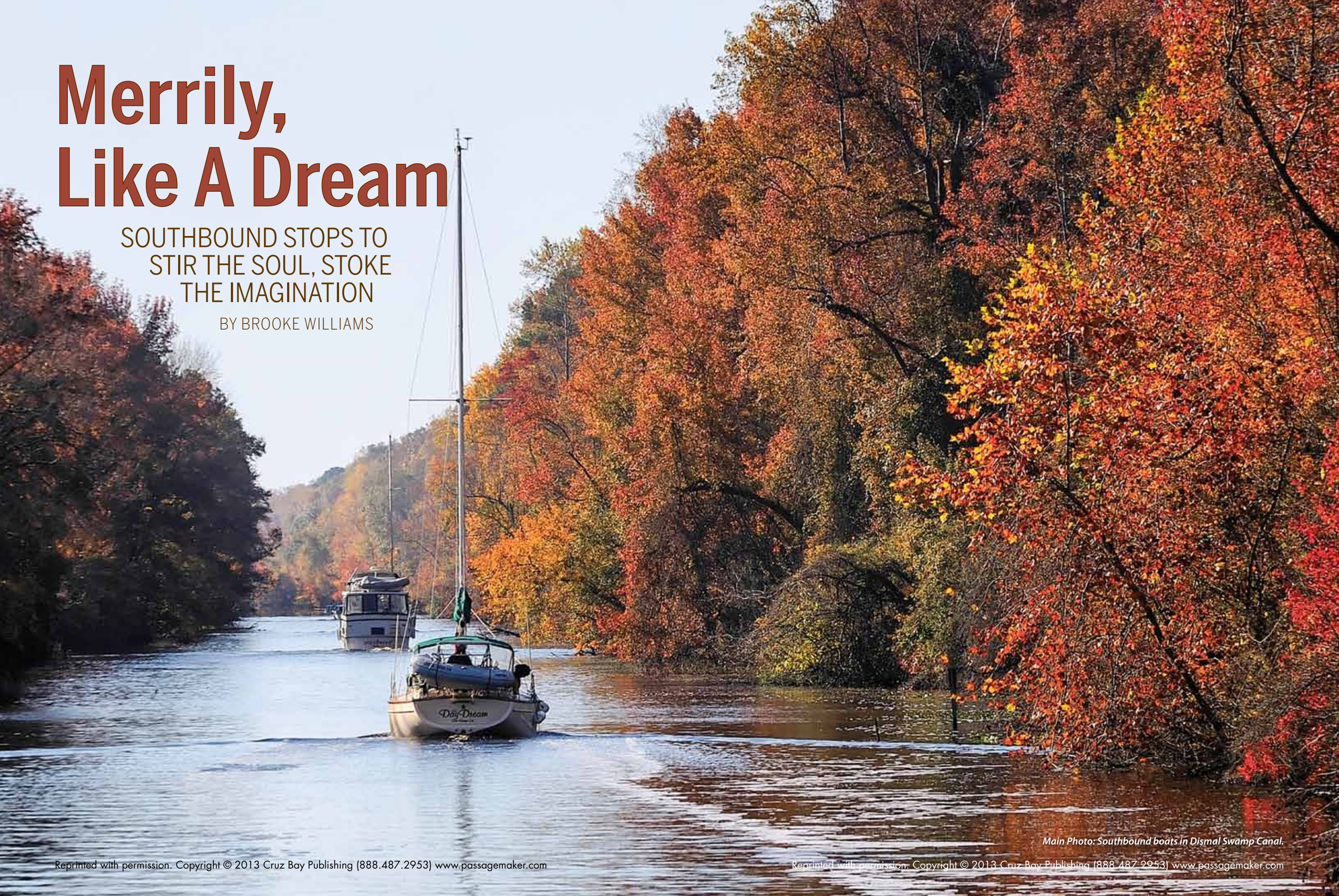


# Merrily, Like A Dream

SOUTHBOUND STOPS TO  
STIR THE SOUL, STOKE  
THE IMAGINATION

BY BROOKE WILLIAMS



*Main Photo: Southbound boats in Dismal Swamp Canal.*



Let's go on a quick trip south. Our starting point may be as far north as New England, and we are going as far south as a boat can go in the United States—to the Dry Tortugas. Here on these pages we'll get there pretty quickly, but our boats will not and should not. And that's the object of this exercise, going slow to enjoy the sights and slower as we linger along the way.

