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Cover photo: David Williford's N909EZ "Stagger EZ"

Bahama Bash 2023



Curtis Wray (OH) - This year's Bahama Bash was planned for La Bougainvillea on the island of Eleuthera. We originally had 12 aircraft and 24 people booked but there were 3 cancellations in the end. Those making the trip were:

- | | |
|--------------------------|--|
| Curtis & Chris Wray | Long-EZ |
| Mike & Bridget Turner | Long-EZ |
| Russ & Kristy Meyerrieck | Cozy IV |
| Roch & Barb LaRocca | ERacer |
| David & Cherie Orr | Berkut |
| Mark & Amy Rieger | Commercial
(new build Cozy IV teething issues) |
| Kevin & Laura Martin | Cessna 210 |
| Keven & Mary Bolender | Cessna 310 |
| Bill & Susan Gallo | |

Chris and I landed at Ft. Pierce (KFPR) on 22 April at 0825. We met with all the fellow Bashers at the Tiki where we gassed up, filed flight plans, pre-briefed the flight and loaded up the aircraft. The group departed KFPR at 1000 in two flights. EZ flight 1 was the Berkut and our EZ as wingman flying high and fast. EZ flight 2 comprised the Turners, LaRoccas and Martins taking the lower and slower route. The Meyerriecks, Bolenders and Gallos departed from Pompano separately. I radioed Miami FSS after launching, opened our flight plans and we climbed to a cruising altitude of 9500 ft and 165 KTAS. We had to fly south of our direct routing to Governors Harbour in order to avoid thunderstorms and rain but landed at MYEM uneventfully at 1150. The Meyerriecks had landed first, followed by EZ flight 1, EZ flight 2, and the 310 within just a few minutes. Everyone grabbed their baggage and proceed-



The 2023 Bashers—what a fine looking group!

ed to clear customs. The rental SUVs and taxi were not yet there, and we had one couple, the Riegers, that were arriving commercially. Their Silver Airlines flight had been cancelled, then switched to land at North Eleuthera and finally, switched back to

MYEM. An hour later we had everyone in the SUVs, left the airport for La Bougainvillea and a 25-minute drive later we arrived at the resort.

This was our first trip to La Bougainvillea resort. We ended up with two houses and a cottage to hold the



N14DL – Me in my trusty steed over the Bahamas

group of nine couples. The big house, Seven Palms, had six bedrooms, each with ensuite bathrooms, and a large common area. It also had its own pool and became a center of gathering for most. The other house, Sea Sea, also had a private pool with two bedrooms/bathrooms that worked well for two couples. The resort is nicely laid out with most accommodations just a few yards away from the beach and a centrally located restaurant, bar and large pool area. The foliage was very nice, replete with many varieties of palms, banana trees, agave, and other tropical botanicals.

Many folks hit the restaurant/bar right away to grab some lunch and refreshments. Others made a grocery and liquor store run for supplies. At 1600 we had an arrival party with rum punch and conch fritters served by the pool overlooking the ocean. It is always a great time to meet new Bashers and reacquaint with those great friends who have returned yet again. Especially true when chatting with a conch fritter and a libation in hand! Later that evening we had a lovely dinner outside by the pool and a drawing for two separate gifts of \$150, one of which was provided by the resort itself. After a long day, most turned in early after dinner.

On Sunday, the Bolenders, Orrs, and Gallos took an SUV and had lunch at nearby French Leave resort. Everyone else gathered around the pool, told stories and imbibed with a few Kaliks. Most made it a lazy day to unwind from the previous day of busy travel. Later that afternoon, we piled into the SUVs to make our way to Tippy's for dinner. This is a nice seaside restaurant with decent food at a reasonable price. We had a few drinks and a great dinner right beside the sea. We headed back to the resort after dinner and those of us in Seven Palms stayed up playing games, telling stories, and having a great time late into the evening.

On Monday folks hung out by the pool, some on the beach soaking up the sun, others went to town to get



David Orr on my wing over the Bahamas

supplies. Most had a light lunch and just hung out in the Bahamas weather (80-85F, mostly sunny, nice ocean breeze) always hearing the ocean lapping onto the beach. The Riegers took an excursion to the Levy Botanical Gardens. That evening, most of us headed to French Leave for dinner. This is an upscale resort with a great view from the open-air restaurant looking over the ocean. The group enjoyed a nice dinner and a beautiful sunset over the Exuma Sound. We celebrated the Bolenders' 52nd wedding anniversary with a special dessert and some fine impromptu guitar/singing by the musician. All the restaurant patrons were singing along while Kevin and Mary danced. The Riegers stayed behind and cooked a fine meal of lamb and chicken on the charcoal fired barbie. Yummm!!

