

I began my Wednesday with a treat: the cold pizza from the night before. I took off into the beautiful morning, already warm enough for me to remove my jacket. I rode the long bridge over the Caloosahatchee River which put me in Ft. Myers. There I came upon the attractive yacht basin and parks along the waterfront. I walked around the



area looking at the flowers, mangroves and a statue of Edison, Ford and Firestone. Edison had a place here and Ford liked it so much that he built one next to it. Their mansions now attract tourists.

Leaving that area I followed a convoluted but rational route through the city as delineated by the Adventure Cycling map I bought via the web last fall. At first it wound through a scenic older area with modest homes exceptionally well

cared for and landscaped. They can't make a city bicycle friendly but they can tell you the best route. Despite the heavy traffic in the area the route was pretty comfortable. Much of it consisted of a narrow separate bike path that ran along the main drag of Summerlin. About ten I made it to La Quinta, the room I had chosen just because it was cheap. The location seemed great and it looked like a nice place. For the nonce I couldn't check in but they were happy to me leave my excess baggage.



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My load lighter I headed toward Sanibel but remembered that my camera battery needed to be charged. I went to Subway where the clerk cheerfully agreed with my request. So I had a sandwich, and bottomless drink while I read yesterday's New York Times and solved my most pressing problem: the low battery.

When the battery and I were both recharged I took off toward Sanibel Island via a magnificent causeway some five miles long. Cars pay \$2.00 but bikes cross free. On a beach area between bridges I saw an osprey eating a fish. The magnificent ride across the causeway could have on its own made for a successful day. I rolled into Sanibel Island and the cheerful Chamber of Commerce office with its multi-colored building, flowers and tropical vegetation. As I walked in to get a map I passed a sign which read: "Please wipe snow from shoes before entering building." Like the flowers and 80 degree temperature, it made the traveler from the north feel glad to be here.



A friendly man gave me a couple of maps showing the roads and the associated bike routes covering much of the island. In particular he directed me to the “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge. I passed quite a few bike riders as I made my way down the island. That itself is novel for me as about the only cyclists I see in Florence are the poor who ride with long pants on the wrong side of the road. After some enjoyable exploring of the island I paid my dollar and entered the Ding

Darling NWR. I started out on a one-way asphalt road shared with an occasional slow moving car. At the first opening in the vegetation I looked across a lagoon full of waiting birds. Just off the far shore I could see a raccoon enter the water and start feeling in the mud for crustaceans I presume. Her three young stood in the mangrove roots on the waters edge intently watching. Further down the road I was looking at the various herons and egrets when I caught a flash of pink. There was a roseate spoonbill digging in the mud with its distinctive beak. At another opening I saw a man looking at an anhinga spreading its wings in the sun.

Leaving the paved road I followed a two-mile trail back to the education center. It traveled on a nice firm path of sand and sea shells. Mangroves, sea grapes and gumbo limbo trees lined the route. . The sea grape tree has round leaves and fruits that grow in a bunch resembling grapes. People make jam out of them and they provide an important food source for wildlife. The gumbo limbo tree has a thin outer layer of bark that peels off, like a birch leaving a dark red, shiny bark underneath. For its resemblance to peeling skin the locals call it the tourist tree



Speaking of food, I had been snacking but it was now almost 2 pm and time for food and rest. Happily I found Sanibel Bean the perfect place for rest and refreshment. They had a varied menu and a nice screened porch area with colorful wooden tables and free wi-fi. My hotel also had free wi-fi though there was some confusion. I asked the Indian lady who checked me in if they had wi-fi and she said no only wireless. Of course, that’s what wi-fi is. Anyway it worked fine. I had soup and a bagel as I developed my pictures and

checked e-mail. I had one note from my mother's friend Bill saying that it had been snowing all day and the high was about 18 degrees. It seemed surreal as I sat there



