

Abaco Journal



Islands Guide

www.abacojournal.com • Fall 2009, Volume 17

The Rage is all the rage

by Stephanie Downs

photos by Jay Downs

A decade ago, Island Administrator Everette Hart scratched his head and wondered why Abaco, dubbed the sailing capital of the Bahamas, had not hosted an all island regatta since 1976. Family Island regattas had been indigenous to the Bahamas and an important part of each island's economy, helping to raise money to refurbish boats before the beginning of the next fishing season. Eager to resurrect a tradition which began in 1954 with the Family Island Regatta in George Town, Exuma, Administrator Hart and many likeminded individuals in Central, South and North Abaco, organized many committees and finally succeeded in 1997 in bringing the island regatta back to the boat building capital of the nation.

In that same year another milestone in sailing history occurred, also borne of hard work and commitment. The legendary *Abaco Rage*, which had raced to victory in the 80s, was restored to her former glory and competed in the first All Island Abaco

Regatta, which took place in the waters between Treasure Cay and Green Turtle Cay. For seven long years the *Rage*, as she is affectionately known, had languished on Man O'War Cay. A legend in her day, the 28-foot native sloop won the Out Island Regatta in George Town, Exuma in 1983 and 1984.

With a crew of seasoned sailors, skippered by Scott Weatherford, of Man O'War Cay, she had competed against the best in her Class A category.

However, like all boats, she required attention and money, both of which were in short supply. After

competing again in George Town in 1990 and placing second overall, she was put to rest, her sails lowered for the last time. Maintenance and transportation hundreds of miles away to Family Island Regattas had proven prohibitively expensive. In short, sailing her competitively was no longer a viable option and sadly for all concerned, including sailors and spectators, she was taken out of commission.

For many years Hope Town resident Christopher Lightbourne, along with a group of ardent sailors, had set their sights on owning the island sailing champ *The Rage* and one day being instrumental in her comeback, confident that she could be victorious again. With an island regatta now on their doorstep, they decided to approach Scott Weatherford about purchasing her.

Initially Scott was reluctant to part with the boat, which he had personally captained on more than one occasion to place first

continued on page 4

FREE for all Abaco
Visitors & Residents



continued from the COVER
 across the finishing line, but eventually he agreed to let her go, knowing that she was destined to a good and caring home. Years of inactivity and inadvertent neglect had sorely left their mark on the boat. It soon became apparent to the new purchasers that the resto-

ration process would be no easy feat, in fact it was a mammoth undertaking. It was going to require not only large amounts of money, but a large amount of hard work as well.

Time was of the essence. With Abaco's First All Island Regatta just weeks away, it seemed impossible that the virtually derelict work boat would be ready to sail, let alone compete, against the boats in her class.

Challenged to meet the deadline, Christopher Lightbourne and other members of the small consortium galvanized the Hope Town community into participating in the reconstruction of the vessel. Volunteers stepped forward to physically assist and others organized fundraising drives for materials.

Under the direction and coordination of long-time sailor Ron Engle, of Hope Town, a team of committed individuals showed up daily at Lighthouse Marina on Elbow Cay where *The Rage* was dry-docked. Volunteers worked long hours doing all that was required to make *The Rage* seaworthy and race-worthy. Some offered valuable expertise, while others were content to be directed. All shared the same goal of seeing the legendary craft regain her former fighting spirit. It was the beginning of a success story, which lives on today.

Unimaginably mammoth and at times disconcerting, the task of bringing *The Rage* up to par was a labour

of love. Practically rotten throughout, one crew-member remarked in retrospect that, "she was all but dead," but the community was not about to, "give up," on her. After two and a half weeks and seven thousand dollars later the relentless volunteers had replaced three quarters of the deck and the entire cockpit. With a new pry bar and painted from the keel up, she was now ready to compete. In all respects she was a traditional working boat, but now a functioning one as well, which adhered to regatta entry requirements; her hull and mast were wood and sails canvas with a single mast. She had no vertical transoms, bowsprits, aluminum spars or winches. With no speed instruments, she relied solely on the wind and the expertise of those on board.

Drawing 4.5 feet and carrying a mast of 60 feet and a boom of 34 feet, *The Rage* was a sturdy work boat, but she was unpredictable and an unknown factor to those sailing her. According to Captain Ron of Nalu Charters, who stripped and glassed her, the crew had to be ready to improvise in a heartbeat. Cruising along at a high knot-rate with extra weight on board invited the unexpected and the new crew needed to be alert. Not only were some of them not seasoned sailors, like those who sailed on her in Scott Weatherford's day, but they did not know or understand and her idiosyncrasies.

