

## 2021 Bone Island Regatta

Submitted by Capt. Richard "Sandbar" Walters

Anticipation was way high with the BCYC racers who were going to compete in the 2021 Bone Island Regatta (BIR), held on May 12 to 15th. There were 26 boats entered but only 20 would finish. BCYC was well represented with three club boats and other club members competing on non-member boats. Last year's race was cancelled due to Covid-19 so many were eager to race this year. A lot of money and work is put into getting vessels and teams ready for this annual semi-pro WFPHRF (West Florida Performance Handicap Racing Fleet) regatta. The BIR is part of the Boat of the Year series (BOTY). This year the race started from Venice and as always finishes in Key West...where the party begins!

Only a couple weeks prior to the race, teams were still being tossed around... some dropping out, and others looking to get on a boat. Last minute boat maintenance was performed to ensure the boats were safe and ready for this fairly grueling 158 mile race as the crow flies. This is the longest race in the BOTY series. Some years the weather has been pretty rough but this year we would luck out and have mostly favorable winds with some steep following seas.

Let me take a moment to list the boat and members that competed in this high action and challenging race.

**MeeShee Skipper:** Lee Nell **Crew:** Mark Rother, Juli Jacoby, Michelle Porter, Mike Cook, and Larry Brown(former member)

**Seafari Skipper:** Gary Rhoads **Crew:** Kathy Longacre, Richard Walters (Sandbar), Dianne Benedetti, and Asa Folsom

**Tranquility Skipper:** Harold Small **Crew:** His sons; Jason, Jonathan, and Ryan

Non-member boats with BCYC members aboard:

**Galene Skipper:** Gerard Gaudry (former member) **Crew:** Member John Meyer with other non-members.

**Mother Ocean Skipper:** Rick Gress (non-member) **Crew:** Joel Heyne, Mark Requa with other non-members.

**After You Skipper:** John Gardner (non-member) **Crew:** John Alonso (former member) and other non-members.

The race was sponsored and managed by Alice Petrat and family, who are not affiliated with any yacht club. The Captains Meeting was held at Sarasota Sailing Squadron (SSS) on May 11 at 7pm. This is the meeting where the details of the race are discussed along with the specific Sailing Instructions (SI) that specify exactly

how the race is to be run, what marks to take to port (usually) and other specific requirements per each division (class) of racing. This year there were five classes: Lighthouse, Multi-Hull, Spinnaker, and True Cruising, which was split into the A and B class due to the number of boats in that class. MeeShee was in True Cruising B, Seafari in Lighthouse, and Tranquility in Multi-Hull. Galene and After You were also in True Cruising B. The only spinnaker class boat with any of our members racing was Mother Ocean.

Enough with all the technicalities and formal details and let me get into the actual race highlights.

The start was off the Venice jetty on May 12th with a single start for all classes at 1300 hours (that's 1 o'clock pm for everyone else...). That meant there would be 26 boats positioning along the starting line to aggressively make tactical moves to get a jump on any other boats. For those that have never experienced this it can be a nail biting - high anxiety moment. There is a five-minute sequence and the closer to the starting horn, the more packed the fleet becomes on the starting line. Most of these boats are at least 35 feet or more so we're talking tons of fiberglass vying to cross the start first, just as the horn blows. This start is not intended for the timid and one false move can cause massive damage to a boat. The race committee was wise enough to make a wide starting gate for this amount of moving fiberglass. Not everyone had the best position and some had just arrived at the start from the dock.

Harold Small's son Jonathan's flight from New York was delayed and he was cutting it real close to be able to get to the boat on time to make the start. Harold had the engines revved up on Tranquility, his Maine Cat 30. Trish rushed her son to the dock and he jumped aboard no more than twenty minutes before the start and they quickly jetted to the start area with no time to spare. Seafari decided to hold back in the starting pack since Gary was not familiar with large boat racing starts. Sandbar totally agreed to be safe and let the pack pass and follow as close as possible without getting any dirty air.

The Seafari crew had very little time to get familiar with the boat before the race so we had to iron out some issues real quick before the start. Gary had purchased a really nice Code Zero light air large genoa that was on a roller furler mounted just in front of their main jib roller. We found that it was impossible to tack this sail and had to roll it completely in and then let it out on the opposite tack. This made for a very slow tack so choos-

More photos in full color on the website at [www.sailbcyc.org/Gallery](http://www.sailbcyc.org/Gallery)





ing not to tangle with the larger and faster boats at the start was a wise decision.

