

Background

We arrived at our home in Burnt Store Marina near Punta Gorda, FL on 1 April 2007 expecting to take it easy for a few weeks and then help some friends, new owners of an Island Packet 40, get their boat ready to move to the Chesapeake Bay. Before the owners arrived Lesley and I did a quick survey of the boat, both inside and out. From our perspective the boat needed quite a bit of work, specifically removal of old technology installed by the previous owners - DC system, refrigeration, AC system, etc. Installation of newer and more efficient systems had been discussed with the owners initially and again after they purchased the boat. Those things would have to wait; our goal now was to do some minor refitting, provision the boat, and help them move the boat to the Chesapeake Bay.

I checked out a few things on the boat to make sure that I had the materials necessary to install a 100-amp inverter/charger before departure. I also finished putting together a complete CDROM Boat System Manual for the owners use. I then started installing the new inverter/charger and quickly found the DC system on the boat was not well designed and was poorly installed. After installing and testing the new inverter on the existing battery bank I discovered that the batteries were shot. So now I had to do an unplanned battery replacement. After about a week of "9:00-5:00's" (it was like going to work again!) the battery upgrade was finished and tested - all systems go with a few minor glitches that the owners will have to sort out. I removed what seemed like miles of incorrectly sized and improperly installed wiring, two unneeded battery switches, and have things sorted out finally. Once I gave Lesley the "all clear", she and the owner's wife went shopping. Lesley spent several hours making a computer drawing of the boat's storage compartments and a spreadsheet for the wife to use when stowing the provisions. The wife decided halfway through the process that she would just put the food away and worry about the location inventory later.

Several days before departure we went for a test sail and I had several questions on the operation of the radar, autopilot, and GPS. I asked the owner if he could set them up and he said that he couldn't remember, "it's been 14 months since I've been on the boat." The owner made no effort to find out how to use anything or answer any questions so I did it as a matter of survival. I reset the B&G autopilot to work with the owner's notebook computer, found out how to display the route info on the radar, and figured out how to change the radar screen intensity so that it would not blind us at night.

Before casting off I also replaced the bilge strainer that was clogged and reset the Balmar alternator regulator to proper charge and float voltages.

For the purposes of this narrative I am going to call the boat owner Blue and his wife Pink.

The Trip

29 April 2006 - Departure from Burnt Store Marina: We departed the marina at approx 4:00 p.m. and anchored for the night off of Useppa Island, close to Boca Grande Pass, for an easy departure to the Dry Tortugas the next morning.

30 April 2006 – Enroute The Dry Tortugas: Departed Useppa Island at 10:00 a.m. Weighing anchor was quite a sight; Pink motored up over the anchor, motored back off the anchor, motored up over the anchor... Not sure what their routine was so we just watched. With the anchor finally up we headed out Boca Grande Pass into the Gulf of Mexico. Once clear of the channel and on our course for the Dry Tortugas we were able to sail or motor-sail until about 11:00 p.m. when the wind kicked up, gusting to 27 knots. We double reefed the main and set the staysail and were averaging about 5.1 knots. Seas continued to build to 5-7 feet on the port quarter as the night progressed. The owners had the 2:00-5:00 a.m. and 5:00-8:00 a.m. watches. With the wind dying and waves building, none of us got much sleep. I got up to check on our speed and saw that the SOG had dropped to below 3 knots so I asked Blue if he could get us back up to 5 knots so we could dampen the rolling motion and get to the Dry Tortugas before dark. That caused a bit of friction but the boat motion improved considerably. I got up again at 6:00 a.m. and made coffee using the newly installed inverter. It was interesting watching the coffee drip out of the grounds basket at about a 45-degree angle as we bounced back and forth; I had to hold the coffee pot and try to anticipate the rolling so that the coffee would make it into the pot!

1 May 2006 - Land Ho: We spotted Fort Jefferson about 7 miles out and it was a welcome sight. We anchored in 15 feet of crystal clear water and had a confrontation with Blue over placement of the anchor. We finally anchored and at about 10:00 a.m. went ashore to tour the Fort. Getting ashore in the dinghy was an experience, as Blue did not know how to drive or beach the dinghy. We returned to the boat and realized that we were nearly out of dinghy gas, which meant no more exploring. Blue made excuses and took the blame for not topping off the gas tank but made no effort to do anything about it! Later that afternoon/evening we talked about borrowing/buying a small amount of gas from a dive boat anchored near us but I decided to wait and see if Blue would take the initiative and try to rectify his mistake.