Tuesday morning, we grabbed a quick breakfast and prepared for a planned excursion to Staniel Cay. Six aircraft planned to make the short flight of 67nm so we had a quick pre-flight briefing. Those making the trip loaded into the SUVs and headed for MYEM. Two Long-

EZs, an ERacer and a Cozy made up the formation flight of four canards. The formation launched at 0945 and the Cessna 310 and Cessna 210 followed the formation providing high "cover." Enroute, the formation deviated slightly north of a direct route to Staniel Cay to set up for some pictures just north of Cape Eleuthera. There, just a few miles offshore, is a spectacular underwater array of shallow "dunes" with peaks quite near the water's surface and valleys falling off into deeper blues of the ocean. As the three-ship tightened up the formation I broke out to be the designated high photo ship. We zoomed and sailed above the three-ship with the magnificent background underneath and took



Kevin, Amy & Chris

many photos before heading southwest to Staniel.

After an overhead mid-field break, all aircraft landed safely at Staniel. Chris and I went to Berki's place to rent a boat and the rest walked through town to the Staniel Cay Yacht Club. Berki is a gentleman we met many years ago on a previous trip to the Bahamas. However, his larger boat had sunk the week before so off we went to the Yacht Club. We decided to have lunch and I worked to find a boat for eight people. We had lunch then met the boat captain to get briefed. The Turners and LaRoccas had been to the Grotto and Pig Beach on previous trips, so they decided to head back to the airport and on to MYEM. With that, we boarded the boat and were off to the Thunderball Grotto to snorkel. The Grotto gets its name from the James Bond movie Thunderball. Many of the underwater scenes were shot in the Grotto. From the outside, it appears as one of three small islands just a few hundred yards north of the Yacht Club. Inside, however, is an open cave-like area largely filled with the ocean, coral, and many fish. Brilliant shafts of sunlight stream down from above through large holes in the Grotto ceiling. *It is an amazing place to snorkel.*

I anchored the boat outside the entrance to the Grotto and gave everyone a quick brief on how to find the entrance, what to expect and look for, and that I would meet them at the entrance. Mark and Amy jumped in first followed by Russ and Kevin. Mark, Amy and Russ made it to the entrance ok. However, Kevin was swept downstream prior to getting to the entrance. Chris had her gear on and jumped in to give Kevin a hand. Now it was a two-person rescue as she just could not fight the current with Kevin! I pulled up anchor as quickly as possible and went to pick them up. They both had made their way to a submerged sand bar about 100 yards downstream. We recovered them, made our way back to the Grotto entrance, and anchored once again.

Not one to miss the opportunity, Chris

and I jumped in and made our way to the entrance. Extreme care had to be taken at the entrance to prevent getting swept in and injured by the sharp limestone. I had wanted to get to the Grotto earlier in the day but now we were fighting three enemies: a significant wind from the south, high tide and, most importantly, a flood tide. High tide made it difficult to enter the Grotto as there was only about a foot of clearance between the water and the entrance ceiling. The winds created a strong surface current that, when coupled with the flood tide, created a very strong flow through the Grotto. The Grotto has several openings on both sides which allow for

strong tidal currents to pass through in a flood tide. And on this day, all three conspired to create a very difficult snorkel. Just attempting station

keeping took lots of energy. Although we have snorkeled the Grotto on many occasions, this was by far the most difficult. Note to self, ensure you



Roch, Russ and Mike



Barb and Chris on Harbour Island



Left to Right: Mike Turner, Roch LaRocca, Russ Meyerriecks

are at slack tide and preferably low tide when snorkeling the Grotto!

With everyone safe on the boat we made our way around the back side of the big island to the north to "Pig Beach." This is the original pig beach in the Bahamas although it seems they exist all throughout the islands now. Kevin and I stayed on the boat while the others disembarked to play with the pigs and piglets. There used to only be a few pig residents, but many are there now, including maybe a dozen young piglets. After "pigging out," we made our way just to the north to Fowl Cay. In the past you could call Fowl Cay resort on the marine radio from the Yacht Club, and they would send a boat to pick you up for dinner and bring you back. Unfortunately, it is now a private resort, and they would not even let us walk around and explore! So back to the Yacht Club we went, made our way through the quaint village to the airport, and departed for MYEM. That evening folks had dinner at the restaurant, or leftovers from the night before. Many in Seven Palms had a rousing game of poker with Barb LaRocca taking all the chips. She was declared the Bash poker champion!

