

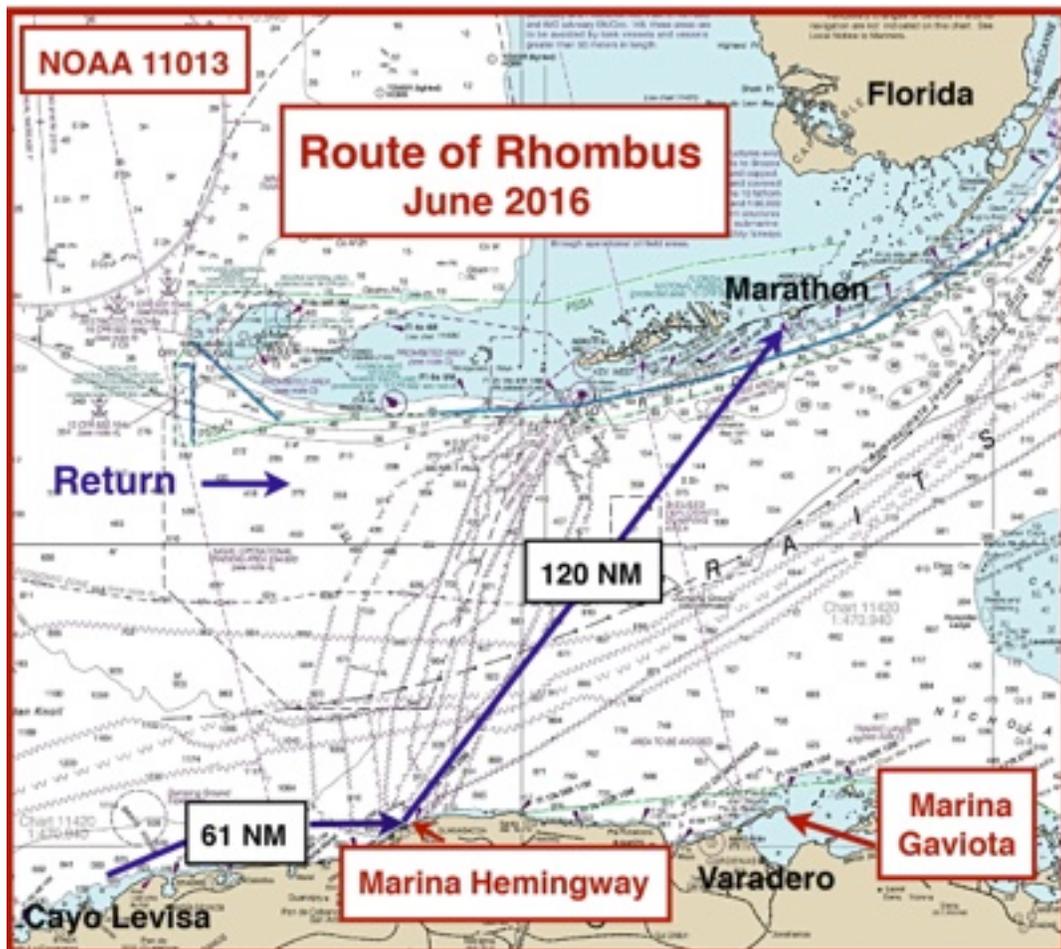
Rhombus' Cuban Adventure

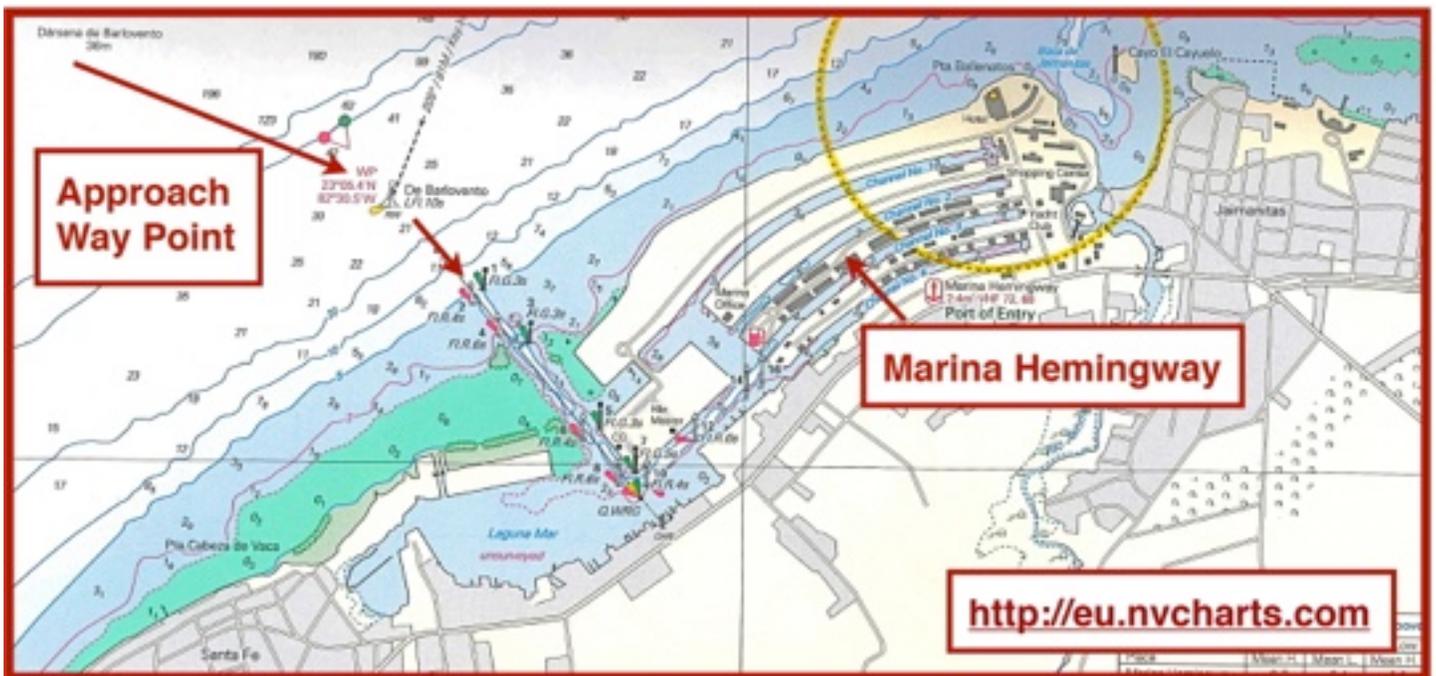
Part III: Marina Hemingway, Havana, and Return

by Fred Braman

We loved Cayo Levisa, but we eagerly looked forward to our last stop, Marina Hemingway and nearby Old Havana. Who can visit Cuba without seeing Morro Castle, the great Havana architecture, and the classic old cars? I'd also keep an eye out for my wife's first ride - a '57 Chevy!

Our overnight cruise of about 61 NM found seas of 1-3, but, very confused with a weak wind on the nose. We decided on an overnigher to ensure a daytime arrival. On this trip, we got no help from the mainsail in moderating the boat's wallowing motion. Under iron genny, we went further offshore than on the trip in, hoping to catch a whips of the easting Gulf Stream while avoiding the westing counter current closer to shore. We had calculated that our departure time would result in a mid-morning arrival at Marina Hemingway. Wrong! In spite of the conditions, we made great time and had to slow the boat and also wait 90 minutes until sunrise for a daytime entry into the marina's well marked channel. It was a great ending to an otherwise miserable transit! We were first in line at the Customs dock, where it was confirmed that I was indeed missing a form, as the very understanding Guardia Fronteria official had insisted in Cayo Levisa. Marina Hemingway is a port-of-entry, so Customs just issued the missing form. We fueled up and were ready for the final overnigher, back to Marathon, several days off. We had lots to explore before then.





Absent a big sea blowing in from the north, the approach and entry into Marina Hemingway is as straight forward as it gets. Mooring is side-to in protected canals.

