of the way. We saw a lot of dolphins and had one swim with us a while.

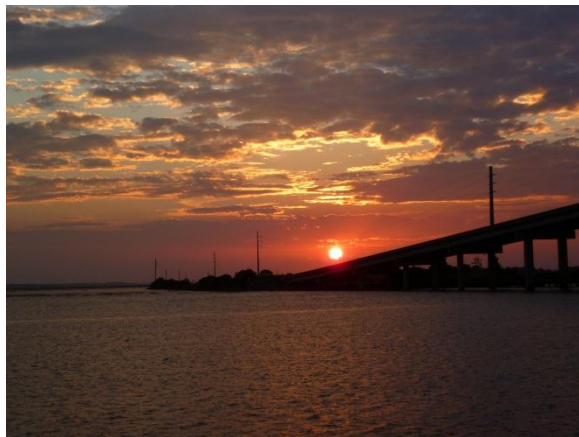


A dolphin joined us for several minutes on the ICW

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There were no good anchorages around when we were ready to pack it in so we stopped at the Jekyll Harbor Marina right on the ICW. We got a space on the face dock, swam in the pool and ate at the restaurant. I started to say the restaurant was nothing to write home about, but I guess I'm doing just that.

<http://www.jekyllharbor.com/>



Sunset from Jekyll Harbor Marina

Tomorrow, it should be just a couple hours to Cumberland Island. We plan to anchor and take the dinghy ashore. It's a preserved wildlife area with wild horses and such.

Captain's Log, day five (May 5, 2012)

Last evening, we headed back up to the restaurant to check out the "live entertainment". It was one guy with a guitar and a stool singing songs we had never heard of and on a par with the food so we headed back to the boat and turned in.

No rush this morning since it's only a couple hours to where we planned to anchor. We left the marina at about 8:45 AM and headed for St. Andrew Sound. You really think you're headed out to sea on this one.

The guide books recommended three spots on the Brookhill River on Cumberland Island so we left the ICW for the river. They would have made OK anchorages, but there was no access to the Island so we rejoined the ICW.



Dredge on the ICW near Kings Bay Submarine Base

After passing the Kings Bay submarine base and about a dozen Coast Guard and Police boats, we went up the eastern branch of Cumberland Sound, anchored and took Q-Tip (our dinghy) to the US Park Service dock and explored the island. From the dock, we saw several boats escorting a submarine from the base to the ocean. I guess that's the reason for all the security. If we had been a couple hours later, we would have been right in the middle of it.



Submarine being escorted from Kings Bay to the Atlantic Ocean

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HIGH COTTON anchored on Cumberland Sound near Cumberland Island National Seashore

We saw a pair of wild horses in the woods on the island and a group of three on the beach. You can get close, but not too close. We took several photos. Patti collected some sea shells.

This is a beautiful place and highly recommended for anyone who enjoys nature or wildlife.



Wild horses on the beach at Cumberland Island National Seashore

On the way back to HIGH COTTON in Q-Tip, a manatee started following us up close. It

startled us but it turns out they are gentle, curious creatures. We took several photos.



Manatee following Q-Tip on Cumberland Sound behind Cumberland Island National Seashore

It's time for dinner. No leftovers and no restaurant so we'll be cooking boat food.

Tomorrow is not planned. It's either Fernandina Beach and stay at a marina or on to Jacksonville. We shall see.

Captain's Log, day six (May 6, 2012)

Nothing exciting today. No rush so we didn't get underway until 8:50 AM. Since we reached Fernadina beach in about an hour, we decided to pass on it and head for Jacksonville. We saw a few more dolphins along the way but no more manatees. We noticed a lot of smoke or haze in the air. We learned later that there were wildfires burning in South Georgia and they were the cause of the smoke.

Fighting the current, it seemed like we would never get to Jacksonville.

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Jacksonville in sight

After looking at the choices more closely, we decided to bypass downtown with no facilities and press on to the highly rated Ortega Landing Marina. We were bucking the current again most of the day so it was about 4:00 PM once we got settled in. Just as we docked, the wind whipped up but after a while, everything calmed down.

We took showers, changed and walked to the shopping center and ate dinner at Longhorn Steak House.



HIGH COTTON on B dock at Ortega Landing Marina

Tomorrow, we'll do laundry and check out the pool. The next morning we plan to walk to

Publix and stock up on food and other items, then head on up the river.

Captain's Log, day seven (May 7, 2012)

Since we came in relatively late Sunday afternoon, we had to go to the office and register and pay. We were planning on staying for two nights but it turns out, this marina's weekly (seven night) rate is the same as three nights. Not only that, but you can split the seven nights up as long as you use them within thirty days. That means that for a little over \$180.00 we can stay here four nights, take our cruise up the river and back, and stay three more nights before heading home. Pretty good deal so we took it.

<http://www.ortegalanding.com/>

We did two loads of laundry, relaxing in the pool and hot tub while the machines worked their magic.



That \$35 folding cart from Target was worth its weight in gold, both for laundry and hauling groceries and ice.

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We had to do something while the washer and dryer worked their magic

Then we walked up to the shopping center, ate lunch, and checked out the stores. We found what must be the world's largest used book store. A GPS would have been nice to find your way around.

As we were leaving Publix with a few things, it began to rain so we sat down on the bench to wait it out. A lady we met at the marina that morning walked over and asked us if we wanted a ride back to the marina. Her husband had dropped her off earlier that day and she called him to come pick her up. We accepted the ride and stayed dry. The weather forecast calls for afternoon thunderstorms through Wednesday so we'll probably head up the river Thursday morning. But, we might do something different.

