



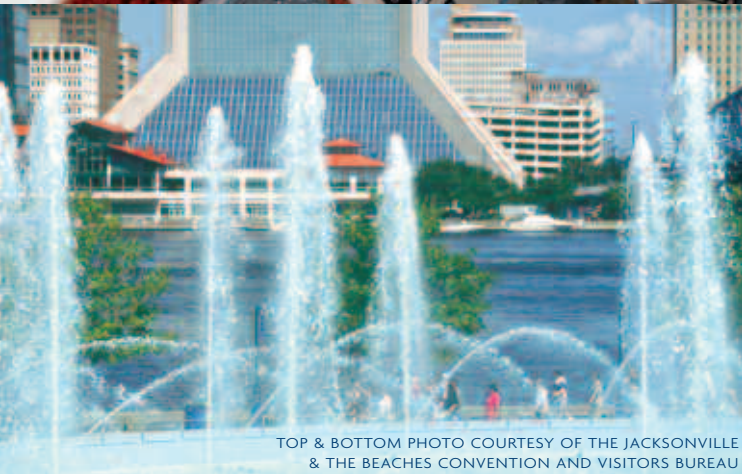
THE LONG G RUN

BY GLENN SWIFT

It's been called "The Boaters' Route 66," but to those captains who know it well, it's simply "the ditch." Don't let the name fool you. Stretching from Maine to Key West on the Atlantic



CRUISING FROM **JACKSONVILLE** TO **FORT LAUDERDALE**
ON THE EASTERN SEABOARD'S SCENIC "WATER HIGHWAY"



JACKSONVILLE

Coast, all the way to Brownsville, TX on the Gulf of Mexico, the Intracoastal Waterway (ICW) represents one of America's most amazing natural wonders. Its winding, 1,200-mile course weaves a majestic path through a combination of natural estuaries, rivers, creeks and man-made cuts. One of the route's most spectacular stretches lies between Jacksonville and Fort Lauderdale.

Known to Florida boaters as "The Long Run," the route features a variety of settings. Whether it's the bustling metropolitan areas of Jacksonville and Fort Lauderdale, the quiet nooks and crannies of Volusia County, the historical sites of St. Augustine, our nation's oldest city, or the elegance and grandeur of South Florida's palatial waterfront mansions, The Long Run offers something for nearly every interest. To bring to life this unique American treasure, *Coastal Boating* assembled a three-man team (Capt. Dave Morris, photographer Jason Collins and yours truly) to give you an up-close impression of The Long Run.

The three of us met just outside of Jacksonville to pick up our boat – a 32-foot Rinker Fiesta Vee 320. It was a sight to behold. With sleek lines, a brilliant two-toned blue and white hull, and a tortoise-shell dashboard reminiscent of a James Bond 1960s Aston Martin, the 320 was far more than your typical power cruiser. Inside the cabin were all

the creature comforts necessary to make even the most fervent landlubber feel right at home.

Acclimating us to the boat were Mitch Yager and Tommy Woods of the Davey Marine Center. Both men greeted us as if we were long-lost friends. They eagerly took us out on the water for a test run of our virgin craft, which was provided for us courtesy of Rinker Boats. Mitch and Tommy went over every feature that the splendid craft had to offer. "We don't just hand people the keys and send them on their way. We want to treat our customers like we would want to be treated if we were in their shoes," Mitch said proudly.

We couldn't have felt better about the way we were treated. Everything had been thoroughly planned and taken care of – well, almost. Just before sending us on our merry way, Mitch said, "There is just one thing we forgot – a tag. And without a tag, you're sure to get stopped. You'll need paperwork showing a recent bill of sale. "So, you," he said, meaning me, "are going to have to buy the boat." I laughed heartily at my newfound friend's gifted sense of humor.

Low and behold, Mitch promptly pulled out a contract and, with a smile, asked me to sign it. My heart skipped a beat. "Of course," Mitch added, "this is only for the sake of the Marine Patrol. We'll tear it up as soon as you guys are done." If it hadn't been for the hospitality of Mitch and Tommy, I might not have been so compliant. So, I signed.