At the fuel dock, we received our assignment in Canal 1. The marina consists of four long canals, all wide enough to turn around in and with good depths for even large boats. We were met by a host of marina dock workers there to assist, including the dock master and an electrician, whose job was to hook up our electrical power. Tips are welcome and we accommodated everyone that helped. We also hired Santos to wash the boat, and Rhombus has never been so clean, including the inside of hatch covers, and with a special cleaner, he took years off the dinghy! Santos spent hours on the project and asked for \$20, we gave \$30.



Boats big and small show up at Marina Hemingway!



Rhombus was clean and happy along Canal 1!! My Cuban courtesy flag flaps in the breeze.

The main attraction of Marina Hemingway is its proximity to Old Havana, a taxi ride away. We certainly would experience Havana, however, the marina itself is great fun and a terrific spot to visit. Canal 1 was a good choice for my crew as the best and perpetually lively outside bar was at its landward end. Also nearby were boat conveniences; various shops including grocery and libation stores, a couple of big hotels (where you can get wifi), and several restaurants, including Chinese, which we loved. Also, of course, a cigar store! Small towns in walking distance outside the marina gate added to the area's charm. Jaiminita, one of the small towns, had an artist favorite son named Fuster, who over a lifetime, covered his town in mosaics.



It took a lifetime, but, the artist Fuster left his mark on Jaiminita!

After relaxing a few days, we contracted for a ride to Havana - \$35. Alejandro dropped us off at the main taxi exchange near hotel row in Havana. We found a hotel as it became obvious we weren't going to quickly find our first choice, a "Casa Particular," a private home in Cuba that rents out rooms. We enjoyed the Hotel Inglaterra. It was in the center of everything and offered the best (though poor by US standards) internet service. We finally got off a few Facebook posts, emails, and even a wifi telephone call to my wife Louise. First up was a bus tour of the city and its very striking architecture, although most of it is badly in need of a facelift. We had a nice time in Havana, touring by foot mostly and enjoying the local restaurants in the evening. Although the classic cars were inviting, in Havana our normal mode of transportation was the yellow motorcycle taxi. Lots of fun!



This yellow fellow was perfect for the Havana streets and was our usual taxi “ride.”

Crew Frank met Vladimir in the park across from the hotel. Vlad is a photographer who accompanies clients on their Havana tours by classic cars and presents them a postcard of the experience. Vladimir's birth name was Frank, but, his father became an ardent Cuban Communist after the revolution, so he changed Frank's name as a boy. We contracted with Felix, driver of our classic car - a purple '51 Pontiac convertible, and with Vlad for the next day. We planned to tour

Classic cars are many in Havana. They congregate in central locations like this park below our hotel balcony, hoping to snare passing tourists. They are hopeful that new US travel policies will result in more customers.





Our “ride” for the main tour day, or at least most of it, was a purple 1951 Pontiac convertible!!

Havana, visit the Hemingway Villa, see his famous fishing boat, and return to Marina Hemingway on the way home. It turned out to be a great day, but, the old Pontiac broke down on the way home! After only a half hour delay, we were collected in a '54 Ford! No extra charge. The service providers were “class acts” also!



A '54 Ford convertible came to our rescue! You can see our broken '51 Pontiac in the background! it was all fun!



Havana is renowned for its very striking architecture, although much of it is in need of a facelift, and a lot of renovation is underway.

The famed Morro Castle guards Havana Harbor. Unfortunately, sailors can't get a view from the water, as recreational boats are prohibited from entering the harbor.



We had a wonderful few days in Havana, spending our last day mostly eating. We started with lunch at the original "Sloppy Joe's." It became the model for the popular Key West restaurant and watering hole. Dinner was later at Cafe de Los Artistas, recommended by our hotel bartender. The owner was his personal friend, and when we arrived, they were expecting us and had a table ready. Other cruisers were in attendance and we had good food and a great time!

The next day, Vlad, Felix and the '51 Pontiac were all waiting in the square. We took a brief tour of the city and then headed for our main visit target - the Hemingway Villa in the hills overlooking Havana. Entry into the villa buildings isn't allowed, but, doors and windows are set up for visual access and we spent an hour roaming the villa grounds. It's no wonder that Hemingway enjoyed the peace and beauty of this place and found it a great place to work.



