

# **ANCHORING OUT versus MARINA HOPPING**

**By John and Judy Gill**

When we talk to boaters about our America's Great Loop Cruise, those who are thinking about doing some long range cruising often ask how much we anchored out versus staying in marinas.

We explain that we only anchored out once during our entire 6,724 mile Great Loop trip for several reasons: One reason is that we do not enjoy anchoring out, particularly in areas we are not familiar with, even where the guide books recommend anchoring. Most anchorage's are well off the main channel where the depths may not be accurately charted. You also don't know about wind, current, tide, bottom structure or weed conditions, etc. in unfamiliar waters. Another reason is that when you anchor out, you miss whatever is ashore to see or do. We also learned that we and our boat does far better tied up to terra firma with electric and water hooked up and all the land benefits available, not to mention a better night's sleep. No, we have never really slept soundly while on the hook.

As much as we really do not feel at ease spending the night on the hook, we spent quite a bit of money to be prepared to do so. We had a new stainless steel bow pulpit made to accommodate two anchors - our standard Danforth and a new Delta plow anchor with the ability to switch between the two anchors easily. We also had a new Good® automatic windless installed with 30 foot of chain and 250 feet of anchor rode color marked in increments. We were equipped with an anchor trip line and also carried a third anchor to be able to use Skipper Bob's 60 degree dual bow anchor method if needed, or set a stern anchor if appropriate. That was a lot of extra study and expense for anchoring out only once (Great Diversion Channel on the Mississippi). But, if you wish to anchor out, you must be prepared for any type of bottom structure from: sand, mud, rock, stone, cyprus stumps, heavy weeds, to whatever.

Friends who anchor out all the time tell us that the benefits of doing so are many -- and they deserve being mentioned here: The main benefit is of course saving a bundle of money on marina dockage and electric charges (partly negated by having to run the generator). Another benefit often mentioned is the wonderful quiet and solitude of being off by yourself with the sounds of nature. They say: commune with nature, read a good book, forget TV or radio, go to bed early and get an early start on the next day of your cruise (they must be morning people).

Of course ones personality and the types of activities each enjoys has a lot to do with whether one likes to anchor out or marina hop. There are people who simply enjoy being alone and there are others who like being around other people. We are among the latter group who enjoy meeting and talking with new people and making new friends with fellow long range cruisers and/or local boaters on the dock. We haven't taken down our AGLCA burgee even though we have closed the loop, because it often starts conversations when people walking the docks ask what group it represents.

What we've learned from reading accounts by others is that you will miss a great deal on the America's Great Loop Cruise by spending most of your nights at anchor, particularly if the village or town does not have a public dinghy dock. Even if dinghy docks are available, you are limited in what you can see and do versus using a marina's courtesy car or pick up truck to go sight seeing. Some of those vehicles are legendary and stories by themselves. When we talk with other AGLCA Loopers about the places we

have visited, we are often asked where that was. We learned that they anchored out a lot and missed many of the things we really enjoyed, or they simply did not purchase and read the excellent guide books available and plan their stops according to their interests.

Over the years, we have heard from people who have done the Great Loop and reported that they spent 5 to 7 days on the Chesapeake Bay and spent most nights on the hook. All we can say is that they missed most of the beauty, charm, history, great seafood (steamed crabs, oysters, Rock fish), watermans museums, and quaint towns, by racing through and not stopping along this beautiful estuary. The Chesapeake Bay is perhaps the finest boating area, with great ports of call, on the East coast of the United States. Those stories caused us to write our first article for The Great Loop Link titled: "Don't Miss Our Chesapeake" and to participate in panel discussions about the Chesapeake Bay at AGLCA Spring Rendezvous.

We need to mention that we didn't always stay in marinas while cruising the Great Loop. We purchased a seasonal mooring pass for use in Canada on the Heritage Canals (Richelieu River, Rideau Waterway, Trent-Severn Waterway) and in the 1000 Islands (Canadian side). Actually the Canadian mooring pass is not really for mooring as in picking up a mooring buoy in a town harbor or anchoring in a designated spot, but rather a flat seasonal fee for tying up for overnight stays at the long piers located above and below the waterway locks and at Parks Canada parks. Most of these areas have great picnic facilities and allow boaters to use the lock masters washroom facilities. We used our seasonal mooring pass 25 nights for an average of only \$6.87 a night (2002 prices).

To be sure, there are lots of stories about anchoring out as well as marina tales. One of our favorite stories (sworn to be true) is by a couple who used to anchor out regularly. They have a small dog which needed to be taken to shore to do his business. The Admiral picked up the dog in her arms one evening, opened the cockpit door to step out onto the swim platform to climb aboard their dinghy with the dog. Just as she was beginning to step down, the dog let out a little bark. She looked down at an 8 to 9 foot alligator laying on their swim platform. We understand that the dog did its business aboard and the Captain, Admiral and "crew" became marina hoppers. Conversely, there are lots of stories about marinas which generally are about poor electric hookups, foul tasting water, and not deep enough draft going into the marina or in the slips. As the old saying goes, "ya gotta be careful out there" and pay attention to all the details. Make a list of the amenities you require (like or need) at the marina and ask if they are available when you call ahead for your slip reservations -- be specific and fudge a bit on your beam and draft measurements.

Whether you like to anchor out or not is not the important point of this article. What is important is to plan your shore visits so that you see and do those things that are of interest to you. Purchase and study the various guide books about the Great Loop, talk to others who have completed the Loop and attend an AGLCA Rendezvous before organizing your itinerary. Spend the time, effort, and money to get the most out of your America's Great Loop Adventure.

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