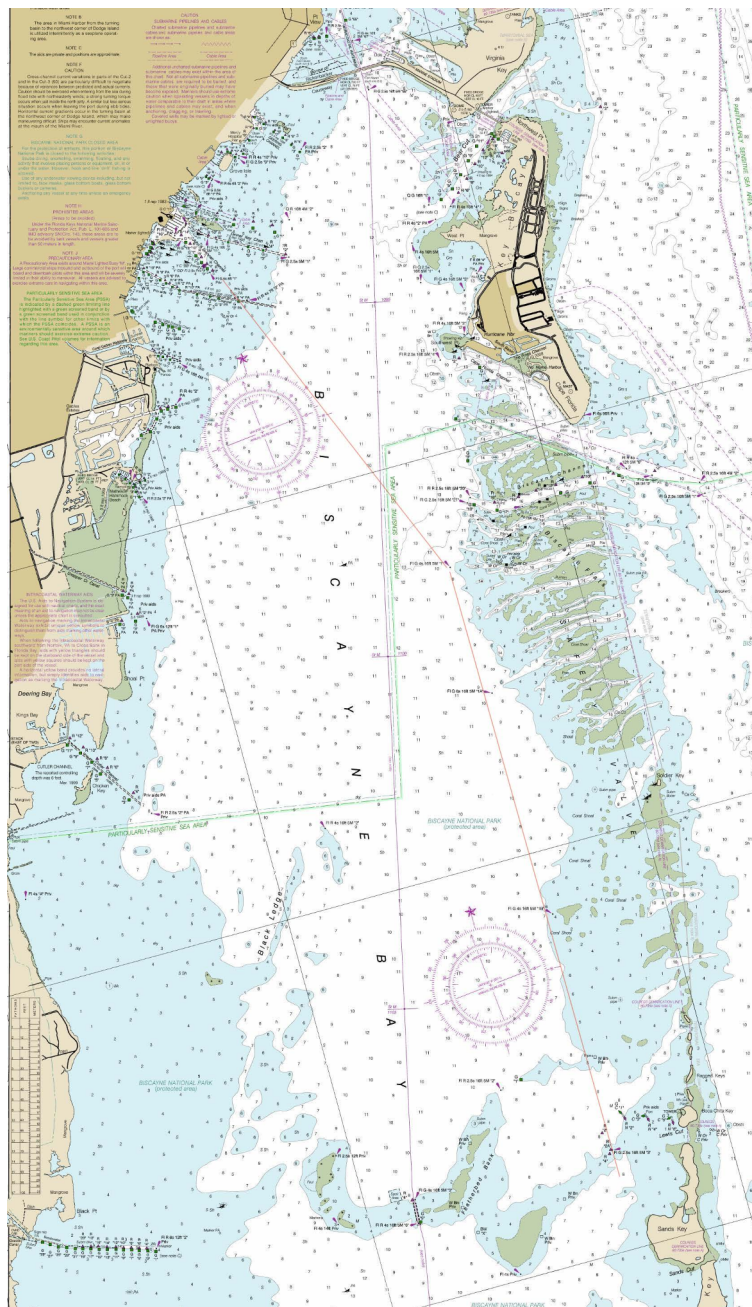


Night Sailing

Troubadour was never a yacht, it was a sailboat. There were no electronics aboard except a VHF radio for safety in pre-cell phone days. Once a depth sounder was on board and working but it died shortly after her 1993 launch probably due to its 20 plus years in service. Once a trailing propeller knot meter was deployed but quickly disappeared in the depths after parting the line. GPS was brand new technology and quite expensive. So all navigation was line of sight, depth was determined with a lead line, and speed was guessed.

Having made the run from Dinner Key anchorage down to Sands Key many times, I felt confident to make a nighttime run late on a Saturday afternoon. The course was easy, 158° to green flashing marker "1", then 180° to the sequential green flashing 1A and then 1B, continuing 180° to marker 3 the entrance to Sands Key anchorage. We left close to sundown, knowing the path to green flashing marker 1 off off Stiltsville. I set the compass course, calculated the distance and the fastest possible arrival at marker 1 if we made Troubadour's hull speed of 7 knots, and started a stopwatch when we left the mouth of the channel.

As darkness set in the number of flashing marks on the horizon grew dramatically and I was not able to identify FG marker 1 for sure. As we progressed I was surprised to not see it, even scanning the horizon with the binoculars. When Troubadour is making hull speed it had a distinctive gurgle under the leeward aft quarter and I was sure that we were not making 7 knots but could not estimate beyond that. Just about the time I started to make a turn south out of caution, I saw the mark within 10 feet of Troubadour's port side as we sailed by it. Flashing light was out! I immediately fell off the wind and turned southwest until green markers 1 and 1B lined at 180° and then set a course 180° . The rest of the trip was uneventful and I was glad that I did not rely only on sailing by the lighted markers as that would have resulted with a night aground some where south of Stiltsville.



I'm guessing that no one on board appreciated the full excitement that we had that night.