Hemingway's backyard view over Havana and the sea.

The Captain and crew Frank pause for a look at Hemingway's front door.





The house wasn't a palace, but, looked very comfortable, as might be expected. It's no wonder that Hemingway enjoyed living and working in these idyllic surroundings.

Hemingway had an upstairs office, with outside access above the rest of the property. Notice the antique typewriter on the desk. "The Old Man and the Sea" was written here.





Captain and crew and Hemingway's famous fishing boat, Pilar.

After the villa tour, we soon found ourselves back at Marina Hemingway, taking two classic cars to complete the voyage, and were ready to enjoy our last few days in Cuba. While we waited for crossing weather, we enjoyed again our new friends at the Canal 1 bar, finally decided on the last of the cigars and rum to purchase, visited the local restaurants we'd missed on the way in, and prepared Rhombus for the return voyage. The captain also decimated crew Trevor at the marina bowling alley!

Reluctantly, we turned our attention to our return trip to Marathon. Fourteen days were not enough, but, that's what we were allowed and we planned to comply. As it turned out, we were delayed in our return by the same number of days we were delayed at the start, so we were good with the program. We finally got a forecast to our liking, ESE winds, 10-15 knots and seas less than 3 feet. On our last evening we had dinner with new friends Bart Blankenship, his Mom Lucille, and friends Sam and Caitlyn at Pollo Frito a La Cabana. Very nice evening. On the way to dinner, as we walked through the small town, we each sought out kids and gave away the last of Bart's baseballs, part of his "People-to-People" program. What a hoot that brought only smiles!

The following day was a glorious one to end our Cuban adventure. Bart and friends on Revival got underway just before us, under sail only. We both cleared out of Customs who took individual

photos of each of us. No fuss, though they did look at the boats to check for others onboard. Underway, it was a little bouncy to start, especially when we reached the Gulf Stream. Wind was NE rather than the forecast ESE, but not too strong so the wind/current opposition problem was not as bad as it would have been with stronger winds. We were able to get the main up and that helped control the boat's motion. It quieted a bit and we got a knot assist from the Stream as our angle to Marathon was about 042. Our passage was pretty fast and we made the 120 NM in 24 hours, leaving Cuban waters at in the early afternoon and entering US waters the next morning.



Getting underway from Marina Hemingway, Captain Bart and his crew on "Revival" often do things the old fashioned way!

We docked at Marathon Marina and cleared Customs over the phone. I made the call with all my Cuba approval papers arrayed in front of me only to find that there were virtually no questions. Nothing about CG-3300 approval, cigars, Cuban rum, or anything. The only issue was that the passport I used to get my LBO card many years prior had expired and replaced with a new one. The LBO file is supposed to be updated with the new passport information, a requirement I that have since found, is unknown to virtually everyone. Customs cleared me in anyway, but, gave me 24 hours to get to a Customs official and show him my new passport. Fat chance! Customs in Marathon was closed for the long holiday weekend, plus an extra day. I looked for a Customs official all the way home and finally found one, in Jacksonville!

Cuba was a grand adventure, one of the most memorable of my near half century cruising life! From the swank resorts of Varadero and classic cars of Havana, to a quiet anchorage at an off-shore Cuban island in between, I don't think we could have done better with our first itinerary and a fourteen day visit limitation. If you missed part of my story, see Southwinds back issues on line, <http://www.southwindsmagazine.com/back-issues-ISSUU.php>, (October 2016, "Varadero", and November 2016, "Cayo Levisa"). I flew my Cuban courtesy flag all the way home. It attracted a lot of attention as I made my way the length of Florida's AICW and gave several informal talks on Cuba. If you have any questions, I am happy to share this trip with you. Just drop me a line or give me a call. Cuba - you can go too!

Captain Fred Braman, USN (ret), and his wife Louise live in Fleming Island, Florida. He is available to talk about the Cuba trip to yacht and sailing clubs in the general Southeastern United States area. Contact Captain Braman at: fredbraman@hotmail.com/904-866-6862.