Captain's Log, day eight (May 8, 2012)

It occurred to me that by leaving on the first of the month, the daily headings are made simpler – the days and the dates are the same.

Don't expect too much this evening, It's grueling work walking up to the pool, swimming

a few laps, lounging in the hot tub, sunning on the chaise lounge and then doing it all over again. This could wear a body out.



It's hard work but somebody has to do it

We did manage to walk to the well-known Pier 17 marine supply store nearby. Bob (Hayes) would love it. It looks like they bought every surplus part from every boat builder in the USA, plus everything that never sold at West Marine, stuck a price tag on it, and put it on a shelf. Staffed by an older woman who was more concerned with sitting on a couch with her feet elevated than anything else. And two dogs who followed us around the store because we were carrying our leftovers from lunch.

Unfortunately, at least today, everything they had, I either didn't need or already had so I didn't buy anything. The lady and the dogs didn't seem to mind.

We'll probably use day four of our seven days tomorrow, then head for Black Creek where there is supposed to be good alligator and bird watching.

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Captain's Log, day 9 (May 9, 2012)

Again, a grueling day of swimming in the pool, lounging in the hot tub, and sunning on the chaise lounges. We did manage to tidy up the boat in anticipation of heading out tomorrow morning. We talked with a couple in the pool who had been staying in the City Marina in Charleston for the past few months and are here for a while, then onto someplace else. They live on their sailboat.

We walked back to the shopping center and ate dinner at Longhorn, then came back and put another load in the washing machine.

Tomorrow, we stock up on ice, water, and diesel fuel, and head for Black Creek.

Captain's Log, day 10 (May 10, 2012)

Well, a little excitement this morning. We got up about seven o'clock, walked to Publix with the cart, got some last minute perishables and 40 lbs. of ice and brought it back to the boat and put everything away. We topped off the water, disconnected the shore power cord and turned the key.

Nothing! Deader than a doornail. Who came up with that expression anyway? What does it mean? Has anyone ever even seen a doornail? Would they know what you were talking about if you asked for one at Home Depot?

OK. No problem. I'll just disconnect and remove the starting battery and replace it with one of the four house batteries. I'll have a good starting battery and just have a little less reserve power on the hook. Never mind that they weigh seventy five pounds each and have to be wrestled into place, and never mind that

the replacement battery had the terminals reversed so I had to re-route the cables.

A half hour or so and I was done but soaking wet so Patti suggested that I go take a shower and change into clean clothes.

I did, of course, and felt much better. Then it was up the river through a railroad drawbridge to another marina for fuel and then back down through two drawbridges and up the St. Johns River. So far, we've used about seventy five gallons of diesel fuel and we are south of Jacksonville. That's about 1.8 gallons per hour.

About an hour up the river, it came to me that I could have just borrowed one of the marina carts, walked to West Marine in the shopping center and purchased a replacement for the dead battery. I would have paid a premium and wouldn't have gotten my first choice in batteries, but it would have been a permanent repair, not something I'll have to undo when I can get to a Sears store for a battery to match the others. As they say, "hindsight is 20-20".

We found Black Creek and motored up a mile or so to a recommended spot and anchored a little after 1:00 PM. We saw several turtles and one alligator sunning on a log on the way to the anchoring spot.

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A friendly alligator sunning on Black Creek

We took Q-Tip up a little side creek and then up and down Black Creek. So far, no special wildlife, but something bubbled in the water behind Q-Tip. I don't know what and Patti didn't want to go back and check.

Tomorrow isn't planned yet but we'll move on up the river somewhere.

Captain's Log, day 11 (May 11, 2012)

Underway at 10:00 AM (yeah, I know, but it's a vacation). We motored slowly out of the creek and back onto the St. Johns River. That's a mighty wide and mighty long river. Getting out of Black Creek and into the St. Johns channel reminded me of home – crab pot markers everywhere. We could see five or six boats out working the pots. Somebody will be eating crabs tonight.

About 2:00 PM we entered Deep Creek north of Palatka, FL. We cruised back and forth looking for a good spot and finally selected one. We saw alligators and turtles on the way in.

We took Q-Tip up and down the creek but didn't see any more wildlife worth mentioning. Still, it's a beautiful and remote area.

In the morning we'll head south again.



HIGH COTTON anchored on Black Creek off the St. Johns River

Captain's Log, day 12 (May 12, 2012)

While we saw no humans in "our" creek the night before, we woke up (at 6:30 AM) to the sound and wakes of small fishing boats. Some were courteous, some were not. Since I had forgotten until the last couple hours of yesterday's cruise to hook up my "manual battery combiner", and we are now down from four to three house batteries, the house batteries were weak and we kept getting low battery alarms when using appliances.

We were ready to get underway about 7:30 AM, but the anchor would not come up, the windlass just stopped (remember, the batteries were weak). I had Patti back the boat up the opposite way from the way we anchored and the anchor broke free of the bottom. As it neared the surface, I could see what the problem was. Along with the anchor was a log. Not a twig, not a branch, but a log about twenty

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feet long and twelve inches in diameter at the large end. Our anchor was hooked on a fork about four feet from the smaller end.



Look what I found this morning

I had Patti move the boat around and I lowered and raised the anchor a couple times. Eventually, I got it to where I could reach out and dislodge the log. We made our way out of Deep Creek and onto the St. Johns River.

Since our next planned “nature stop” was only a couple hours up the river, we decided to save it for the return trip and head for the Georgetown Marina at the entrance (or exit, it depends which way you are heading) to Lake George, a twelve mile long by five mile wide lake that can get rough in high winds. It’s also a good place to top off the diesel tanks.