For many boaters the trip south starts in earnest at Norfolk. Here, you have choices to make. Go straight through the lock at Great Bridge and you'll inevitably stop at Coinjock for the prime rib everyone talks about. (See Ditch Dining, page xx.)

A right turn heads us down to the Dismal Swamp Canal and to one of the great characters of the waterway, Deep Creek lockmaster, Robert and his trusty dog, U-Turn. The first hints of southern living appear. Cypress trees line the banks turning water to an almost black mahogany. Either way we break out into the Albemarle Sound with perhaps even more crab pot floats than the Chesapeake.

The experienced Intracoastal Waterway boater will certainly have many sea stories to tell about trips up and down the ICW. The connecting theme of these stories must

## 1. SOUTH CAROLINA



surely be one of variety. Straight canals, winding creeks, and the open-water crossings of sounds take us south. North Carolina's Alligator Pungo Canal may well be the first of those ditches, one with years-ago cut cypress tree stumps as its main attraction. However, a sharp lookout may spot a bald eagle or, better yet, an immature one. (See Birds of a Feather, page xx.)

## WILMINGTON

Those of us who have done the trip have favorite places to stop and some never to stop at again. I will suggest several stops that may be less obvious. The first diversion takes us up the Cape Fear River to Wilmington, North Carolina. Downtown remains vibrant—not gutted out by business development outside old city limits. Dockage is cheap and easy, long docks and a sea wall are within a block of a good watering hole or restaurant. Your choice. Enjoy hanging.

Walk a couple blocks into old neighborhoods to enjoy a southern town with National Register houses guarded by magnolias and trees with Spanish moss. Wilmington's Cape Fear Museum merits a visit. It does an excellent job of presenting the area's history, much of it maritime. During colonial times the theme was a ship's stores, pine products for the King's navy. Then came the Civil War and blockade running to bring in supplies from Europe. Finally, and now long gone, was a massive Liberty Ship mothball fleet. Now we can hang out across the river from a battleship, the *USS North Carolina*, also worth visiting.

If lingering means stopping, where else is there to stop? Cruising guides offer so many suggestions. Myrtle Beach's Barefoot Landing and the newer Barefoot Marina across the way may not seem like places to linger, but as obvious layovers they become places to hang out with fellow boaters, to talk shop and swap experiences. In such a setting, an old ICW hand may encourage you to head up Kilkenny Creek in Georgia, a place that is shrimp-boat basic, full of character for some, not up-to-date enough for others.

- 1: Live oaks and Spanish moss complement Statuary at Brookgreen Gardens in South Carolina.
- 2: A southbound caravan approaches the bridge at Little Creek, Virginia.

## 2. LITTLE CREEK, VIRGINIA



## 3. CUMBERLAND ISLAND, GEORGIA

### WACCA WACHE

If you run into us, we will tell you to stop at Wacca Wache Marina so you can make arrangements to go to Brookgreen Gardens, an outdoor sculpture garden. We will remind you that the lovely cypress swamps of the upper Waccamaw above Georgetown were once cleared, as this was rice plantation territory.

Charleston, South Carolina is another obvious stop, well deserving of major time for culinary exploration and otherwise. For now, however, we are going to keep on chugging, chugging along through the salt marsh oxbows of Georgia. Somewhere around Brunswick, boaters are likely to pick up a fan club—gulls following the boat seemingly draft in the boat's slip stream. There is no slip but they are not just riding. They are looking for something to eat—anything. It could be fish stirred up by the boat; it could be they think we are a shrimper ready to toss food overboard. If it's an early morning run in late fall, the gulls will be backlit with golden light, creating a scene that makes a morning on the water special.

We are headed to Cumberland Island, to anchor and dinghy ashore for a visit with southern history and nature.

- 3: A classic old timer seen at Cumberland Island, Georgia.
- 4: Imaginative marketing by a North Carolina real estate broker.
- 5: Battleship USS North Carolina on display at Wilmington, North Carolina.
- 6: Some abandoned derelicts add interest to the waterway. Cape Fear River approaches Wilmington.
- 7: Wilmington's welcoming waterfront.

## 7. WILMINGTON, NORTH CAROLINA



## 4. NORTH CAROLINA



## 5. WILMINGTON, NORTH CAROLINA



## 6. WILMINGTON, NORTH CAROLINA





8. NORTH CAROLINA



9. OKEECHOBEE, FLORIDA



10. CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA



11. CUMBERLAND ISLAND

CUMBERLAND ISLAND

Step onto one of the two park docks and a southern coastal forest is but a few steps away. Walks take strollers through pines, cabbage palms, and palmettos. The central unpaved road lined with live oaks leads south to the entrance to Thomas Carnegie's winter home, Dungeness.