With weight distribution being a

key factor when underway, the captain, positioned at the helm, and the bowman, who commands the crew, has to ascertain how many sailors to place on the wooden planks known as "prys". The prys extend four feet from the starboard and port sides. It is imperative that not too much or too little weight is balanced on these extensions. A mistake in either direction can influence the craft's speed through the water and hence the outcome of the race.

With almost no time to practice and familiarize themselves with *The Rage*, in November 1997 the 15-man crew competed in the First All Island Regatta. The champ was ready with one exception. Her new canvas sails, donated by John Bull of Nassau, did not arrive in time from the capital. The crew had no choice but to sail with the existing, 17-year old ones. It was not until just before the George Town, Exuma Regatta in April of the next year that the new sail arrived.

There were more hiccups in May and June of that same year in the Exuma and Long Island Regattas, respectively, when the freight boat scheduled to transport *The Rage*, along with her 16-man crew, was unable to make it because of engine trouble. Three different boats towed *The Rage* to George Town, Exuma, but unfortunately the



rudder was lost en route. Concerted efforts by the crew in around-the-clock shifts on a small Exuma cay and the camaraderie of other competitors saved the day. "We borrowed some from *Rupert's Legend* and *The New Courageous*, two fellow competitors, and we ended up beating them both. But everyone was real happy," said Christopher Lightbourne. *The Rage* arrived one day before the race and came in sixth overall. It was a close call all around and a journey to remember for all the crew.

Improvements to *The Rage* continued and the level of commitment on the part of the crew and the Hope Town community never floundered. She has literally been kept afloat by love and enthusiasm and a true desire to see her victorious.

This paid off in 1998 when she won the second All Abaco Regatta held in the waters between Treasure Cay and Green Turtle Cay. Skipped by Chris Thompson of Hope Town along with Jeff Gale of Parrot Cay as tactician and a crew of 15, *The Rage* gained two first-place finishes and one second-place, pulling off a tremendous victory to a time-honoured sailing tradition. By the first mark they were behind *The Courageous* and *Rupert's Legend*, but on the down wind leg they passed both boats, finishing three minutes ahead of the

nearest contender.

"We had a hard year, particularly with the sails," said Jeff Gale, but with new sails and an extended mast, they were in good shape and ready to actively compete and bring the sloop to victory. It was fitting that the Class A race of the All Abaco Regatta was won by one of Abaco's own boats.

Again in 2001, *The Rage* battled against such sailing giants such as *The Running Tide* and *Who Dat* and once more was victorious, gaining the coveted overall first place. Competing in distances covering five miles and lasting two hours, the races were fiercely competitive. With the same core team and a few new faces, it was superb sailing. "I was proud of the boat and the crew," said Patrick Stewart. Fellow core-crew member, Scott Patterson, agreed that, "it was a real good competition." Over time, the original crew has become accustomed to *The Rage*, thereby reducing tactical errors.



The seventh annual All Abaco Regatta in 2003 successfully staged another major sailing event with

From then on it has been smooth sailing for *The Rage*. As recently as 2005, she sailed to overall victory in the 16th Annual Regatta on Harbour Island and in 2006 she placed fourth overall and in May 2007 the *John Bull Abaco Rage*, as she is now known, placed fourth with 25 points in the Exuma National Family Island Regatta in George Town.

The Rage has become a frequent competitor at many Family Island Regattas, including races as far away as Long Island. Transportation to such destinations has been expensive and sometimes problematic for the crew, but somehow they have come through, be it by mail boat or by air.

When not sailing, *The Rage* rests quietly with her sails down in Hope Town Harbour. She sits alongside her sister work boat, *The Lonesome Dove*, originally from Moores Island. *Lonesome Dove* is another Hope Town purchase and legendary sailing icon.

"Simply the Best" as its theme. It was for *The Rage*, placing second in the first race of its class. Every year the event has become larger and better, attracting crowds to what has become known as The Regatta Village at the Treasure Cay Ferry Dock.



Chris Thompson Real Estate
 "Offering the Island's Most Exclusive Listings"
 One Purple Porpoise Place, Hope Town, Abaco, Bahamas
 ph 242.366.0216 fax 242.366.0223



Chris Thompson



Greg Roberts





* Private Islands * Waterfront Homes and Land
 * Investment Property * Acreage * Project/Property Management
 Complete Service from Sales to Construction

www.ChrisThompsonRealEstate.com