A few miles upstream from Palatka, we came to the Buffalo Bluff railroad bridge. We called the bridge tender and requested an opening. He replied back “You’ll have to wait a few minutes captain, there’s a train coming.” Sure enough, about ten minutes later, the Amtrak passenger train came rumbling by.



Amtrak crossing the Buffalo Bluff Bridge

After the train passed, the bridge tender opened the bridge and we were on our way again.

We reached Georgetown marina and tied up at the fuel dock where we were to spend the night. Georgetown Marina would be described as “quaint” if a brief description was necessary. It’s a combination marina, houseboat and Jet Ski rental place, boat launch, campground, trailer park, and bait store. If you need some live crickets, this is the place to come. They seem like very friendly people, both the staff and the people staying here. Some of the campers were cleaning fish and they offered us some fillets. That will be dinner tonight and probably another night as well.



Georgetown Marina and Lodge

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Friendly folks at Georgetown Marina

<http://www.georgetownmarina.com/>

Tomorrow, we'll top off our tanks and head across the lake before it gets too windy.

Captain's Log, day 13 (May 13, 2012)

We learned last night about the infamous Florida "blind mosquitoes". I went out to the cockpit to get our towels and left the cabin door open for a couple minutes. The cabin filled with dozens of these flying creatures, heading for each light that was on. We ended up turning all but one light off, then swatting them as they gathered around the light. These are plump, juicy bugs so once you squash them, you have to clean up the mess. Ugh! We'll know better than to do that again.

Georgetown Marina being as much or more a fish camp than a marina, we were awakened early this morning by people getting ready to head out on the lake for a day of fishing. No matter, we had a twelve mile lake to cross before the winds got strong so it was a welcome wake up call.

We had topped off the water tanks the night before so we bought two twenty pound bags of

ice and topped off the diesel tanks. Fuel seemed a bargain at \$3.99 per gallon, but for some reason, that doesn't include sales tax so it was really closer to \$4.27 per gallon. Still, that's less than we paid in Jacksonville and far less than we paid in Thunderbolt, GA.

Twelve miles in a straight line across Lake George and we were back in the winding St. Johns River we had come so far to experience. This part of the St. Johns River is really a lot like the upper Waccamaw River in South Carolina. Mostly narrow and twisting with periodic patches of civilization. It's a little more developed though, with campgrounds, fish camps, and even a few restaurant/ bar establishments. Being Sunday, there were lots of boats on the river. Mostly bass boats and pontoon boats with a few center consoles and bow riders thrown in. We saw three air boats just south of Lake George. One went right over a sand bar and back into the water.



One way to deal with shallow water

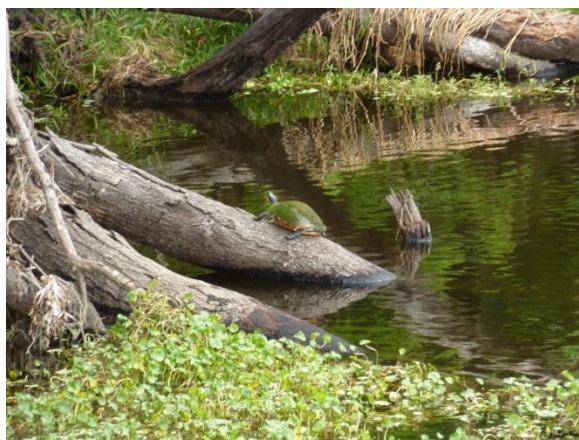
Not far from where we decided to anchor for the night, we came upon a group of manatees near the shore. It looked like five or six, possibly some young ones and adults. We got some photos, but we didn't try to get too close to them as they were near the shore in shallow water.

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We pulled into River Forest Loop, a loop in the river that has been bypassed by a short canal or cut. The channel used to go through the loop but now there's a straight bypass so there's no river traffic in the loop.

Once we got ourselves set for the night we started looking around. Right near the boat were a couple of turtles sunning themselves on logs. There was a limpkin (an apparently somewhat rare bird) feeding in the water under a tree. Later it flew into the tree and sat for several minutes. We got photos of the turtles and the limpkin.

Towards dusk, we saw a couple alligators swimming in the loop and one swam around our boat. A pretty good sized one, perhaps ten feet long. There are a lot of strange animal sounds coming from the woods and the water.



Turtle sunning on River Forest Loop



The "elusive" Limpkin on River Forest Loop

It looks like the plan for tomorrow is to go to Hontoon Island State Park and spend the day and night. It's been reported that they don't take reservations and only have a couple slips big and deep enough for HIGH COTTON so if we can't stay there, we'll head on up the river, possibly as far as Lake Monroe and Sanford.

Captain's Log, day 14 (May 14, 2012)

We awoke this morning to see an alligator swimming towards the boat. Last night was a symphony of strange animal and bird sounds. One sounded like a giant cat meowing. Preparing to leave, we saw more alligators swimming in the river.

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Alligator swimming past HIGH COTTON on River Forest Loop

I called ahead to Hontoon State Park about the slips and they said the T heads (ends of the piers) were vacant and available so we took our time because it was only a six mile trip. Much of it was posted “No Wake” so we went slower than we might have expected. We also had to put our bimini top down to go through a 15’ clearance bridge. We could have asked them to open it, but if you can get through by lowering tops and antennas, you’re supposed to do that so we did. We saw several more alligators along the way.