The start sequence started and Seafari was a bit late getting over but we settled into a close reach and started to pick up speed. Seafari is an Island Packet 31 so it takes a few football fields to get her going. We did our best to keep up and for a long while we were doing pretty well with most of the fleet within sight. Gary did a great job in setting up the helm shifts and had one person overlapping the shifts. We had to tie up their folding dinghy and lash it to their davits. We told everyone it was our racing spoiler.

As the first evening started approaching we got all the jack lines in order and harnesses ready for the evening. We were able to track some of the other boats while we still had internet reception through our cell phones from the BIR website. Every vessel was being tracked with either a SPOT or In-Reach tracking device that was required by the race committee. After a while our cell coverage went weak and we had trouble seeing where other boats were located. We could see MeeShee come and go off our port bow probably a couple miles ahead. We soon went black with no cell service so we hoped we were staying close to the back of the pack.

Throughout the evening we did our best to keep Seafari running as fast as possible, with Sandbar giving some suggestions for trimming sails and maximizing our VMG (Velocity Made Good). VMG is basically the speed at which a sailboat is making progress directly upwind or directly downwind. Points of sail on a beam do not affect VMG but that is a math thing that I won't go into here.

Sandbar also explained the concept of ladder rungs. No we didn't have an extension ladder aboard! Just imagine a very wide ladder superimposed on the race course. The sides of this ladder are aligned parallel to the direction of the wind making each rung of the ladder perpendicular to the wind. Before your eyes start

rolling back in your head from further math concepts just think the higher you are on this ladder the better your position is with the rest of the fleet. Unfortunately Seafari was at the bottom rung.

The next morning's sunrise was spectacular, with absolutely no sight of land and in our case no sight of any other boats either. This can cause you to feel lonely and hoping you're still heading in the right direction without looking at

the plotter. We came across a fishing vessel on AIS about five miles off our bow that was meandering back and forth. An AIS (Automatic Identification System) is a cool gizmo that allows you to identify vessels using a digital VHF radio-based transponder. You can register your own vessel into this international network once you acquire a MMSI (Maritime Mobile Service Identity – unique 9 digit number) which is exclusively assigned to your vessel identifying what type of vessel, its length, name, and ownership. Gary being the techie he is had this all set up way ahead of time.

In the afternoon the wind went light and we had to fall off a bit more to keep our slow progress towards Key West that seemed so far away at the time. The general consensus in past BIR races is to stay east of the rhumb line and wait for the evening land breeze closer to shore. The land breeze never arrived. Amazon delivery was late? The wind had clocked more to the north and began filling in so we set up for a downwind run. Sandbar suggested to pole out and use the heavier jib into the night and set up a downhaul line on the whisker pole to keep it from rising up in puffs which causes the wind to dump out, slowing Seafari's average speed. We put the mainsail on the lee side and added a preventer to it also and tightened up the boom vang. Seafari was now wing-on-wing and surfing down the following seas that started building into the evening. Seafari loved to surf since her bottom was fairly flat. Many times we clocked SOG (Speed over Ground) knots way above the apparent wind.

Earlier that afternoon we finally saw a boat we thought was racing and coming up behind us. Getting on the binoculars we noticed it only had its mainsail up and seemed to be motoring. This had us puzzled since the AIS was telling us it was Barry McClure's Island Packet

*Bone Island Regatta, continued next page >>*

## Bone Island Regatta, continued from previous page

420 April, which was a boat in our Lighthouse class. We thought she would have been way ahead of us at this point in the race. The rate she was moving under a mainsail alone we could tell she had her motor on. Sandbar tried to hail her on the VHF but received no response. We continued to watch and attempt hailing her as she fell off and headed to the coast. Once we gained a couple bars on the cell phone we called Alice Petrat the race committee chair to inform her we believed that April dropped out but we didn't know why. She didn't get any word either. We found out later that Barry got clunked on the head by the whisker pole and split his head open and had to go to the emergency room. It turns out that he is fine but unfortunately had to DNF (Did Not Finish) himself.

In racing you never want anything bad to happen to another competitor in your class and we knew we had won at least 2nd place in the Lighthouse class due to a fellow sailor's accident. You never know what can happen out on the water when you are miles away from land, so you really need to take safety seriously and have a good first aid kit. Night time can be especially dangerous on the foredeck when there is no moonlight to help guide you.

Early on Friday morning we were getting within range of the Smith Shoal Light that we had to take to port. Sandbar read the chart for the details on this marker and said it flashed at a 6 second period was 47ft and had 9M noted. He explained to the crew this meant we should see the light when we are roughly nine nautical miles from it. Per the plotter we were about eight miles out. He suspected that the light was out, not the first BIR he raced in with the light out so this was a common occurrence. Hitting this marker in the middle of a dark moonless night is not something you want to do.

