

**Broken centerboard?
No problem for Wayfarer cruisers in Florida**
By Charles Child

Thirteen Wayfarer sailors enjoyed a healthy dose of the real Florida -- sun, sand and wind -- on a two-day cruise to undeveloped Cayo Costa State Park on the Gulf coast in early February.

We wrestled with a few difficulties -- a broken centerboard, 30 mph winds forecast for our final day and sand fleas. But no matter. The beaches, energetic sailing, camaraderie and superb stargazing created an outstanding trip.

Our destination

Cayo Costa State Park occupies a barrier island about 30 miles west of Fort Myers. The island itself is about eight miles from the mainland. It's far enough south to feel part of the Caribbean -- long sandy beaches, scrubby trees and bright skies.

The only way to get to the park is by boat. So the island has only a handful of vehicles used by state park staffers. The park is quiet and natural. Birds create more noise than cars.

Pelicans were the stars of the show. At the Pineland Marina, where we departed from the mainland, about two dozen pelicans begged for scraps from the fish-cleaning table. At the state park's small marina, they dove for fish as boats came and went.

A pair of osprey were nesting on the roof of the Pineland Marina. I enjoyed a bird-watching first for me: seeing an osprey and a bald eagle at the same time. The osprey was clearly not enjoying the experience.

Lodging at the state park

Let's tell it like it is: The lodging was basic -- huts with bunk beds and mattresses. But when you are roughing it, what more do you need? Also, the bathroom huts had flush toilets, sinks with running water and cold showers. Luxury!

The huts were about a 20-minute walk from the marina. Fortunately, state park volunteers operated a tram back and forth from the marina and the huts. The tram hauled us and our camping gear to the huts. More luxury!

We gathered for potluck dinners at the Heffernans' cabin. After dinner, stargazing free of urban lights was a rare treat for most of us. The only annoyance: hungry sand fleas that attacked our ankles.

The sailing

Our group of six Wayfarers and a safety boat arrived late morning on Tuesday, Feb. 2, after a four-hour drive from Lake Eustis, Fla, the site of the U.S. national races during the previous weekend.

The cruise organizers, Jim and Linda, sailed together. Al Schonborn singlehanded his boat and I sailed with John Cadman. The other pairs were Phil and Cathy Leonard, Ken Butler and Patty Kuntz, and AnnMarie Covington and Tom Goldsmith. Dave and Jane Hepting kindly joined us in a motorboat for safety.

We launched after lunch and enjoyed a quiet sail in light winds out to Cayo Costa. Navigation was straightforward. The marked channel from the marina pointed us in the right direction. And after two miles or so between small islands, we picked up the channel into the park's marina. The only tricky part was shallow water. Our centerboard bumped sandy bottom a couple of times.



Tuesday's light air provided a quiet sail in Pines Sound.

The marina had slips available for four Wayfarers and the safety boat. We hauled two boats onto a sandy beach adjacent to the marina.

On Wednesday, we got out on the water mid-morning with a plan to sail about five miles to the town of Bokeelia for lunch. But the wind picked up more than we expected, gusting to about 20 mph. So to stay comfortable, we tacked back and forth in a protected area outside the marina. We knocked off for the day at lunchtime for an afternoon of napping, beachcombing, hiking and swimming.

On Thursday, we wanted again to sail to Bokeelia for lunch but the weatherman intervened. We had planned to leave Cayo Costa on Friday to go home. But on Thursday morning, the Friday forecast called for 25 mph winds with gusts to 30. We decided that was too much. So we agreed to leave Thursday instead.

The sail back was glorious -- mostly close and beam reaches in steady 18-20 mph winds. We docked at the marina shortly after lunchtime.



John Cadman and Charles Child and Phil and Cathy Leonard reef sails for Thursday's sail to mainland.