The Dungeness ruins now offer us little reminder of the Gilded Age of American industrial opulence. Where ladies in white linen dresses once strolled, now wild horses graze on meager offers of grass. Late in the afternoon wild turkeys are likely to poke out onto the field for a quiet look-see. Walk a short distance beyond the ruins to reach a short boardwalk taking one along the island's salt marsh. Continue on and the ocean appears to make Cumberland Island perhaps the first place where a boater heading south can walk to an ocean beach. The island reminds us that we have definitely arrived in the coastal south. Sand is everywhere and, depending on wind and season, so are sand-dwelling bugs. That's OK. Bugs are everywhere. The experience is not.

Now we come to Florida with choices that must be made. Perhaps already made. Some have winter harbors already selected as far north as St. Augustine. Some will head down to Lake Worth and over to the Bahamas. We are going across Florida by way of the Okeechobee Waterway, down the West Coast and out to the Dry Tortugas.

A trip across Florida is easy enough. Distances between mooring locations allow for comfortable daily runs. The locks are benign. At 14 feet, St. Lucie Lock is the first and greatest

8: ICW Sightseeing: Shrimp boats at rest Holden Beach, North Carolina.

9: Early morning fishermen on the Okeechobee Waterway.

10: Carriage tours highlight a stop in Charleston, South Carolina.

11: Horses graze on the lawn of ruins on Cumberland Island, Georgia.

12: Florida's Okeechobee Waterway is big-boy alligator territory.



12. OKEECHOBEE, FLORIDA



13. EVERGLADES, FLORIDA

lift. The lake's locks are less than 2 feet and may be left open depending on the water level. The lake is really shallow, so a lake crossing relies on the wind being down and the water level being up. Boaters can check the water level well in advance.

Anyone with guests aboard who have not spent much time on the water in Florida should urge them to bring out their cameras as they come off the lake. The canal here is the last narrow stretch providing a good opportunity for bird watching and more. We are in alligator territory, as in some really big boys! If it is late afternoon at a time of the year when water temperatures are down, gators will be on the mud flat banks warming up. After Moorhaven, the waterway opens up as it follows Caloosahatchee River to the sea, where we turn south and head offshore in brilliantly blue water.

SHARK RIVER

Possible stops and day trips include a visit to Marco Island or a run in the Ten Thousand Islands for a dinner at the Rod & Gun Club in Everglades City. The Shark River, where we anchor, is an almost solitary anchorage at the edge of the Everglades. The banks are lined with mangroves. Birds are abundant but shy, perhaps because human intruders are infrequent enough. By day, sea turtles come in. The fishing is good. Pelicans dive regularly. Bass boats come up from Flamingo. At night, expect to share the anchorage with only a couple other boats at most. A sunset filtered by trees at the river's entrance gives way to a soothing darkness.

A restful night is in order. We need to do some planning to get to our final destination, the Dry Tortugas. The national park is 60nm offshore and has no protection, but it does have a designated anchorage right off Fort Jefferson. We plan,



14. FLORIDA

maybe wait, and then run offshore. The old fort is once again an outpost of American interests at the western Straits of Florida. Jefferson once protected a deep-water anchorage where Navy ships patrolling the Gulf of Mexico and Florida Straits refueled and rested their crews.

Now the U.S. Coast Guard patrols the area, often finding Cuban refugees. High-speed boats drop Cubans on these out islands and tear off north to the mainland to avoid capture. The Coast Guard routinely brings those migrants right to Florida. They have since placed a foot on dry U.S. soil, thus earning a unique exception to the law and eventual citizenship.

During the day tourists come to see the fort, to see the birds (fabulous birding during migrations), to fish, and to dive—all this we cruisers can do from the comfort of our anchored boat. Enjoy a cool drink as the afternoon glows gold, silhouetting a returning patrol. This is why we go out there. This is why we head south. This is why we cruise. Y'all come join us. Y'hear.

13: A quiet sunset anchorage on the Shark River in Florida. 14: Pelicans are absolutely everywhere on Florida's west coast. 15: A Coast Guard Patrol boat returns to base in the Dry Tortugas off Key West. 16: The anchorage at Fort Jefferson as seen from the fort.



15. DRY TORTUGAS



16. DRY TORTUGAS