

After my tour of Ft. Taylor I continued my random wanderings on the intriguing streets of Key West. Cars abounded as they always do but the lack of parking encourages other transport. In addition to pedestrians bicycle riders seem to be everywhere. Half of them ride rented bikes and seem pretty clueless about traffic and the like. Others rent motor



scooters or exotic gulf carts. The congestion slows traffic and makes it quite enjoyable to get around by bicycle. As I began to think about lunch I passed a variety of inviting cafes and got a craving for a wrap. I came upon the Southernmost Café next to the Southernmost hotel and across the street from the Southernmost House. I sat on the last bit of land in the continental U.S. looking out under palms trees, across the sand as pelicans dove in the surf. My chicken Caesar salad wrap tasted

superb. I sat on the edge of the porch in partial sun which would have been too hot but for the pleasant breeze.

I didn't have any trouble finding my hotel but it could have been differently. The Comfort Inn sits on North Roosevelt Blvd. which is also Route 1. It runs up the gulf side of the island and has a bike lane along the water most of the way. South Roosevelt, on the other hand, runs along the Atlantic side and is called route A1A. So the two Roosevelts parallel each other. I checked in and used the internet to make a reservation for two days away. I had been worried because it would Saturday and Marathon Key has limited accommodations.

Friday, for the first time I didn't have to pack up as I was staying two nights in the same place. Before breakfast, I went for a ride along the Atlantic side on south Roosevelt. I was surprised at the number of cyclists, joggers and walkers out that early. After breakfast I rode to Stock Key just north of the hotel. On the west side of route 1 Stock Key consisted of middle class homes and some schools, government offices and a hill, manmade for solid waste disposal. I had seen it from the boat and assumed that was the most likely explanation for a hill around here; the countless birds flying overhead confirmed it. East of route 1 housed the less fortunate. Tired single-wide trailers were crammed together and their tiny lots had more junk than



landscaping. I also found a couple of huge boat storage areas and a lobster company where men made wooden lobster and crab pots by hand. That struck me as odd because Maine has gone almost entirely from wood to wire pots, and I didn't even know they fished for lobster in Florida. Hundreds of traps sat in rectangular piles and buoys in pyramids.



I spent the afternoon exploring dead end streets and alleys in the old part of Key West. I found little hidden beaches, scattered art and tiny rundown houses next to multi-million dollar luxury hotels. About 11 I saw a sign for baked ziti and around noon I found my way back there for lunch open to the port area. At one point I rode out onto a pier as an ocean liner was entering the

harbor. The crowds standing along the railing seemed eager to explore Key West. I visited the obligatory tourist sights like Hemingway's house, Truman's little white house and the old light house.

The next morning I was waiting when they opened the breakfast room and on the road at 7:09. I faced a long ride straight into the wind all the way so I wanted an early start. A lovely day dawned as I pedaled along not even needing a jacket to start. The route alternated between separate bike paths which traveled on the old bridges and paved shoulders present on all the new bridges. A steady flow of traffic made a lot of noise but I was happy for a safe place to ride. I saw a flock of ibises feeding in the shallow water and miles of mangroves lining the road. The route consists of bridges connecting keys such as Boca Chica, Rockland, Bahia Honda, Little Duck, Big Pine, Ohio, Missouri, Cudjoe and, my favorite: Sugarloaf Key.



At the northern edge of Big Pine key and stopped for coffee and met a fellow bicycle tourist. Andy, a contractor from St. Louis rode a recumbent and we chatted for a while. As he continued on I took detour down a road that led to a National Wildlife Refuge with a sign that said no motor vehicles so I went in on my bike. I found a trail leading through

some unusual vegetation down to a little beach on a path through a copse of mangroves and gumbo limbo trees.

Eventually I hit seven-mile bridge, the longest of the 42 bridges between Key West and the mainland. Unlimited views of the Atlantic to my right and Gulf to my left rewarded me as I worked to ride into the wind with no breaks of any kind. I felt tired but great as I rode into Marathon. I thought to myself that I hoped I would be able to find a place to eat outside. It was just too pretty to go indoors. I spied a small sign along the bike path and followed it down to the waterfront on the Gulf side where I found Keys Fisheries. A genuine wholesale operation with a web site, they also have a small retail operation. You order at a window and then sit outside on the edge of a small marina. Brown pelicans swam in the marina and tarpon occasionally surfaced flashing a fin and shiny back. The woman who took my order asked for the name of a TV show; that threw me for a minute and I finally came up with Man from Uncle. They use the show to call you when your meal is ready. This picture shows my seat and view; I certainly got my wish to eat outside with a view.



My good luck on Marathon continued when I checked into Banana Bay Resort & Marina. I had chosen it on the internet because it was 50 miles from Key West and fairly reasonable in price. Located less than a mile from Keys Fisheries it could hardly have been more inviting. The desk person, who greeted me, like all the employees I encountered, treated me like a welcome friend. Lush tropical vegetation lined the drive to my room in a wonderful wood-frame house. When I entered my room I saw a huge bed with an awning; I've rarely slept in anything like that.



After a shower and nap I went and sat in the Jacuzzi and then took a dip in the pool. I wandered down by the marina where a man was cleaning fish and a flock of brown pelicans helping with the scraps. I saw for a while under the palm trees reading and watching boats go by.

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miles I came upon Midway Café which claims to be 80 miles from Key West and 80 miles from Miami. They had coffee, a wrap and free wi-fi so I sent and received a few e-mails. Soon after leaving the café I passed the entrance to Windley Key State Fossil Reef Geological State Park. I decided to give it a try and go stuck like a bug on flypaper. I couldn't tear myself away. They had several trails and over 80 marked spots with a directory that named the plant or geological item and its importance to the community. Windley Key at 18 feet is the highest spot on the Keys. It's a hardwood hammock with a unique set of flora and fauna. For example, poisonwood, so named for the rash the results from contact with it, is a native whose berries are important wildlife especially the rare white-crowned pigeon. The park is also the site of quarries created when the railroad was run to Key West in the earl 20<sup>th</sup> century. It explains how the island was formed of limestone on fossilized coral reefs. Here's a fossil in the quarry. I spent two hours there and was tired from standing and reading and thinking. The next 20 miles into the wind gradually wore me down. I was famished when I came upon the charming Key Largo Conch House, a coffee shop in a dense copse on the side of busy route 1. I got coffee and food and took advantage of free wi-fi to find a room. By then it was 5 p.m. and I was too tired to want to find the park and camp out. So I settled for comfort and leisure at the Marina del Mar Resort and Marina.



This turned out to be quite and intriguing place very close to Rt. 1 but not easy to see from the road. I had to pedal down a couple of streets t get there but later was able to walk back a much shorter way along the dock. I reveled in the hot shower and soft bead after planning to rough it. The next morning I had breakfast on the dock looking across the marina. While I ate a young woman approached and asked it that was my bike. I said it was and she asked if I was a guest. I said yes and she asked to see my key. I headed north and soon left route 1 which turned inland while I continued on a two-lane road with less traffic but no shoulder. The road ran through protected land with nothing but trees on both sides for miles, then it turned west becoming Card Sound road. It took me through Crocodile Lake preserve; I saw the lakes but no crocodiles. I climbed a steep bridge over the sound and passed the toll booth but didn't have to pay. The land on both sides of the road which gradually went from mangroves to grass was undeveloped. Eventually I made it to Florida City and a motel room and hot meal.