We docked at Hontoon Island State park about 10:30 AM. Total cost for a night’s dockage including electricity, water, showers, etc.? Twenty dollars and twenty five cents! Of course, there’s no pool, no bar, no restaurant, and you can’t go anyplace, but it’s a good rest stop.

<http://www.floridastateparks.org/hontoonisland/>

We decided to walk the nature trail to the Indian Shell Mound where Native Americans discarded snail shells two thousand years ago. Little did we know it was a three mile round trip through the woods. I wonder if two thousand years in the future, people will be hiking to view

our present day landfills? Mt. Trashmore National Park?



Indian shell mound

Hot and sweaty from our hike, we hit the showers, then fixed steamed shrimp and coleslaw for dinner. I scanned for TV stations and found about thirty, but half either wanted to save our souls, or expected us to understand Spanish.

Tomorrow, it’s on to Sanford, FL for a couple days and then head back towards home.

Captain’s Log, day 15 (May 15, 2012)

We left Hontoon Island State Park about 9:45 AM. Much of the way is either “Slow Speed Minimum Wake” or “Idle Speed No Wake” so it was slow going. Of course that meant we could enjoy the ride and watch for wildlife, which we did. We didn’t see any more manatees, but we saw lots of turtles sunning themselves on logs and alligators, both swimming and out of the water.

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Alligator sunning on the St. Johns River

We had to wait for a railroad bridge to be opened and then we entered Lake Monroe. Lake Monroe is very shallow, with a ten foot deep channel dredged through it. Lake Monroe is pretty much as far up river as a boat the size of HIGH COTTON can navigate, although shallow draft boats can go many more miles upriver. It's a pretty straight shot across the lake to Monroe Harbour Marina, but the marina itself is a trick to get into if you've never been there before. The harbormaster guided us all the way, past real markers and PVC pipes with painted tops.

<http://www.monroeharbour.com/>



HIGH COTTON at Monroe Harbour Marina

Safe and snug in our slip, we set off to explore the town. Walking down the street, a man

handed us a menu from his restaurant so on the way back we stopped in and had lunch (again, we already had lunch during the trip). We stopped in the Family Dollar store to pick up a few staples.

When we returned to the boat, I proceeded to hose down the boat to reduce the number of dead insects we were carrying while Patti tidied up inside. While I was hosing off the flybridge, a group of ducks swam behind the boat. Patti fed them a pack of peanut butter crackers. Walking up to the bathrooms, I saw an alligator swimming in the marina.



Ducks behind HIGH COTTON waiting for a handout



Alligator at Monroe Harbour Marina

About 6:30 PM, we walked back to the Family Dollar store to pick up two cans of green beans

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that we had paid for but hadn't been put in our bag. On the way back, we stopped in the pizza shop next to the marina for dinner. That's when our luck ran out as far as the weather was concerned. It began to pour down rain and was still pouring when we finished eating.

Lacking a better plan, we grabbed our bags and walked in the pouring rain back to the marina and down the dock to the boat. By the time we got there, we were as wet as if we had fallen in the water. Of course by now the air conditioning had cooled the cabin really well so I switched it to heat and we disrobed and dried ourselves off.

It's still raining as I write this. Tomorrow, we'll walk the town some more and probably eat dinner at the German Restaurant. We haven't had good German food since we moved from Maryland.

Captain's Log, day 16 (May 16, 2012)

Not much special to report today. We showered and did the laundry in the marina facilities. Then we walked to the German restaurant for lunch. We'll probably go back tomorrow for dinner. As we were leaving the restaurant it began to sprinkle so we returned to the boat. It's a good thing we did because it began to rain harder and continued raining for a few hours. The ducks returned and Patti fed them some crackers. After the rain we walked around the waterfront park and returned to the boat.

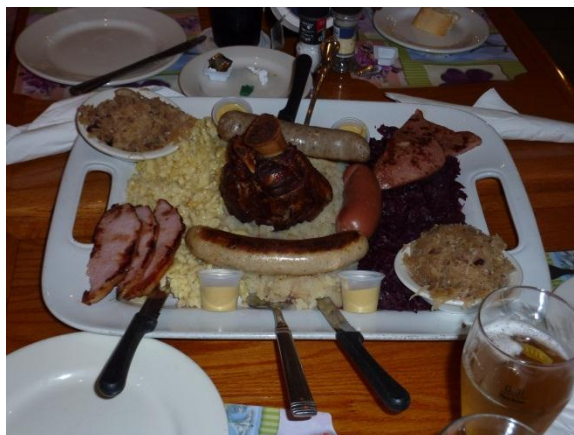
We'll probably start back towards home Friday morning.

Captain's Log, day 17 (May 17, 2012)

We topped off the water tanks and paid our marina bill. \$90.00 for three days including electricity. We walked to the 7-11 store for sandwich rolls but they didn't have any. We walked to another convenience store with no better luck. McDonalds for a couple burgers and an ice cream, then back to the Family Dollar store. Still no rolls so we bought bread. And an umbrella.

We showered, dressed, and went back to the German restaurant for dinner. It was all it's cracked up to be, very good.

<http://www.willowtreecafe.com/> There was a duo playing German music and they were exceptional.



No, that wasn't Patti's dinner; it was for the table next to ours. A "feast" for four people

Back to the boat, it looks like a pretty severe thunderstorm is heading towards us. No matter, we're safely tucked into our slip.

Tomorrow, we'll turn in our gate keys and head for home with several stops along the way.

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Captain's Log, day 18 (May 18, 2012)

Up bright and early, we left Monroe Harbour Marina and the city of Sanford a little after 8:00 AM. The weather forecasts were calling for spotty afternoon thunderstorms so it seemed like a good idea to get an early start so we could be safely anchored or docked if a storm hit. As I write this in Georgetown at 6:30 PM, it's been sunny all day. No hint of rain.