Throughout our journey, I suffered from wild hallucinations all involving our engines stalling while alongside the jetty of a treacherous inlet,

sending "my" boat thrashing against the rocks. In the background, I could hear my attorney – who handled my divorce – berating me with, "You did what?" immediately followed by, "This is the second-craziest thing you ever did." Fortunately, we had a great captain – and a great boat. Everything went smoothly.

Capt. Morris quickly learned that he had not been supplied with a U.S. Coast Guard-certified crew. I'm sure the earth must have trembled as the bones of my ancestors (many of whom served in the British Royal Navy) rolled over in their graves while I amateurishly struggled to tie-off a cleat and loop a line over the pole. By the end of the journey, however, Jason and I were functioning like Annapolis grads – or so we liked to believe.

Jacksonville, our point of embarkation, was an exciting place to begin our run. Located 16 miles upstream from the ICW, on the banks of the St. Johns (the nation's longest north-flowing river), Jacksonville is a thriving metropolis in every sense of the word. Along both the north and south banks of the river is a 1.2-mile wooden boardwalk, the Riverwalk. A great place to stroll, shop or just watch the riverboats cruise past, the Riverwalk is at the center of Jacksonville's culturally vibrant waterfront area, known as The Landing. Located right in the heart of the city, the glitzy boardwalk frequently holds seafood fests, parties, parades and craft festivals of all sorts. With all the shopping, dining and entertainment, The Landing feels like a whole world unto itself.

Incredibly, it was not all that long ago that

A RECREATIONAL PLAYGROUND THAT BOASTS THE ST. JOHNS RIVER AS THE FOCAL POINT DOWNTOWN, AS WELL AS MILES OF COASTLINE ALONG THE ATLANTIC, JACKSONVILLE'S SUNNY CLIMATE AND FESTIVE RIVERFRONT ALLOWS BOATERS AN EXPERIENCE THAT'S UNRIVALED.



COURTESY OF THE JACKSONVILLE & THE BEACHES CONVENTION AND VISITORS BUREAU

THE LONG RUN

TOP & BOTTOM PHOTO COURTESY OF THE JACKSONVILLE & THE BEACHES CONVENTION AND VISITORS BUREAU



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Jacksonville’s waterfront was nothing more than an eyesore. You would never know it now. Over the last 20 years, billions of public and private dollars have been invested in the downtown area, making it a showcase for both visitors and residents alike.

The River City Brewing Company Marina offers excellent dockage at reasonable rates and is located right on the Riverwalk. Be prepared, however, for strong currents when docking. The currents and wake of the St. Johns can produce such an uncomfortable rocking that many boaters choose to spend the night in a hotel. If that is the case, the Omni Jacksonville, a spectacularly lavish, high-rise hotel overlooking the Riverwalk, might be your best bet.

As for fine eateries, there are many. Particularly worthy of note is Benny’s Steak & Seafood – a family-style restaurant featuring sushi-grade seafood and Certified Angus Beef.

One note of caution: Although the ICW in North Florida tends to be far quieter than at the southern end of the state, the St. Johns around Jacksonville is quite the exception. A major port, and the site of one of the world’s largest naval bases (nearby Mayport), Jacksonville is home to a large number of oceangoing vessels. Boaters need to be very careful when maneuvering around all those 10,000-ton freighters. Special attention

also needs to be given to the river itself. The St. Johns at this point has a very swift current and cannot be taken lightly.

We embarked from Jacksonville and began heading east to link up with the ICW. As one leaves the city, one needs to keep an eye on the shoreline, for there are a number of sights of interest. The famous Maxwell House Coffee sign (of the dripping coffee pot) and ALLTEL Stadium, home of the National Football League’s Jacksonville Jaguars, are two of the most well-known sights.

The St. Johns connects to the ICW at Sisters Creek (Mile Marker 739.5) just west of Jacksonville Beach. At this juncture, traffic diminishes significantly and one begins to get an idea of the Florida that Ponce de León first gazed upon. The ICW is wide here, with miles and miles of unspoiled wetlands and marshes. The quiet setting was a welcome change of pace from the hustle and bustle of Jacksonville.

