



Loading a sand lighter: one member of the crew works the simple bilge pump while the others shovel sand from the skiff to the hold.

mainsheet while Carli crawled over the cargo to tend the jib. The embodiment of simplicity, the jib sheet was fastened with a bowline to the port chainplate, run through the clew of the sail, and ended in another bowline on the starboard chainplate. The line was long enough so that, after tacking, it could be sheeted in by doubling the slack through the leeward bowline and then making it fast with a slipknot.

*Mermaid* streaked along on a close reach and we soon passed *Sir William*, whose gaff sail was indeed less effective close to the wind. Carli threw some sweet-smelling buttonwood twigs on the fire and began boiling pigs' trotters for dinner. Relaxed, Fred and Carli talked about how they liked their sailing lives: the profits that were split in three even parts between the crew and the boat were satisfactory; the hard work of loading was followed by the enjoyable boat handling; they valued being able to spend most of their time under the brilliant sky in a clean,

pure breeze. While waxing somewhat romantic Fred kept a sharp weather eye. A cumulo-nimbus cloud to windward reached such mammoth proportions that he decided to anchor in the lee of Caye Caulker. There, replete with Carli's soul food, we stretched out under the decked-over bow and dozed while the wind started to moan and the rain drummed on the planks above.

It was still very dark when we weighed anchor and sailed on to arrive in San

Pedro just as the sun popped over the breakers marking the barrier reef, only a quarter of a mile away. *Mermaid* was soon anchored again and the flat-bottomed skiff was slipped over the coaming to ferry the sand ashore. On the sixth and last run I changed places with Carli so that he could knead dough for the "fried jacks", a delicious puffed up bread cooked in coconut oil.

When we set sail again, the departure was a lesson in flawless boat handling.

The skiff was shipped onto the expected windward side as ballast. Carli hoisted the mainsail and sweated up the halyard while Fred stowed the scissors-style boom crutch. Carli then pulled in the anchor and, as the flukes hit the deck, Fred pushed the boom to windward to swing the bow; the boat fell off and gathered speed as Carli and I set the jib. In no time the boat was slipping along, the sun high enough to turn the shallow waters aglitter like a giant polished turquoise. We gathered aft to wolf down the breakfast contentedly.



In *Mermaid's* cramped cockpit Fred Meija steers while Carli (Carlton Young) looks after the meal cooking over an open fire in a sand box.