On the way from Sanford to Georgetown we saw a group of manatees near a marina/fish camp. We followed them a bit and tried to get photos. Later in the day, we spotted a single manatee in the middle of the river. We stopped and it swam under the boat. We also saw lots of alligators swimming and sunning on logs. And of course, turtles and all kinds of birds. The upper St. Johns River is one No Wake Zone after the other so we didn't quite make the progress we anticipated.



It's not often you see a drawbridge for pedestrians

I had a place picked out for us to spend the night on the hook a few miles south of Lake George, the plan being to cross the lake early in the morning, stop into Georgetown marina for fuel, and head north.

Well, I got tired so Patti volunteered to run the boat for a while so I could rest. Before I realized it, we had passed our anchorage and were nearing the southern inlet to Lake George. The choices were to double back to the anchorage or cross the lake and spend the night at Georgetown Marina. I called and they had space so we continued on. Several "Go Fast" boats passed us on the lake at high speed. We got to the marina a little after 5:00 PM and after the marina was closed so no docking help was available. No problem, we slid on up to the dock, tossed a line over a piling, pulled the boat to the dock, and got off and tied it up just like we knew what we were doing. We get to shower tonight!

Today is my last day of being sixty eight years old. Tomorrow I'll be a year older. We'll top off the fuel and water tanks and head north again.

Captain's Log, day 19 (May 19, 2012)

Well, we've both been on the boat so long that when we stand on solid ground it seems to move. Is there such a thing as "Land sickness"?

Anyway, we topped off the fuel tanks and got underway about 9:10 AM. We burned twenty six gallons of fuel from Georgetown to Sanford and back. That's less than one and a half gallons per hour. Of course there are a lot of No Wake zones so that could help to keep the fuel burn lower than normal. Still, HIGH COTTON is a pretty economical boat to run.

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We saw dozens of these on the upper St. Johns River

Apparently there was a poker run going on the river today, dozens of bass boats and go fast boats were passing us all day.



Poker Run on the St. Johns River

Somehow, even though the boat was locked all night, the Birthday Bunny managed to sneak on and leave me two birthday cards!

There's a well-known riverside restaurant in Palatka (actually East Palatka), Corky Bell's at Gator Landing, that we considered stopping at for lunch. We thought being Saturday, the dock would be filled, but when we got there about 1:00 PM, there were only two jet skis and no other boats so we docked and went in. It's a very good seafood restaurant; we would recommend it to anyone passing through.

Apparently, most customers come by car, at least in the middle of the day.

After a leisurely and filling lunch, we got back on the river headed north. This is a long wide river at this point and the wind kicked up a fair chop. Rather than anchor where we anchored on the way up river or in an exposed cove, we headed for another well-known restaurant near Green Cove Springs where boaters who patronize the restaurant are allowed to spend the night at the dock. We didn't really need more food, but we needed somewhere to tie up so we pulled in, docked, and ate a light dinner. We are at the far end of the dock, away from the music and road noise. There's an alligator on the other side of the dock.

We should easily make it back to Ortega Landing Marina tomorrow for the remainder of our week's dockage. Swimming pool, hot tub, and laundry.

Captain's Log, day 20 (May 20, 2012)

We should have realized that by docking next to a restaurant/bar, there might have been some commotion later. Sure enough, at closing time, several boats zoomed by us at high speed with no running lights. They rocked us but no damage and we went back to sleep. First thing in the morning the jet skis arrived.

We got underway a little after 9:00 AM and just headed for Ortega Landing Marina. That took about four hours straight up the St. Johns River. For some reason, the dockhand who had promised to meet us at the dock didn't show up so we just docked the boat ourselves.

We connected the power rinsed the worst of the dirt and bugs off the boat, and headed for

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the pool and hot tub. Someone has to do it, right?

After that, a shower and change of clothes, and off to the mall for dinner.

Captain's Log, day 21 (May 21, 2012)

What can I say? Another tough day at the Ortega Landing Marina lounging in the pool and hot tub, and lying in the sun. I can't say enough about this place. Pool, hot tub, deck and chaise lounges, free laundry, free ice, gated access, and all for \$26.00 per day at the weekly rate.

We ate our leftovers from the German restaurant in Sanford and they were as good as the first day but without the entertainment. Patti is watching her TV show, "Dancing with the Stars" and I am surfing the net. Two weeks ago we were on "B" dock and I couldn't get the Fox station. This time we are on "A" dock, 25 yards away and it's clear as a bell. Go figure!



Ortega Landing Marina from the Ortega River

We're thinking of our friends back home, sitting in traffic, working, meeting deadlines, etc. We did it ourselves for many years. Your time is coming.

Captain's Log, day 22 (May 22, 2012)

We had one load of laundry so we put it in the washer and hit the pool and hot tub. Then it was lunch by the pool and take the clothes back to the boat and put them away. That wore us out so we fell asleep watching TV!

Later, we showered, dressed, and walked to the mall to return some items that didn't fit and eat dinner at Longhorn again. We took back two shirts and left with a different shirt, a swim suit, and a pair of shorts. When we got back to the marina we put our towels in the laundry and Patti settled in to watch "Dancing with the Stars" again.

Tomorrow, it's back to Publix for ice and a few more things then we'll head for Jacksonville Landing, a free dock with restaurants and stores. If all goes as planned, we'll spend the night, and then head for Fernandina Beach.