The next stop on our journey was America’s oldest city, St. Augustine. This is a definite “must see.” If you’re fascinated by the past, you’ll be spellbound by St. Augustine. This town has a little bit of everything – even a castle! The “old town” offers one of the most fascinating pedestrian-oriented shopping areas anywhere.

An ideal base for exploring this charming city is the St. Augustine Municipal Marina (Mile Marker 778.3). Concrete floating docks, fuel, oil, ice, a pump-out station, showers, a laundry, a boaters’ lounge and a host of other conveniences are available at modest prices. The restored part of the historic downtown area, and the Castillo

de San Marcos, are within a short walking distance. Caution: If you prefer to anchor out, you can dinghy into the marina for \$7 a day. Just don’t anchor too close to the seawall near the city. When it is low tide, many vessels end up high and dry.

Despite the harbor’s numerous sandbars, the channel is deep and extremely well-marked. Navigating the ditch when leaving the old city is relatively easy. You don’t need to be Sir Francis Drake to find your way out. Before departing, however, be sure to take a cab to the beach and dine at Fiddler’s Green (named after an old English seafaring term used to describe a sailor’s paradise), arguably the best restaurant in town.

Heading south from St. Augustine, we encountered yet another long stretch of undisturbed natural beauty. For nearly 25 miles or so, there is very little development of any kind. Tantalizingly, the banks of the ICW are nearly devoid of any signs of human habitation. Pristine islands with sandy beaches, ideal for picnicking and exploration, are commonplace. Although the natural beauty is overwhelming, it is definitely not a great place to break down. Even cell phones don’t work here! So, make sure you have plenty of gas.

Appearing almost out of nowhere was our next stop, the Palm Coast Resort Marina (Mile Marker 803). In addition to offering some of the finest docking facilities in Florida, this upscale resort community has a little bit of everything: championship golf, spectacular beaches, first-class restaurants and much more. After relaxing by the Olympic-size swimming pool and enjoying a superb lunch at the Atlantic Grille, we

THE OLDEST CITY IN AMERICA, ST. AUGUSTINE IS HOME TO THE PICTURESQUE BRIDGE OF LIONS. AS THE MOST RECOGNIZABLE SIGHT IN ST. AUGUSTINE, THE BRIDGE WAS CONSTRUCTED IN 1927 TO CONNECT THE HISTORIC HEART OF ST. AUGUSTINE WITH ANASTASIA ISLAND.





DAYTONA BEACH / STUART

resumed our journey south.

As we approached Daytona Beach, the damage of Hurricane Charley, which had swept across this part of the state just two days before our trip began, was plainly visible. As a result of the storm's fury, much of the immediate area was still without power. For many nearby marinas, that meant "no gas." Fortunately, Daytona's Halifax Harbor Marina (Mile Marker 831) was not one of them.

Hailed by many as the finest of its kind on the entire ICW, the 600-slip marina is a boater's dream. Featuring every conceivable amenity, well-protected dockage and a highly trained staff, Halifax Harbor Marina is also conveniently located. Just a few blocks away lies Daytona's Riverfront Marketplace. Situated along Beach Street, a palm tree-lined avenue in the heart of the city's historic district, the Riverfront Marketplace offers a nostalgic experience for those who stroll amid the many unique shops and restaurants.

One well-known, free tourist attraction, open every Saturday, year-round from 8 a.m. to noon, is the Daytona Flea & Farmers Market. Located on adjacent City Island, the ever-popular event is a bargain hunter's paradise, offering everything from fresh produce to antiques.

After a day of beach-going or sightseeing, the Stock Exchange is ideal for those who appreciate good food in an upscale

atmosphere that allows for dining and conversation in the same room. For singles, seats at the bar are equipped with an in-house phone system that puts a different spin on meeting new people.

After spending the night in Daytona Beach, we were ready to resume our trek south. After cruising about 15 miles, we encountered yet another stretch of unblemished shoreline. In many ways, this part of our journey was reminiscent of the expanse of pristine natural beauty we experienced after leaving St. Augustine. At one spot in particular, the "Mosquito Lagoon" (Miles 855-870), it appeared as if man had yet to make an imprint.