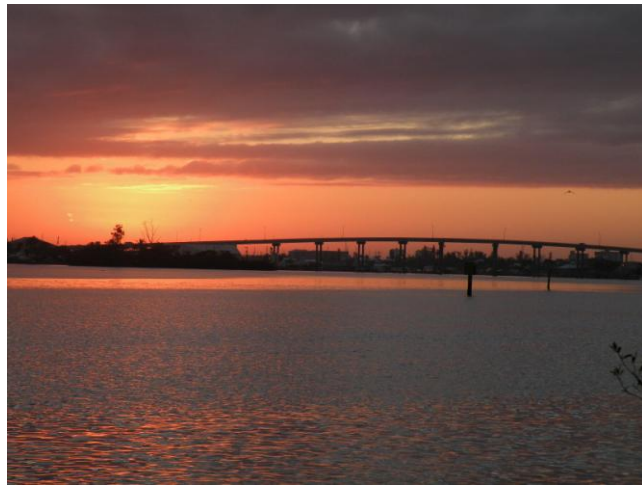
grateful for the break the shade provided from the hot sun. One of the best things about vacation is the freedom from time pressure. I tarried quite a while in that pleasant atmosphere working on this narrative, before pushing back to La Quinta.

They have big signs on Sanibel saying it is a Florida law that cars have to yield to bikes and pedestrians and that it is an \$80 fine for failure to do so. Crossing the

road on the bike trail is weird because cars really do stop. I almost felt guilty. I made my way back over the causeway and climbed the bridge. I was getting tired but still loved the experience.

I checked into my room relishing the hot shower and nap before Chinese food next door and a phone call from Paula. I read a little while but was too tired and relaxed to stay awake long.

The next morning I enjoyed a full breakfast of waffles, juice, fruit, oatmeal and coffee free with my luxurious \$32.99 room. I'd have considered it a bargain at the current rate of \$65 but had gotten it at a fire sale price over the Internet. The location was superb and I had less than



5 miles to ride to Salty Sam's Marina to catch my boat to Key West. I had a grand time riding in full darkness, my little lights flashing, along the bike route. I flushed one big bird that I couldn't really see or hear as I rode alongside a ditch.

I got to the marina way early so had time to ride over the bridge and explore the beach area. I found my way to Bowditch Point Park where I explored a little path. It led to a secret place in the mangroves with a view of the bridge as the sun rose. I'm working



again on this tale now on board the Big Cat Express. In an example taken from the airlines we had to show a picture ID and board at least 30 minutes before departure. Sitting on the top deck could hardly have been a more pleasant place to spend thirty minutes. It was almost too hot in the sun. As soon as we got underway it immediately cooled and then turned to a gale as this is one fast boat. As we left the harbor I got a nice view of the secret spot where I had watched the sun rise. We also passed south of

the causeway to Sanibel Island. After a while the view ceased to change so I started developing pictures and writing over a cup of coffee. After three and ½ hours I saw some islands in the distance and we arrived at Key West. I enjoyed seeing the waterfront from the water side for a change.

We joined an ocean liner already moored at the other end of the harbor. The crew asked me to wait to disembark and then opened a special gate just for me. I pedaled out onto the street and was off on my next adventure. I decided to start without a map or destination. I knew nothing of Key West other than the name of Duval Street and that Hemmingway lived here. By chance I came upon the Truman Annex, an exclusive little area of pretty homes and the museum at the Little White House, Truman's presidential getaway. The street then let me to a quay where I rode out next to the water. I expected signs saying no bikes, but in a pattern to be frequently repeated it barred only cars. From that point I was able to look out at the islands I had seen on the way in. Perhaps they are the Dry Tortugas, a national park. I could also see the impossible large ocean liner with its life boats and incongruously, a fake rock climbing wall.

Next I came upon Zachary Taylor Fort and paid my \$1.50 to pedal in. The fort, completed just before the civil war, was occupied immediately by the union and never attacked. A bike trail of a common sand/shell mixture led around the fort and to the seaside where picnic tables sat under palm and other trees. I stopped there for a water and bagel break before continuing my exploration of Key West.