Captain's Log, day 23 (May 23, 2012)

Up bright and early at 7:00 AM, but by the time we walked to Publix for ice and other supplies, it was after 9:00 AM by the time we left Ortega Landing Marina. It's just a short trip to Jacksonville Landing so we were tied up at 10:00 AM or so. We checked out Jacksonville Landing and grabbed a light lunch. It's supposed to be an attraction with shops and restaurants and entertainment in the evenings. There are plenty of restaurants, but the shops leave a bit to be desired. Not much more than trinkets and T shirts.

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Jacksonville Landing, Jacksonville, Florida

While we were eating lunch we kept seeing a strange looking vehicle that appeared to be running back and forth across the Acosta Bridge. It looked like two busses back to back. We asked about it and found out it's the JTA Skyway, a sort of monorail similar to what is found at major airports.

We went back to the welcome center and got a map. We walked to the Skyway station and rode it to a station on the other side of the river and walked along the River Walk. We stopped at the River City Brewing Company and had another light lunch. We decided that it would be shorter to walk back across the river (OK, walk across the Main Street Bridge) than back to the Skyway station and from the other Skyway station to the boat so we did.



Jacksonville Main Street Bridge

If we've learned anything about this part of Florida, it's that they like their trains. We've had to have two railroad bridges opened twice ourselves and another one once. There's one just upriver from where we are docked, and it's up and down all day long. It was already up when we went through.



Jacksonville Railroad Drawbridge

As I was typing this, about 5:00 PM, a group of three ladies, speaking something other than English, walked down the dock, saw me through the window, and proceeded to step onto HIGH COTTON's swim platform to take pictures of each other. I guess customs are different wherever they are from. I figured it would be more trouble to shoo them off than to let them

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take their pictures and leave. They waved as they left.

We'll grab some dinner, get some sleep, and head north in the morning.

Captain's Log, day 24 (May 24, 2012)

First, an update on last evening. When we came back from lunch yesterday, we noticed a man, probably in his early twenties who appeared to be practicing yoga on the concrete gazebo that juts out behind where we had the boat tied. This didn't seem out of the ordinary as other people were power walking and jogging along the river front. He was sitting and standing in various positions and seemed to be chanting. He was still doing this when we left the boat for dinner three hours later.

We returned from dinner and he was still there, but had now progressed to pacing back and forth around the gazebo loudly preaching to no one in particular about black power, black on black crime, and the dangers of marijuana and other drugs. He didn't leave until after 10:00 PM and it had begun to rain.

After dinner, we climbed to the fly bridge of HIGH COTTON with our drinks to sit and enjoy the evening. A pair of females, probably twenty years old, wearing the most impossibly short skirts and high platform heels walked down the ramp to the dock and beside our boat. They asked if we were taking the boat out on the river. The one in the matching iridescent pink skirt and heels said it was her birthday and she had never been on a boat before.

We told her we were docked for the night and wouldn't be cruising the river and suggested that she ride the water taxi. They left, walked

to the gazebo, and joined two young males who had apparently been with them. Jacksonville Landing is an interesting place at night!

Acting on a tip from the Jacksonville welcome center, we decided to eat breakfast at the Skyline Restaurant. It's a cafeteria style restaurant open only for breakfast and lunch but it's on the 42nd floor of the Bank of America building with a view of most of Jacksonville. Breakfast for two was nine dollars and change but the view was priceless. HIGH COTTON looked like a bathtub toy from forty two floors in the air!



HIGH COTTON from the 42nd floor (at the arrow)

We got underway about 9:00 AM. A few miles from the turn onto the Intracoastal Waterway, a tug boat pushing a large barge left its pier headed down the St. Johns River bound for sea. It began to catch up with us and not wanting to have to deal with a passing situation involving a barge, I kicked the throttles up a bit and made the turn into the ICW before it caught up with us.

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Tug and barge on the St. Johns River

For some reason, several boats about the size of HIGH COTTON or larger entered the ICW at Sisters Creek about the same time we did. Of course, they were going faster than we were and the last ones in line wanted to go the fastest so it was quite a while before we all got sorted according to speed.



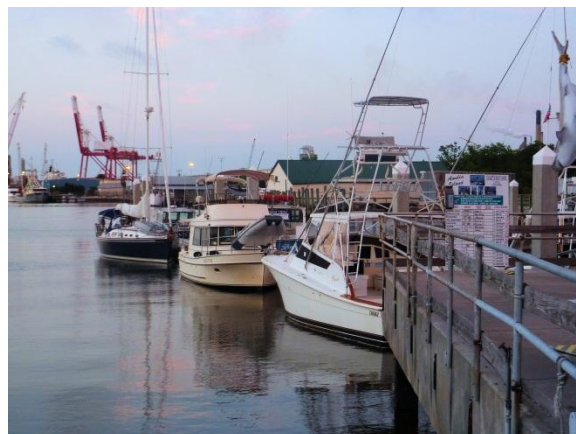
The ICW at Sisters Creek

We saw several pods of dolphins today and one manatee. Of course we slowed or stopped, especially for the manatee, but this one was shy and didn't want to play or be photographed like the one we saw at Cumberland Island.

We pulled into Fernadina Harbor Marina for fuel and a night's rest. As I was fueling the boat, a lady came up to me and spoke. She was

in one of the boats that had passed us near the St. Johns River. <http://fhmarina.com/>

Fernandina Beach is an easy walking town with lots of shops and restaurants. It's more of a resort town though, so the shops are either artsy or sell t-shirts and souvenirs.