The sailing instructions said to set up a waypoint to sail to for this marker that was a safe distance away at approximately 150 ft. west of the marker. Gary went up to the bow, tied to the jack line with his harness with a death grip on his phone, to be ready to snap a picture when we had reached the way point he had entered earlier. The crew was getting a bit nervous because we were getting close but still could not see the Smith Shoal marker in the muddy dark night. Gary saw a faint shadow off our port bow and Sandbar felt that it probably was the light since it was in the proper direction with respect to the waypoint. We all breathed

a sigh of relief when we saw the ominous dark unlit tower just off our port beam. Exactly at 24°43.094'N by 81°55.331'W Gary snapped the picture concluding our finish for the Lighthouse class. The crew was elated, but knew we had a lot more racing to do since we decided to race the complete course all the way into Key West. We knew it wouldn't count for a trophy, but that's what BCYC sailors do.

We found out the Garmin plotter they had on Seafari was off compared to the Navionics chart we had on the iPad, so we shut the wacko gizmo off and relied solely on the accuracy of Navionics in the dark to help guide us. Kathy was aiding Asa, who was at the helm, with instructions from the chart on the iPad while Sandbar and Gary looked ahead to make sure we were clear and heading correctly while trimming the sails as needed. Dianne, oh did I mention Dianne, she was a bit under the weather but did come up to join the crew to help us navigate safely in. Asa had warned us earlier that there is a wicked current at times after we get through the Northwest Channel and then turn to port to head north into Key West Bight next to Tank Island. We didn't know at the time where the tide cycle was and hoped it would be slack or push us to the finish line.

As we progressed up the North West Channel we were just able to harden up and not have to tack. That was a welcoming feeling in this dark night, with the confusing city lights of Key West in the background. Dianne, Kathy and Asa kept working the chart and guiding Asa since she has trouble seeing at night. Didn't know that till then... So with the extra eight eyes working in concert we successfully made our way up the channel.

We started to head up into the Key West Bight channel with less than a mile to make the finish. We couldn't believe it but that wicked current that Asa warned of earlier was as its peak wickedness—and not to our favor either. Sandbar realized we didn't have the board down and quickly shouted to drop it immediately knowing the IP31 has a shallow keel and needs every bit of its long centerboard to point up. The current kept pushing us further away from our intended direction.

Asa was working so hard at the helm to get Seafari to point up, with Gary and Sandbar trimming the sails. "Don't strap the jib - bring it in gradual after the tack", Sandbar shouted. "I'm losing her she's falling off, I'm losing speed", Asa cried out. Sandbar kept an eye on our speed and signaled to tack before we lost our way to make it. Gary ran up to the bow to help backwind





the jib to get our little piglet to tack, she's a stubborn tackler... Kathy and Dianne kept an eye on the nuns and cans so we didn't whack them during our tacks.

With each tack it seemed we were not making any headway but the Seafari team wouldn't give up. Kathy suggested shorter tacks, since we were always losing too much speed on the longer tacks—great idea Kathy! After over a half hour of grinding, sweating, and yelling commands, we finally were able to make a final tack to lay the

finish. Gary had us going between G25 and R24 to finish but Sandbar shouted out "No—we need to take R24 to port!" Gary raced down below to check the SI while we were getting close to DNF ourselves. "Sandbar's correct—take R24 to port," and shortly after we could see a flash from the race committee, who was waiting for the last boat to cross the finish line at 06:19. It took us 17 tacks to finally cross the finish but the Seafari team prevailed and overcame the wicked tide of Key West.

The whole team high fived each other with a big group hug. Feeling so elated that we forgot how exhausted we all were. We puttered about a bit trying to contact the Galleon Marina for our slip and while we were waiting Gary checked the centerboard. We found that it had hung up even though the line was released in the cockpit so we had no centerboard when we needed it the most. Sheer determination from a great team must have been what made up the difference. Truly amazing!

After getting safely tied up at the Galleon Marina we all took hot showers and passed out on Seafari to recover the rest of Friday to get prepared for the parties that night. This is why sailboat racers do what they do. We all want to get to the party as fast as we can. There are

more stories I can tell about Key West but we have a saying "Whatever happens in Key West, stays in Key West", so if you want to know more about what happens in KW get some experience and get on a crew for next year's Bone Island Regatta. Sandbar with his Seahawk will be there for sure next year.

Keep her sailing fast and live life slow,

Captain Sandbar





More photos in full color on the website at [www.sailbcyc.org/Gallery](http://www.sailbcyc.org/Gallery)

TAMPA BAY



TAMPA BAY