The broken centerboard

Ken Butler won the cruise's seamanship award. Early in the final day's five-mile sail back to the starting marina, the centerboard on Patty Kuntz's Wayfarer, Green Side Up, broke cleanly in two. Little if any board remained below the waterline. See picture.

Actually, the centerboard was the day's second equipment snafu. After leaving the dock, Ken noticed that the starboard shroud had come off the deck plate. "I tacked back to port and Pat secured the shroud," Ken said later. "The turnbuckle was still there. Reattaching the turnbuckle, Pat used the hook on a bungee through the eye of the turnbuckle to torque down the turnbuckle. A great job by Pat. Had she not been able to secure the turnbuckle, plan B may have been the spinnaker halyard. But I sure am glad we did not need plan B."

With the shroud reattached, but with a broken centerboard, Ken helmed the boat the five miles back to the starting marina, mainly to windward, in 20 mph breeze with gusts to 25.

"Ken noted that we needed some jib shortly into the sail," said Patty. "I went onto the deck and unfurled about half of it, and we seemed to be OK, but then when we steered to the channel we had difficulty completing our tacks. I had to lean over to the leeward side to help the boat around. Ken was just terrific as things got worse."

Added Ken: "What I recall on helm was having zero ability to do a normal tack. The boat would head up

and stop, in irons. So I let her back up in the direction needed to complete the tack.

For Ken, the last 10 feet to the dock at the marina was particularly thorny. Those of us on shore could see Ken approach the dock and sweep the tiller to leeward -- to no avail. He just kept sliding sideways.

"As we approached the marina there were yells, 'Put the board down.'" Patty said later. "We yelled back, 'It is down!' At one point we slid into the mangroves, made it back to the marina but still could not land a slip."

Finally, Ken was able to slide the boat into the shallow end of the launch ramp, where he jumped out to stop the boat -- and to high-five folks waiting to lend a hand.

Later, preparing the boat for the trailer, Patty could see that most of the centerboard was gone.

"I was very happy to be tied up at the dock when I saw that," she said.



Safely back at LESC the new centerboard is installed in Pat's boat. Ken holds what remains of the broken board and Pat holds the new carbon board that she already owned!

Our favorite parts of the cruise

Cathy Leonard, Greensboro, North Carolina:

"Lows in the 60's, highs in the 80's, in February! New friends, new recipes, new scenery. Birds that swim underwater only showing their heads. Moss in trees. A glimpse into the world of retirees."

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Jane Hepting, Leesburg, Florida:

"I was amazed at Ken being able to sail to windward back to the dock at the launch ramp, after the centerboard broke off on Pat's boat, which he was helming."



John Cadman and Charles Child on Thursday in protected waters off Cayo Costa.

Charles Child, Ann Arbor, Michigan:

"The final sail back to the mainland. The winds were brisk at 18-20 mph but very steady. I sail on a small lake in southeast Michigan plagued by shifty winds. So a steady sea breeze is a glorious thing. My skipper, John Cadman, was unruffled by the gusts to 25 mph, and we blasted back to the marina, soaked by the spray but very happy."

Honorable mention: "The stars. After the potluck dinners, my companions joked that I was snoozing on a bench near the campfire. But I really was star-gazing -- well, most of the time anyway."



Patty Kuntz, Mt. Dora, Florida

"When Ken pointed out the porpoises on the bow wave of Green Side Up, and then to have one submerge and come up on the port side of the boat. Enchanting."

Pictured below are Jane and Dave Hepting in their power boats that served as a safety boat on the Cayo Costa Cruise. Dave created the Fortnight in February schedule that had Wayfarer sailors racing and cruising for 17 days at Lake Eustis and in the Gulf.



Dave Hepting, Pat Kuntz and Ken Butler admire the Wayfarers docked in a row after a lunch time sail across Lake Eustis on Monday after the Midwinters.
Photo: Al Schonborn



Dave Hepting leading the Wayfarers, mostly solo handed, in Race 1 of the George Washington Birthday Regatta.
Photo: Randall Moring