2 & 3 May 2006 - Marine Life in the Dry Tortugas: Woke up this morning and the dive boat, our potential source for dinghy gas, was gone! However, a catamaran had anchored nearby sometime during the night. Wanting to do some more exploring of the islands and knowing that Blue wouldn't do anything about the gas situation, I jumped into the dinghy and headed over to the catamaran. The two guys aboard the Cat, from Healdsburg and Redwood City, CA, understood our predicament and were happy to give us 3 gallons. Meanwhile aboard the boat Lesley discussed the importance of the dinghy and gas with Blue. Her comments must have been brutal the way he raised his voice and shook his finger in her face! Oh well, he'll get over it.

Birds everywhere! Flocks of birds of all types were nesting on Bush Key. Several large fish too, including a 5-foot barracuda that stayed by the boat while I fed it meat scraps. I think I also saw a small shark cruise under the boat. Lesley and gang snorkeled near some old pilings at Fort Jefferson and saw large tuna, another big barracuda, and a nurse shark. I stayed in the dinghy and saw a small ray blast out of the water. We headed back to the boat to run the

refrigeration system. The system onboard is so inadequate that the engine has to be run several hours each day to keep our food frozen/cold; what a pain. To top it off the fridge freezes everything stored near the bottom!

4-6 May 2006 - Key West: Arrived Key West and stayed overnight at Conch Harbor Marina. Arrival was dicey as Pink was at the helm and the slip that we were going into was quite tight. We managed to get the boat backed in (team driving) and then were told that there were no finger piers. No way to get off the boat as the arch and dinghy blocked the stern. We pulled out and turned around and re-parked the boat. Had a couple of cold Guinness drafts, showered, and did laundry. The Guinness did me in, gout got my big toe again, but after taking 4 doses of colchicine I was fine and could walk again. The next morning we got up and Lesley and I made a quick tour of shops near the marina. We found a small, very nicely stocked market so bought several things we needed and returned to the boat to put things away. Since the marina fees included use of the hotel amenities, we went to the dockside pool and Lesley swam while I ordered Mother's Day flowers and wrote out post cards. We had a nice lunch, cracked conch and grouper fingers, before leaving the marina for the anchorage near Wisteria Island. After fueling up and leaving the marina I noticed that the bilge pump was running every few minutes. A quick check of the packing gland revealed the dripless seal had come apart and was leaking badly. Blue made several frantic calls to local service facilities looking for somewhere to haul the boat and have the seal repaired. He found someone who talked me through the process and I was able to readjust the seal and stop the leak. We now have a dry bilge but we continue to have an unusual vibration above 2400 rpm. As we anchored I noticed that Blue did not know how to release the clutch on the manual windlass so I showed him how. Not sure what is going on but Blue and Pink are acting very unusual. Spent most of the day of the 6th ashore sightseeing, mailed some postcards, and had lunch at Sloppy Joe's.

7 May 2006 - On our Way to Marathon: Blue slipped and fell on the bowsprit as he was bringing up the anchor; he seems OK but hit his chest very hard. The Bow thruster is not working. I checked main power and verified that relays are functioning. We were underway with steep waves and wind on the nose until we cleared the channel. I had a hard time explaining to Pink the effects of opposing wind/current and set and drift. Had they taken a coastal navigation class as we recommended when we visited them last winter, this and every other discussion we've had with them since leaving Burnt Store would have been unnecessary. Jib up and we motor-sailed to Marathon. I plotted a course from Marathon to Savannah using best guess for Gulf Stream location and will refine once we get Jennifer Clark's route information. During the trip to Marathon we had a real heavy smoke/haze that we think is from burning the sugar cane fields in Cuba.

