

November 29, 2005 - Key Largo and Mangrove Forests

We woke, had breakfast at the hotel and drove south to the Florida Keys. The Keys are a string of islands starting from the southern tip of Florida, and stretching in an arc south and west for ~100 miles. They are connected by bridges all the way to Key West, which many people mistakenly believe is the westernmost Key. This is wrong; several Keys exist farther west, it's just that you need a boat or plane to get to them. Over 40 different bridges connect the Keys together, the longest one being the 7-mile bridge. In several places there were actually two bridges running side by side, a new one that we drove on and an old one that people were fishing from. The old one was in service until the 1990s, at which point it was sold to Universal Pictures. They blew up a section of it for a scene in the movie *True Lies*. The new one was constructed and ready for use at this time.

Along the way south we stopped at Coral Castle. This curiosity sits on a piece of land just off US highway 1 south of Miami. On this piece of land is a "castle" built entirely out of dead coral. The castle consists of a 7-foot enclosing wall, furniture, and various rooms inside the enclosing wall. This castle was built before WWII by one man as a testament of his devotion for his lost love – an under-aged girl whose parents convinced her to leave him. Apparently the castle was built using hand tools only, no power tools of any kind. We walked around and took pictures for an hour or so.

Figure 1: Ed Leedskalnin built Coral Castle for his one true love, Agnes Scuff



Figure 2: Be careful where you sit; some of the coral is quite sharp to the unclothed leg.



We drove to Key Largo, and checked into the Bay Cove Motel, which lay west of the freeway and sat on the beach. This motel consisted of 11 stand-alone beach houses. Ours was the honeymoon suite, and included a living room, very big bathroom, and a patio. The cost was \$110 per night after taxes. Our suite sat right on the water and overlooked the bay side of the island. In the Keys, everything is either on the ocean side (east of US1 highway and facing the Atlantic Ocean) or on the bay side (west of US1 highway and facing Florida Bay – the Caribbean Sea).

After unpacking the car, we drove to the visitor center to find out what was to do here. It was 4 PM, and the only thing left was to take a boat tour of the surrounding environments. We did this. It was an eco-tour, which means we were taken into the mangrove forests, along several islands, and shown the local wildlife. There were only three people on the tour, Casy, Newton, and the tour guide. Part of the tour took us into an island built entirely of mangrove trees. We sailed along channels through the forest, and as the sun set, I got spooked because the trees seem to rise and creep in on you. It rained as the tour ended and got quite cold.

Figure 3: We are now inside a mangrove forest



We drove to a restaurant called Snappers for dinner. This restaurant sits on the water on the ocean side of Key Largo. The calling card of this restaurant is the taupin fish that swim alongside the restaurant. Specifically, a customer can buy fresh fish from the restaurant, and throw it into the water to feed the taupin. Adept feeders can hold a tasty morsel just above the water to get a taupin to jump out and grab it. Casy did this, but could not any taupin to jump out. We went back to our motel afterwards.