

## Going South

By Robert Janger

I've been accused of it many times but have never actually done it ... gone south, that is along the Intracoastal Waterway (ICW). Like many of you, it's my dream but I just don't get there because of that MWT thing. (If I had enough Money, I wouldn't have to Work and would have enough Time to do it.)

Recently I've been exchanging email with some folks that have made the trip and I may have figured out a way that I can go as well.

In this article we'll talk about some armchair traveling and a way to understand some of the ICW as well as see part of it without leaving the comforts of home. It may give you some ideas that you can use on your next adventure, a way to chronicle one that you're already on, or just something to do because the "real" boat is currently up on blocks in some boatyard somewhere while you watch the local thermometer.

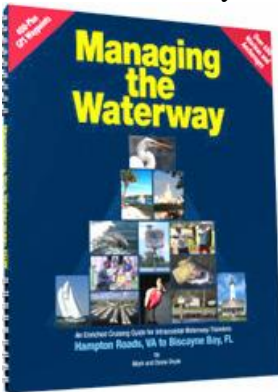
## Riding Along

I've been lucky enough to know some folks that are currently making the journey south and every so often they send me an email and let me know where they are. Each time I learn they are in a new port, I look up the port using some mapping software. I use Microsoft Streets and Trips but there are several other packages out there, including a good old fashioned atlas. This gives me a general idea of where they are located.

Now before I get too carried away, let me remind you that they are voluntarily telling me where they are located and it really isn't stalking as long as I maintain a distance of 500 feet, or in this case 500 - 1500 miles.

## Plotting your Course

Take this a step further and for about \$25 you can purchase one of the ICW guides and check out where your travelers are in the guide. I bought a copy of *Managing the Waterway*: the ICW version which is an excellent publication.



This guide not only details all of the ICW milestones, but gives you plenty of history, local color and some "must see" things along the way. It's worth reading, even if you never venture onto these waters in your own vessel.

You can also purchase the charts necessary to navigate these waters. They come on a couple of CDs that can be loaded onto your PC. Knowing your own boat's capabilities, you could use the charts to figure out how far you could go in a travel day, where you would refuel, take on provisions or spend the night.

This is especially helpful if you don't have any friends, or if those folks who are now referred to as your *former* friends suddenly get a restraining order to keep you from tracking them like paparazzi.

## Seeing your Way Clear

A great tool for looking at the ICW, or anywhere for that matter, is Google Earth. What an amazing tool! Did I mention it's free? I've used this tool to check out waterways and harbors before I go there, getting an idea of what to expect ahead of time. For example: Never having been to St. Michaels on the Eastern shore of the Chesapeake Bay, I used Google Earth to locate the marina I had booked for the weekend, rotated the view to simulate my approach into the harbor and adjusted the tilt to get an idea what the harbor would look like at bridge-level. Now I knew exactly where the marina would be located when I arrived. This turned out to be a great idea because we blew in the harbor with plenty of rain, high wind and low visibility.

Through this collection of satellite images, you can fly over the ICW, zoom down onto specific port cities, check out the bridges and canals and get an overhead view of the water along the way. I figured out a way to plot out my friend's progress on their southbound journey and got an aerial view of their trip.



You could document your own voyage by setting a pushpin on the ports where you stop and then zoom out to see the whole trip. Google Earth will let you save the image to a JPG file which you can print out, share with others or use to introduce the photos of your trip.

So now you know some ways you can share in the experience or at least get a better idea of what to expect along the way. Happy cruising!

See you next time!

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