8 May 2006 - Marathon: Verified that the bow thruster motor turns and also turns the prop. I called Vetus in MD and confirmed that the solenoid pack is bad. Blue ordered a new one for shipment to Savannah, GA. With a minimum of a 60-hour passage to Savannah and no discussion of what we would eat enroute, Lesley told me to get the Pink and Blue off the boat long enough for us to cook a few meals. Since they still don't comprehend the basics of cruising, I forced the issue by taking them ashore and dropping them off. I told them where to find the grocery store, buy whatever we need, and call me on the cell phone when they were ready for me to pick them up. Lesley and I had enough time to make pot roast and porcupine meatballs to eat while offshore in the Gulf Stream. Pink and Blue were both quite grumpy, hot,

and tired when they returned to the boat. In the evening Blue managed to destroy his cell phone. He had shorted the data port plug when he tried to plug it in backwards and then threw the phone and a tantrum. I was fed up with his attitude so confronted him and told him that I had had enough and that I was tired of his mood swings and negative attitude. I explained to him again that he was not finished buying and fixing things on his boat, that he is still re-commissioning the boat and that many of the systems will have to be replaced. I learned at this point that both of them had recently had Lasic eye surgery but were too vain to wear reading glasses. Blue can't see anything up close including a chart without reading glasses!

9 May 2006 - Leaving Marathon: Blues' email account is so clogged with junk mail that he was unable to retrieve the Gulf Stream routing and weather report from Jennifer. I used our cell phone/PC and sent an email to Jennifer explaining the situation and asked her to send me the info. About 30 minutes later we got the routing info and Lesley started converting waypoints to degrees/minutes/10ths of minutes and we modified the route I did a few days ago. As we made final preparations for the trip offshore, I told Blue we needed to take the outboard off the dinghy and secure it to the rail mount since we wouldn't be using it and to remove excess weight from the arch davits in case it got rough in the Gulf Stream. He insisted on leaving the outboard on the dinghy. The trip to the fuel dock on our way out was dicey. Pink wanted to hug the left side of the channel going in and she forced several boats around us. She attempted an approach to the fuel dock but was unable to do it without the bow thruster so I took the helm. Our trip from here to the first waypoint in the Gulf Stream was uneventful.

10 May 2006 - Gulf Stream: The Gulf Stream gave us 2-3 knots of current but large thunderstorms were headed our way. I plotted the storms on radar and saw that our course and speed were putting us directly in their path. We came about in the stream and maintained approx 2 knots SOG heading south. After about 45 minutes of fireworks most of the storms blew past us. We asked Blue to get the lee cloths so we could rig them and he said they didn't have any. Why am I not surprised? Although the aft cabin is noisy when the engine is running, getting any rest in the forward cabin in rough conditions is impossible, and with no lee cloths Pink and Blue spent the night rolling around on the salon floor, along with all of the gear they chose not to stow. It was quite a sight! Without adequate tie-down straps and with the extra weight from the outboard, the dinghy was swinging on the davits. I thought we might have to cut it loose but I cinched up the lines that I had used to tie it down. I also noticed that we are taking on a small amount of water that appears to be coming down either of the bilge pump hoses with following seas.

11 May - While still outside the 12-mile limit Blue pumped out the holding tank and the smell followed us on and off until we anchored. Something is wrong in the plumbing, but Blue is definitely not in the mood to discuss it! Sixty-two hours after leaving Marathon we arrived at the mouth of the Wilmington River. Eased our way in as some of the marks are unlit or missing, and anchored at about 11:45 p.m.

12 May 2006 - Arrived Thunderbolt, GA: Pink was at the helm and the current was pushing us out of the channel and onto a mega yacht as we approached the marina. I explained set/drift yet again and she managed to tie up to the face dock at Thunderbolt Marina. We plugged in to shore power and the air conditioner ran for a minute then quit. Lesley told Blue but he was not interested as he was busy washing the boat. Lesley referred to the digital manual that I made

and determined that we had an HP freon error, i.e. no water flow. I cleaned the strainer, which looked like it had never been cleaned, and then reprimed the AC RW pump. Restarted the AC and it worked fine. The owners rushed to finish washing the boat, took showers, and left to visit friends ashore. Lesley and I decided to grill steaks for dinner and enjoy some quiet time alone. When I went up to hook up the grill I noticed that we had lost the gas venturi overboard so we broiled the steaks in the oven, YUCK. We began to talk about mutiny at this point.

13-15 May 2006 - Thunderbolt, GA: I replaced the solenoid pack and fixed the bow thruster. I also repaired the fire extinguisher status lamp with a LED unit and rewired it. We can now tell that the extinguisher is OK. The foul smell from the plumbing is still hanging around and was so bad that we decided to leave the boat open instead of running the AC.