Shortly after crossing into Brevard County (Mile Marker 870), we entered a 120-mile stretch of the ICW known as the Indian River, one of the widest and deepest sections of the ditch. Due to its proximity to Cape Canaveral, this part of Florida is referred to as the Space Coast. After continuing south for about eight miles, we gassed up at the Titusville Municipal Marina – a great port from which to visit either NASA or Disney World. This marina caught our attention due to the fine example it set by installing a manatee protector on the propeller of its workboat.

We continued cruising until just before nightfall when we pulled into one of the last remaining jewels on Florida's east coast, Vero Beach. We knew we were getting close to the affluent community as soon as we passed under the Wabasso Bridge (Mile Marker 943). For, immediately after doing so, our eyes were entranced by one extraordinary waterfront estate after another. In terms of sumptuousness and

grandeur, these magnificent homes are among the finest on the entire ICW. We docked at the Vero Beach Municipal Marina (Mile Marker 952) – a fully modern operation with a large laundry facility and a highly competent staff. A free shuttle bus leaves the marina every hour and will take you anywhere in town.

In Vero Beach, you will find some of the most elegant boutiques and fine dining establishments in South Florida. Over the years, Vero has been given the name "Velcro Beach," since so many "snowbirds" come for a night or two and end up staying for months.

The next day, we resumed our journey and arrived in Stuart (Mile Marker 987) a few hours later. Neatly tucked along the banks of the adjoining St. Lucie River, the self-proclaimed "Sailfish Capital of the World" is another highly exclusive community with miles of wide waterways and uncrowded beaches. Its small-town charm is enhanced by a revitalized, pedestrian-friendly downtown area that offers a variety of boutiques, restaurants, museums and theaters. In recent years, Stuart has become a prospering arts community and the site of numerous festivals throughout the year.

The Stuart Harbor Marina offers excellent, full-service dockage for vessels up to 100 feet and is located just a short walk from downtown. For a touch of yesteryear, try The Ashley Restaurant. A local favorite, the establishment not only offers excellent food at moderate prices, but a unique ambiance as well. Restored to its original 1920s appearance, the restaurant was formerly a bank (of all things). As for the name

ABOVE: DAYTONA BEACH IS HOME TO THE "WORLD'S MOST FAMOUS BEACH."

STUART IS DUBBED THE "SAILFISH CAPITAL OF THE WORLD."

RIGHT: JUST NORTH OF BOYTON BEACH, FLORIDA'S

"GATEWAY TO THE GULF STREAM."



MILEAGEMARKERS: All miles on the ICW refer to statute miles (5,280 feet) and ascend as one moves south from Mile Marker 0 in Norfolk, VA.

LENGTH: Jacksonville to Miami on the ICW is approximately 345 statute miles.

NAVIGATIONALAIDS: The Rinker Fiesta Vee 320 was equipped with the Raymarine SL70 CRC (color radar with chart). Nearly all modern electronic systems containing National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)–certified maps are more than adequate for the ICW. In addition, we kept the *Waterway Guide: Southern 2004* (York Associates) handy at all times. This is the veritable canon for “ditch” cruisers. The guide contains detailed information about nearly everything you need to know about the route (ports of call, navigational aids, potential hazards and obstructions, dockage, etc.).

TIMENEEEDED: You will always hear stories about the captain who made the trip in three days. To really enjoy the Long Run and be able to take advantage of the many interesting ports of call, a week is recommended.

CLEANMARINAS: Look for marinas with a flag containing a white pelican logo on a blue background. These marinas have been recognized for having the highest environmental standards.

WEBSITES: www.waterwayguide.com – Probably the most comprehensive Web site with information on everything from nautical maps to the best marinas.

www.americanboating.org – This Web site has a collection of articles from boaters who have made the trip in recent years, and includes what they find most interesting and helpful.

www.seatape.com – Another Web site with assorted information about “cruising the ditch.”

www.floridatravelusa.com – This is a “must” Web site for Florida boaters and includes a great deal of information on the ICW.

TIPS ON CRUISING THE LONG RUN

... well, it’s named after the notorious gangster who robbed it.

Continuing on from Stuart, we entered Palm Beach County. Aptly named, the scenery at this point became increasingly tropical as more and more coconut trees could be seen swaying in the gentle breeze. After checking out the magnificent Jupiter Inlet and historic Jupiter Lighthouse (Mile Marker 1004), among the most beautiful of their kind anywhere, we arrived in Palm Beach (Mile Marker 1014).