HIGH COTTON at Fernandina Harbor Marina

We're heading out in a few minutes to find a restaurant, and then it's catch up on some sleep and head north tomorrow morning. We'll run six hours, more or less and look for an anchorage for the night.

Captain's Log, day 25 (May 25, 2012)

We got up about 8:00 AM intending to get an early start. We decided to hit the marina bathrooms before we headed out. As I was leaving the bathroom, Patti was standing near the dock pointing to a set of bubbles. "There's a manatee in the marina." she said. Sure enough, not one, but three manatees soon surfaced.

Since I don't usually bring my camera with me to the bathroom, I walked back to the boat and got it. When I got back, they were swimming in the marina and coming up to the docks to eat

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the vegetation growing on the floats. We got lots of photos and videos. Patti even “petted” one.



Manatees at Fernandina Harbor Marina

After thirty minutes or so, we decided we should get underway. We got a bag of ice, unhooked everything, and motored back onto the ICW.

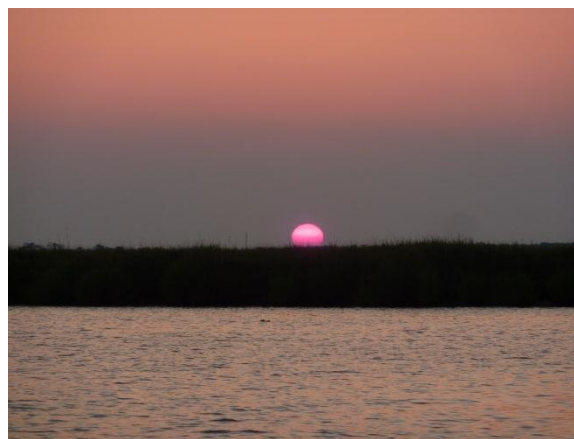
Passing Cumberland Island on the west side, we saw a wild horse grazing on the beach. We took some photos and motored on.



Wild horse grazing on Cumberland Island

As we were crossing St. Andrew Sound, the wind kicked up and the waves just about beat us to death. We were certainly glad to get that part of our trip over with. St. Andrew Sound has a bad reputation and now we know why.

We’re anchored tonight a few miles south of Altamaha Sound. The plan is to get underway early tomorrow and get that sound behind us before the wind kicks up again. But, there are several others we have to navigate. We’re watching the weather forecasts to see which way the approaching storm goes and what effect it will have on us. Hopefully if it gets bad, we can find a protected marina for a couple days.



Sunset on the Altamaha River

Captain’s Log, day 26 (May 26, 2012)

Wanting to hit the next sound early before the wind kicked up and wanting to get as far along as we could before the predicted tropical storm hit, we awoke at 6:00 AM and got underway a few minutes later. We hit some choppy water in the sounds but nothing as bad as yesterday.

We saw several pods of dolphins and something we had observed a few days ago in South Georgia – stingrays jumping out of the water and flipping. A web search reveals that it’s not uncommon but we had never seen or heard of this before. It’s hard to get a photo, they don’t give any warning but they make quite a sound if they are close to the boat.

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A few miles south of the Savannah River, we called Thunderbolt Marina but they could only guarantee us a slip for one night. The guy said "You do know there's a tropical storm headed this way, don't you?"

Anyway, we called Isle of Hope Marina and got a spot. We're ready for the storm if it comes, but there's not a lot to do here. They have a loaner car. If we're stuck here for long, maybe we'll go shopping! We ran for a little over nine hours today. It was time for a rest.

<http://www.iohmarina.com/>

Captain's Log, day 27 (May 27, 2012)

Well, discretion being the key word here, it looks like we'll be staying in Isle of Hope for a couple more days. It's a relatively protected location and we have electricity, water, showers and restrooms. Unfortunately, the cable TV system is in the process of being rewired so there's no cable and for some reason, pretty poor "over the air" reception even though we're just a few miles from Savannah, so there's not much to watch on TV.

They have free loaner cars so we took one and went to Sears to get a battery to replace the one that failed. Since we're going to be here a couple days, I might as well do something useful. Seventy five pounds of pure power! One of the zippers that holds the canvas cockpit cover on came apart so we took the cover down and put it away.

We helped a couple on our dock with a much larger boat than ours take their canvas down. The man is handicapped and their boat has an elevator! We also deflated Q-Tip and put it in the storage bag because it was bouncing around on the bow.

So far, the sun is shining brightly but it's far too windy to be on the water. The dockmaster told us that the Port of Savannah has been closed because of the storm.



Strong winds across the ICW from the Isle of Hope Marina

Tomorrow we'll get the car again and do some shopping.

Captain's Log, day 28 (May 28, 2012)

It rained a little last night but the wind never stopped. Rain started again about 8:30 AM and stopped an hour later. We took the loaner car and did some shopping at Wal-Mart and the mall. Patti got some new clothes. I didn't.

We stopped at a Mexican restaurant for lunch, then Piggly Wiggly for a few things.

It's unclear where the storm is going and what effect it will have on our trip. The marina gives a fourth day free after paying for three so we'll probably leave here Wednesday morning and see how far north we can get.

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Captain's Log, day 29 (May 29, 2012)

No sense boring anybody with today's activities. Got the car, went to a restaurant, came back and settled our bill. Hopefully, it will stop raining and blowing by tomorrow morning so we can get underway.

Captain's Log, day 30 (May 30, 2012)

Ok, up bright and early at 6:00 AM and underway about 6:30 AM. We left Isle of Hope, motored through Thunderbolt, then crossed the Savannah River. We found a couple very shallow spots as it was close to low tide.