Wednesday morning Bill and Kevin had a meeting scheduled on Bimini, so I drove them to the airport to see them off in the Cessna 310. Back at the resort, Chris and I went for a walk down the beach and met couples from Vermont and Canada. It is al-



David climbs back to cruising altitude

ways interesting to chat with folks to get stories of how they came to be there, where they are from, etc. Most hung out at the pool the rest of the day, swapping stories, drinking a Kalik or two and having a great time. For dinner some barbecued or cooked at

the villa and others went back to Tippy's. A Bob Marley band at Tippy's provided great entertainment. Back at Seven Palms another rousing game of poker was underway when we finally returned.

For our Thursday we planned an ex-



Glass Window Bridge from above

cursion to Harbour Island. We stopped at the Glass Window Bridge along the way. This is a very narrow part of Eleuthera Island where the Atlantic Ocean to the northeast meets the Exuma Sound to the southwest. The meeting takes place under the Queens Highway bridge and is an interesting sight to see. After a bit over an hour, we were at the ferry dock. Once on the island we rented

golf carts and began exploring. The island is famous for its pink sand beaches and high-end resorts. We drove around the streets in town and then climbed the hill to the beach. We walked the beach and eventually made our way to the Blue Bar to grab lunch and refreshments. The Blue Bar sits high atop a central ridge on the island and provides a sprawling view of the beach below. We watched as people played, swam, and walked the beach. It was fascinating to watch horses on the beach lay down in the water to cool off. Riders would take them into the surf where the waves went completely over their heads! Finished with lunch we jumped back on the golf carts and toured the back streets and alleyways. It is always a joy to see these small island towns with colorful and picturesque cottages often accompanied by lush foliage and beautiful gardens. Everyone eventually met at the dock at 1430 to catch the ferry back to Eleuthera. We arrived at La Bougainvillea in plenty of time to get ready for pizza night at the resort. Their wood fired pizza oven produced scrumptious pizzas by the dozen. We ended the night chatting and reviewing some of the many pictures already taken during the trip.

Friday was our last full day on Eleuthera. It was spent just enjoying the beautiful weather, hanging at the pool, walking the beach, flight planning for the return trip and packing. Most folks went into town for the Friday night fish fry while others had a leisurely dinner at the resort. Some light apéritifs and a beautifully prepared pork chop for dinner made for a great finale to a wonderful week. After dinner we chatted over some light refreshments and turned in early in preparation for the return flight to the US.

Saturday was departure day. We planned for an 0800 departure from the resort to the airport. The baggage taxi arrived at 0745. We loaded people and baggage into the vehicles and headed to the airport. Upon arrival we

cleared security, cleared customs, and made our way to the ramp to pack and pre-flight the aircraft. The 310 departed first in order to beat a TFR airport closure at Ft. Lauderdale (KFXE). Once again, Silver Airlines cancelled the flight out for the Riegers, but the Bolenders graciously offered a ride back to Florida in the 310. Next, it was the Meyerriecks and Martins followed by the Turners and LaRoccas. We and the Orrs were the last to depart as we had filed our eAPIS for a 1000 departure. We actually departed a bit early at 0945 local.

I flew lead and David flew my wing as we departed Governors Harbour. There is a Nassau TCA overlying MYEM that begins at 1500 feet with a ceiling of 10000ft. We stayed under the 1500 ft floor until outside the lateral boundaries of the TCA and climbed to 10500 for the cruise back to Florida. The skies were generally clear with clouds forming over the islands at 5000 to 7000 ft. A headwind of 15 Kts and true airspeed of 167 Kts resulted in a 152 Kt ground speed. As we approached the ADIZ we slowed down to 140-145 Kts to not arrive too early and began squawking our assigned discrete codes. We landed at KFPR six minutes prior to our planned ETA of 1145. We pulled up to customs, shut down and went inside to clear. We then moved the aircraft to the Tiki so we could grab a bite to eat and check the weather. We had been watching the weather as there was a



Da Pigs at Pig Beach

huge cold front rapidly pushing north-east through central Florida. This would block everyone travelling north. The other aircraft had cleared customs and departed in order to beat the weather. We quickly devoured our lunch, refueled the aircraft, and departed KFPR for Ohio. The Orrs departed shortly after to try and get north and west as far as possible.

Chris and I departed KFPR at 1338 and landed at I19 in Ohio at 1814 to a blustery (winds gusting to 20 Kts) and cold (low 50s) greeting. The Orrs made it to Tuscaloosa, AL, for the night and everyone else had made it back home safe and sound by the end of the day. The Orrs eventually made California on Monday. No aircraft were injured in the making of this adventure. It was a really awesome Bahama Bash and we look forward to another gathering next year!