

VENTURING MAGAZINE

Snorkeling the Bahamian Reefs by Michael Martin

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Looking out the window of the prop plane on the flight home at the gorgeous water rolling against the beaches, I felt the display set before me had lost some of its luster. Two years of planning was now an afterthought but wonder memories were now etched into the minds of the scouts from Venturing Crew 2235 and the leaders that went along. From snorkeling, to sailing, to swimming, they had given their full attention to the week and all that Admiral Linda and Captain Thomas had to offer them. Listening to the tired scouts reminiscing about the week put a smile on my face as a sense of accomplishment crept into my mind. Not one for me personally, but for the scouts that had put in the time and effort to make this happen.



This trip of a lifetime started roughly 2 years ago as Mr. Burney, one of our founding Advisors, brought the trip to the crew as an option. Mr. Burney had gone with his son several years prior and was amazed at the sense of change with the boys as the week progressed and they learned the ship. The crew voted for the trip but then the issue of getting enough members on board arose. Our troop decided to pass on the trip so several other units were approached and it wasn't long before we had the minimum number of 15 covered. We relied on Mr. Burney's experience to help us along the way.

After several popcorn seasons and camp card sales, the trip was paid for and we were highly anticipating the week of July 8th to the 14th. The scouts in the crew showed valuable leadership by continually checking for travel methods, to food preparation, to trip necessities. Planning was key and several methods of travel came into play. The scouts discussed flying, driving, and going by train or a combination of several of these methods. In the end, flying was chosen as the cost of flights and the safety of not driving 12 to 14 hours both ways came into the equation.

The Crew met at Hampstead United Methodist Church and we drove to Albert J. Ellis Airport in Jacksonville, North Carolina. We flew to West Palm Beach Florida where we stayed overnight and left the following day (8th) shortly after noon on Air Bahamas where we landed in Marsh Harbor. During the flight, everyone took turns looking out the windows and taking pictures of the many colored varieties of blue and green water that surrounded the islands. We arranged taxi transportation via radio from the airport and were soon on our way. We made it to a quaint little dock with a gorgeous view of the bay. I personally had hoped to have this wonderful scenery, but was in awe of what lay before us. Being a leader, one of my desires is for the scouts to enjoy each trip, and with the hype, I was hoping it would live up to it. We watched as a long boat with a man of smaller stature holding the arm



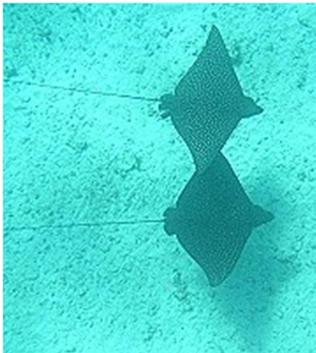
of the motor pulled up effortlessly to the dock as if he was driving a car. Captain Thomas was soon tied up to a post and up on the dock meeting and greeting everyone. We loaded our gear and ourselves into the dingy and were soon treading Bahamian water. I leaned over casually and ran my fingers in the water, hardly believing we were finally here. Soon the Ciganka came into view. Admiral Linda and Craig Murray were standing next to the lifeline ladder and Capt. Thomas pulled us up briskly to it. After more introductions and a tour of the ship, we stored our gear, and were soon underway.



Captain Thomas oriented us on the snorkeling while we were underway. We chose snorkeling gear and flippers and before we knew it, we were parked next to the mermaid reef. After brief directions, everyone was in the water soon having the glory of the Bahamian reefs open up before their eyes. Fish of all types were everywhere. Parrot fish, blue tangs, yellow fin, and so many more were right before us. This was the way to start a trip. After an hour or so we were back on board and rinsed of the salt water that



Captain Thomas tried the entire week to keep off of his ship. We soon had dinner and more discussion with the Captain and his wife came about. Admiral Linda is from Ohio and had met Captain Thomas, who is from North Carolina. Captain Thomas had worked 9 years on the design of the Ciganka and over the course of that time, built a 78 foot, 74000 pound boat in Stonewall, North Carolina near Oriental. Our president, Sierra, took over as ship leader and divided the crew into 4 stations to be rotated out for duty each day. That first night was a learning experience and we soon settled in for bed in either a hammock or a sleeping pad on the deck.



The next day found us at Man of War Cay (key) for their Independence Celebration. The boys competed in their games ranging from an egg race, to a 100 yard dash, to a baseball throw, with several placing in each event. We left there and went on a dive that afternoon and were constantly amazed at all the wonders of the reefs. The scouts had their underwater cameras and we all had great pictures from the trip. Eagle rays and sea turtles were the ones that stood out the most. The week was a



whirlwind and we dove, played on the beach, found shells, explored reefs, swam, and crashed hard each night. Craig Murray had joined us from California. He is a veteran Venturing leader with a great many a stories that kept is entertained during the week. Even though the wind was low, we were able to sail the ship several times. The captain worked the tides for us all week so that we were at ideal areas at the right times. Overall the guys had a blast and wanted to stay, which you can't say about very trip they take, which made us leaders feel good about it. Linda and Thomas gave us the special treatment and personalized it with the mother and father feel that you just can't get everywhere.

On the last evening we went to Hopetown and had dinner. We were able to tour the island a bit and see local shops and the lighthouse. It wasn't long when we got back onto the boat that we were having our closing ceremonies. The leaders could tell from the roses and thorns that this was a summer camp trip that most likely would not be beat. It made me feel good to hear how well each and every one of the scouts enjoyed themselves and would love to stay or come back. After all of the planning, and as with all good things, it had come to an end, and the trip back home stood before us. We made it home safely and have gone back to our regular lives for the moment. But our troop Court of honor is coming up soon and the special few that went will be able to reminisce about that great week in the Bahamas....