As we passed Hilton Head just past the highway bridge, a guy in a forty five or so foot sport cruiser who had been at the Isle of Hope Marina the night before decided he needed to pass us in the narrow channel. Rather than contacting us on the radio and arranging a "slow pass" as is the custom on the ICW, he decided to just blow on by us. The resulting wake rearranged everything in the galley that wasn't fastened down. He had a jet ski following him jumping his wake.

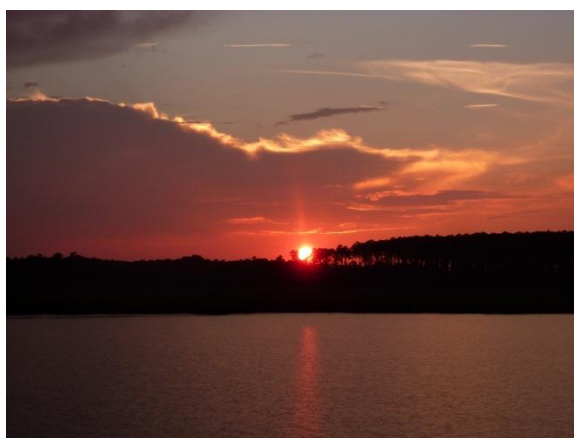
Crossing Port Royal Sound, something flew by the boat and almost hit me in the head. It turned out to be a small bird. The bird landed on the boat near the cockpit ladder and rode with us for several miles. At some point, it decided to take off on its own.



Our feathered passenger

The guy in the big sport cruiser apparently stopped for a while because we nearly caught up to him just before Beaufort. As he passed the first marina, the marina operator called him out on the radio for blowing by the marina with a big wake. The boat operator claimed there were no signs. There were signs.

We pulled into the Beaufort Downtown Marina, took on forty four gallons of fuel, and continued on our way. We decided to do the long Coosaw River run so we ended up anchoring in the same spot where we anchored on our first night.



Sunset on Rock Creek near the Ashepoo Coosaw Cutoff

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Dinner was steak, baked potatoes, and fresh green beans for dinner. Yum! All the flan is gone though.

We should be back to RiversEdge Thursday evening if all goes well. We're having fun but we miss our boat friends.

Captain's Log, day 31 (May 31, 2012)

With about a seven hour trip back to RiversEdge, we got underway about 9:00 AM. Along the way, we were overtaken by a faster boat the proper way. The captain called us on the radio and asked to make a slow pass on our port side. We agreed and slowed down to idle speed while he passed us as slowly as possible. We pulled into his wake as he returned to his cruising speed and we returned to ours.

A little later, we saw dolphins swimming and stopped to watch. There was a mother with a baby and they were darting back and forth. After a while they left and we resumed our journey. We passed another dolphin and he swam over and swam in our bow wave for a while.



You don't want to cut these markers too close at low tide

Exiting the Dawho River into the Wadmalaw River, we heard a thump and a chopping sound. I immediately cut the power and shifted to neutral. We looked behind us but saw nothing. I shifted back into gear and accelerated slowly back to cruising speed. There were no vibrations, no unusual sounds. Patti took the helm while I checked the bilge and shaft for damage or leaks. Nothing unusual. We can only guess we hit a partially submerged log or tree branch.

Entering Elliot Cut, we were fighting the tidal current. Our normal seven knots was reduced to under four knots near the Eastern end of the cut.

Since we were a couple hours early for slack current at RiversEdge we decided to dock at the Charleston Crab House for a late lunch/early dinner if the dock was accessible. We arrived just as two boats were leaving and we had a favorable current so we got a spot, docked, and went in, and ate. A couple in the restaurant complimented us on our docking performance. After thirty one days on the boat, it was pretty routine.

After our meal we motored slowly through Wappoo Creek and up the Ashley River towards home.

We arrived at RiversEdge Marina at 6:00 PM as planned where we were met by our friend, the lovely and talented Ms. Patty Lucarelli who caught our lines and later drove us home.

It was a fun trip but it was good to sleep in our bed on dry land for a change.

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Epilogue

Duration	31 days
Distance (round trip)	763 nautical miles (878 statute miles)
Time underway	128.2 hours
Fuel used (diesel)	239 gallons
Fuel consumption	1.87 gallons per hour
Fuel mileage	3.39 nautical mpg (3.67 statute mpg)
Fuel cost	\$1,006.00
Nights anchored	8
Nights docked	22

We've been asked if we would do a trip like this again. The answer is a definite "yes". We had a great time, saw lots of interesting sights and wildlife, including manatees, alligators, dolphins, turtles and many birds, and met some nice and interesting people along the way. Many of these people cruise for months at a time. Some live on their boats and have no land based residence.

Other than a failed starting battery which was only an inconvenience, we had no boat troubles. We did have to wait out a tropical storm south of Savannah but that was the only weather difficulty and it gave us the chance to replace the battery.

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 and marinas and read reviews of these places by other cruisers. Two of the resources we used were <https://activecaptain.com> and <http://cruisersnet.net>.

Other resources were:

Anchorage Along The Intracoastal Waterway (Skipper Bob Publications)

Marinas Along The Intracoastal Waterway (Skipper Bob Publications)

Dozier's Waterway Guide Atlantic ICW

Dozier's Waterway Guide Southern

Cruising Guide to Coastal South Carolina and Georgia (Claiborne Young)

Cruising Guide to Eastern Florida (Claiborne Young)

Boating and Cruising Guide to the St. Johns River (Tom Kranz)

Our neighbor kept our lawn mowed, brought in the mail and packages, and kept an eye on the house for us.

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.