Here, the ICW leaves the land cut, turns starboard and enters the long, broad, shallow Lake Worth. Cruising becomes a bit frustrating here because much of the lake contains a series of manatee zones. Lake Worth is also crowded with boats, so it’s wise to be on the lookout.

This can be difficult, however, due to the seemingly endless row of spectacular mansions that line the waterway. For this is Palm Beach – playground of the rich and famous. Teeming with unsurpassed class and charm, Palm Beach is the virtual personification of “chic.” Its posh shopping district, Worth Avenue, is a collection of famous boutiques, jewelers, art galleries, restaurants and antique stores. The ultra-lavish Breakers Resort and the Brazilian Court Hotel are nearby and offer a glimpse into a world frequented by America’s aristocracy.

There are a number of fine marinas, but the Palm Beach Yacht Club Marina offers first-class dockage and is within walking distance of Worth Avenue. Just don’t expect any bargains – this is Palm Beach. After leaving the land of The Great Gatsby, we cruised into yet another stomping ground of the well-heeled – Boca Raton.

Above and beyond everything that this town has to offer (and that’s a lot!) is the Boca Raton Resort & Club (Mile Marker 1048). This grandiose hotel is arguably the finest in the United States – if not the world. Appraised by some at nearly \$1 billion, this architectural marvel was built in 1926 by the legendary Addison Mizner, and reflects his trademark Moorish-Gothic style with hidden gardens, barrel tile roofs, archways, ornate columns, finials, intricate mosaics, fountains and beamed ceilings of ornate cypress.

Consisting of “The Cloister” – the original Mizner-built structure, complete with an 800-year-old archway from Spain; the Yacht Club; the Tower; Boca Beach Club; Boca Country Club; conference facilities; two championship golf courses; 30 tennis courts; the 500,000-square-foot Spa Palazzo; six pools; an indoor basketball court; and a 27-slip marina with full fishing and boating facilities – there is little that this “hotel” doesn’t offer. If you’re concerned about service, there are over 2,000 employees representing 60 nations to serve you. We decided to pull in.

For the last leg of our journey, we headed south to the “Venice of America” – Fort Lauderdale. With over 300 miles of canals, channels and waterways, the city is definitely “water

oriented.” Located halfway between the Palm Beaches and Miami, Fort Lauderdale has become South Florida’s “newest of places” to be. At the heart of the waterfront is Las Olas Boulevard, which runs almost parallel along Fort Lauderdale’s New River on its way to the Atlantic Ocean. A broad avenue divided by a beautifully landscaped median of flowers and towering shade trees, Las Olas (meaning “the waves” in Spanish) is at the forefront of everything, from fashionable boutiques and art galleries to world-class cuisine, sidewalk cafés and jazz houses. Here, patrons chat in a dozen languages as they enjoy the very best life has to offer – in a very special Fort Lauderdale kind of way. Although there are a number of fine places to eat, Shirrtail Charlie’s is a fun family place offering a beautiful downtown, air-conditioned setting.

After nearly six days on the ditch, our amazing journey had come to an end. Shortly before pulling into the John U. Lloyd Beach State Park outside of Dania Beach to hand over the boat to Mitch and Tommy, the Florida Marine Patrol appeared. Amazingly, we had come all the way from Jacksonville without registration and had completely avoided detection. Luckily, the officer was very polite and quite satisfied when I proudly displayed the bill of sale for “my” boat.

Wobbly-kneed, the three of us disembarked. Although relieved that the boat had been delivered without a scratch, all of us were a bit saddened to say goodbye to what had been our home on the water for almost a week. We had been given a glimpse of a Florida that relatively few ever encounter. ⚓

AFTER NEARLY SIX DAYS ON “THE BOATERS’ ROUTE 66,” CRUISING BENEATH THE INTRACOASTAL BRIDGE IN LAKE WORTH SIGNIFIED THE APPROACHING CONCLUSION OF THE LONG RUN, WHICH SPANNED NEARLY 350 MILES FROM JACKSONVILLE TO FORT LAUDERDALE.