16 May 2006 - Departure from Thunderbolt, GA: I kept stressing the need for the Pink and Blue to start learning weather and navigation. The ride up the River was so scary for me that I could not stay on deck when we left. Pink wanted to discuss departure from the dock and I had a hard time explaining the process as she still does not understand the boats movements. On the way to the fuel dock I asked how much fuel we needed to take on and discovered that they had not entered any info in their log since Key West so they had no idea how much fuel we'd used. Lesley found what appeared to be engine hour readings and did the calculation for them. Blue was very pissy and eager to correct Pink whenever she made a mistake. We departed Thunderbolt and as usual, no guidebook or chart in the cockpit and I thought for sure we were going aground more than once. At a split in the ICW I went down and got the chart and told Blue to navigate. Once we were offshore I put the cruising chute up and then showed Blue how to take it down without messing with the main. Whenever the sails were up and engine off, Blue made comments about how this is the way cruising is supposed to be. I had to remind him that when you are making a delivery you have to maintain suitable boat speed. I cooked again, bratwurst, fried potatoes etc., and Pink did dishes. We drew up a new 2-hour watch schedule and drew straws: Blue, Lesley, Bobby, and Pink. We should be in Charleston by 8:00 a.m. tomorrow.

17-19 May 2006 - Charleston, SC: Pink stayed right in the middle of the shipping channel all the way into Charleston Harbor. As we approached the 56-foot bridge on the Ashley River Blue asked me what his mast clearance was. I told him to check his manual! As we turned into a fairway on the inside of the face dock, Lesley and I decided to stand by if needed but to let the two of them get the boat in and tied up. Pink continues to have problems with currents so I had to talk her through it again. Blue still doesn't know how to tie the bow line to a cleat!!! As we finished securing the lines one of the marina staff said something to the Blue and he replied, "it's my boat but I'm not in charge." It's obvious to us now that our assistance is not appreciated but is now openly resented.

As was our stay in Thunderbolt, Pink and Blue were more interested in talking with or visiting friends and reading email than in checking weather or doing route planning or meal prep. Since Pink never updated the provision spreadsheet Lesley started for her, she's the only one who has a clue where some items are located. Lesley couldn't find rice for our dinner aboard – Pink and Blue are going out with friends again - so Lesley enlisted the unwilling help of Pink in locating it. On the 18th Pink announced that she was out of cell phone minutes so could no longer check weather. Lesley reminded her that she could wait until her "free" minutes, i.e., after 9:00 p.m., but she said that was past her bedtime and she wasn't going to stay up late to download

weather. It's not like she'd been getting the right forecasts anyway. We had been getting the daily offshore and coastal weather as a matter of survival. They did find a WIFI hot spot and downloaded weather - the wrong weather again - local NBC TV weather for Charleston and vicinity! I explained again about the NOAA web site and the weather regions that NOAA provides forecasts for. I had planned to cook something for our upcoming overnight and decided to let it ride and see what happens. We have some leftover cutlets that Lesley made a few nights ago that we can serve but want to see what happens tonight at dinnertime.

19 May 2006 - Offshore: We left Charleston at 1:30 p.m. and cleared the channel enroute to Bald Head Island. We started off by raising the jib and then trying to get the main up. Pink could not hold the bow into the wind so we struggled to get the main sail up. I was worn out trying to winch up the main until Lesley took the helm and got the bow into the wind. Pink and Blue cooked dinner, hamburger steaks and instant mashed potatoes. The night was uneventful except for the stuff from the forward cabin, a guitar, new TV, cushions, all ended up strewn about the salon. As usual, another discussion over SOG, time enroute, engine speed ensued. I relieved Lesley at 7:00 a.m. on 20 May while she went below to make coffee. Pink and Blue both still asleep. We raised the jib and motor-sailed for about 2 hours in light rain until we approached the Cape Fear channel. We dropped the jib and turned up into the channel with about 2 knots of current on the nose. As we discussed whether we should wake Pink up for the rest of her watch, the winds and rain picked up. I increased the engine speed up to 2200 RPM to maintain 4 knots and Blue stepped through the companionway and directed, "no more that 2200 RPM!" I told him that he was now at the helm and that a fishing boat and a tug pulling a barge were on our stern, then Lesley and I went below. Blue made a comment about his engine/prop problem and what IP and someone in Thunderbolt had told him, which he chose not to share with us at any time during the trip. As we approached Bald Head Island the wind picked up to 30 knots and it started hailing. Lesley said "there's no way they can get this boat to the dock in these conditions by themselves," so we put on our foul weather gear. Lesley glanced out the window and saw the tug pass dangerously close at about the same time I heard the tug captain hail us on the radio. I was prepared to come on deck if necessary when Blue yelled down to us that they needed help on deck. I asked him what help he wanted. He got red faced and said he needed help on deck. I again asked him what help he needed and he said, "Don't make me get ugly! Ask Pink - she's the skipper!" This blew my mind and I confronted him and told him that this was not a game. I came on deck and asked Pink if she had contacted the dock master. She said she had and I asked her if we were going in port or starboard to. She said she couldn't understand the dock master's instructions, so I called the dock master and clarified that it was going to be a port side tie up. About this time Pink completely missed the harbor entrance and I had to get her to turn back to the entrance. Things went downhill quickly. I asked the Blue which slip they were assigned and he said 05. Lesley asked which dock and no one seemed to know so I called the dock master again. Just as the dockmaster said "F5," Lesley noticed a piece of paper next to the companionway hatch that had "F5" written on it! Lesley rigged the bow line, I had the spring line, and Blue was at the stern. Bow thruster and engine galore as we approached the slip. I stepped onto the dock, took the bow line from Lesley and secured it and the spring line. I turned to take the stern line from Blue who was still aboard (I thought) and he was standing on the dock with both ends of the stern line in his hands. I tossed one end of the line to Pink and told her to cleat it but she didn't know how. Lesley grabbed the line and put it on the cleat. After securing the boat Lesley and I took a walk to check out the marina grounds and get away from the boat and owners. The atmosphere on the boat is now intolerable; we don't just feel uncomfortable, we

feel unwelcome. Blue continues to make snide comments on just about everything, usually when I'm not around or in a low enough voice that Lesley can hear them but I can't. When Pink, for the first time in 3 weeks, asked Blue about a route on the computer, he said, "you'll have to ask Bobby, I haven't been allowed to do a route." Lesley was so upset she stomped off without a word to anyone! She came back, we talked, and decided that we had had enough and would part company with the owners at our next stop - Beaufort, NC. We told the owner's that we would be leaving the boat and went ashore and had a nice dinner at the marina restaurant, returned to the boat, closed the door to our cabin, and went to sleep.

22 May - The End is in Sight - Beaufort, NC: After some awkward discussion about weather and best departure time, we left just after noon. Despite the fact that our projected arrival time in Beaufort had us missing the forecasted evening thunderstorms, Blue really resents anyone else making decisions. Pink was at the helm as we started up the Beaufort channel and we had yet another discussion about set and drift. The autopilot was steering the boat up the channel but she thought we were going to run aground on a shoal so she took the autopilot off and tried to hand steer the boat. We almost ran aground on the opposite shore. We finally made the approach to the Beaufort town docks and Pink nearly ran aground on the way in. The dockmaster asked Blue whether he wanted to take up the slack on his end of the lines but he didn't answer for whatever reason. At this point Lesley and I don't care anymore. We had a rental car reserved and had a pick up scheduled for late morning. We rounded up all of our personal gear so that we could get off the boat as soon as I got the car. For the first time on this trip Blue took an interest in route planning and started trying to enter routes to get from Beaufort to Rock Hall, MD. Blue has owned the computer and navigation software for about 2 years but this appears to be the first time he has tried to use it. I had to provide quite a bit of over-the-shoulder help, but after yesterday's comment in Lesley's presence, I REFUSED to do any more routes for them. The rental car company called and said they were in the parking lot so I prepared to leave. Blue said that he would finish route planning when I returned and I told him that Lesley could help him. He started to argue and Lesley told him he either accepted her help or he could do without, that we were leaving as soon as I returned with the car. I got back to the boat about an hour later and Lesley had helped him finish his routes, provided pointers on stops along the way, and gave them some last minute info. We loaded the car in a flash and said goodbye to them. They never did ask us why we were leaving or apologize for the way they had acted or treated us. We left the marina and had not gotten more than 5 minutes from the boat on our way to a hotel when we got a call from Blue saying that he had crashed his computer and needed my help. When we went back to fix the computer they weren't even on the boat; they got back just as we were leaving. I told him what I did to fix the computer and we parted company for good.