

## ALDEBARAN

### **Isle des Saintes, Guadeloupe to Monserrat (11<sup>th</sup> Report)**

**Our last report** ended with us sailing from Dominica on 29<sup>th</sup> February to Iles des Saintes a distance of 20 miles. These are a group of French islands 12 miles south of Guadeloupe. It was a lovely sail with one reef in the main and full headsail in 15 to 22 knots of breeze. Our first anchorage there was at Anse Fidelling on Terre D'en Bas a very quiet island with lovely long walks away from habitation. Despite being reputed to have more iguanas than other islands in the Caribbean, with the exception of Iles de la Petit Terre, we failed to see even one after many hours of walking through the hills. After two nights there we moved to the main island in the group Terre D'en Haut and anchored off the main settlement of Bourge de Saintes. It is a very clean and picturesque village with red roofs and some older Caribbean buildings. Scooters are the main mode of transport here. They are everywhere. On the east side of the island is Baie de Pointpierre, one of the nicest bays we have been in. Yachts are banned from the bay since 1996 for fear of pollution, likely to be exasperated by the constant onshore breeze. To reach the bay you can either walk the road or over the hills. We choose the hills and after 90 minutes were rewarded with a magnificent overview of the bay. Olivia began to fraternise with the natives (goats) who were insistent she share our lunch with them.

#### **TRAGEDIES AVERTED:**

**On Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> March** we sailed 27 miles to Pigeon Island on Guadeloupe and on the way rescued a very young windsurfer almost a mile out to sea. We had been observing her for some time during our approach and noticed she was unable to sail back to shore with the strong offshore breeze. She was part of a sailing school and they had not noticed her difficulty and did not even have a rescue boat in the area. We had already passed it some miles down the coast attending to a number of trainees in catamarans. Many people are lost, mostly fishermen, on the western side of the islands due to the constant offshore breeze. Around this same time our friends Denis and Janette Knight while sailing in their boat "SHILLING" some ten miles off the Dominican coast rescued two fishermen who had been in the water for five hours after their small boat sank. One was wearing a very poor lifejacket and the other person was holding onto their petrol tank that had come adrift when their boat sank. They were about 200 metres apart and very lucky to have been spotted. There is no doubt if Denis had not rescued them they would have been lost like our friend Roy whom we met in 1997 and was lost under the same circumstances last year, also from Dominica.

**Deshaies (pronounced Day-hay)** on the north west corner of Guadeloupe was our next anchorage where we stayed for three nights, the first two of which were comfortable while the third night, after a NW swell came into the bay, was awful. It was too dangerous to even board the dinghy.

The following morning 8<sup>th</sup> March at 0710 we weighed anchor (lifted it) and set a course for English Harbour on the south coast of Antigua a distance of 44 miles, in company with "MUNA" and John and Margaret Handley from Scotland in "VITAMIN SEA". We first met John and Margaret the weekend we sailed to Carlingford before departing Dublin last July. At 1600 hours we anchored in English Harbour, perhaps the Caribbeans most popular yachting centre and the northern hemispheres wintering home for many of the gold-plated charter power and sailing yachts. Checking in and out through customs and immigration in some of these islands are a true test of ones patience. Here in English Harbour we had to list our ships stores including the amount of, milk, sugar, flour, tea, butter, eggs etc. we were carrying. One could write a book (comedy) on the bureaucracy on checking in and out of the various countries we have visited.

A number of boats we knew were also anchored here and together with the crews of “ALDEBARAN”, “MUNA”, “VITAMIN SEA”, “OCEAN BREEZES”, “SHILLING” and “DUCHESS” (from whom we got the 100 litres of diesel from in mid Atlantic) we went to the Sunday bar-b-cue at Shirley Heights overlooking English and Falmouth Harbours. We would highly recommend this weekly event where you can, while consuming a good meal, watch a beautiful sunset to the sound of a steel band.

English Harbour has a very historical past, it was the main naval base for the British during the “plundering and ethic cleansing” of these islands by various European powers. In fact the history of these islands is a disgrace to all such nations.

**Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> March** saw us depart English Harbour and have another idealic 15 mile sail, skirting the many reefs on route, to Jolly Harbour Marina half ways up the west coast of Antigua. Jolly Harbour is a new development with over seven miles of dredged waterfront. When winning the “Spirit of the ARC” award we also received a voucher for five FREE nights here. During these five days we did a lot of small jobs on the boat that had been left on the long finger. St Johns, the capital, is only a 20-minute bus ride from the marina and it was from there we got the ferry to;

### *The EMERALD ISLE of MONSERRAT, on St Patrick’s Day.*

**Suitably attired** in a Cead Mile Failte (Gaelic for “A Hundred Thousand Welcomes”) t-shirt, green trousers, shoes and hat we were collected by taxi at 0515 to catch the 0630 hour ferry to Monserrat. With us were Malcolm, Helen, Laura and Jenny Shaft from “MUNA”, John and Margaret Handley from “VITAMIN SEA” and Michael Riordan from “EDAIN”. With a not favourable weather forecast, a bad anchorage and active volcano the ferry trip, rather than sailing there, was the obvious answer. On the outward journey we met people from the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) who were preparing to evacuate the donkeys from the island, they had already taken all the dogs and cats off from the old capital area of Plymouth. There were an abundance of families in the USA willing to take the cats and dogs, this annoyed the islanders, the fact that the Americans took in and housed animals and would not take humans.

**On arrival** at the new port of entry at Little Bay in the northwest corner the first locals we met were of course the immigration people. While checking our completed entry forms the immigration lady commented on Olivia’s maiden name of Sweeney, this was also her name. We later met the undertaker who was also Sweeney. Monserrat was first settled by Irish people in 1630, after experiencing problems with the local English Protestants on the neighbouring island of St Kitts. A second wave of Irish arrived in 1649 after the Cromwellian campaign in Ireland. Later many returned to Ireland but not before leaving behind their genes of red hair and smiling Irish eyes. Names like Sweeney, O’Brien, Dublin and Ryan etc are still very popular on the island in addition to an Irish stew they call “goat water”.

### **A SAD PICTURE:**

**We engaged a local taxi** for a tour of the island that took about 3 hours. The southern half has been totally evacuated since the major volcanic eruption in 1996. The population was reduced from 12,000 at the beginning of the eruptions in 1995 to 3,000. Today it has risen to 4,000, as a result of people returning. To look down on the devastated capital of Plymouth covered to roof tops in mud slides, lava, ash and boulders the size of houses and all with a background of smoke and ash still billowing from the volcano is awesome and one which we will never forget. Looking through the windows of vacated homes it is eerie to see all the furniture in place covered in ash. An uneasy peace hangs over the island with scientists predicting more eruptions in the near future.

**THE FESTIVITIES:**

**After the tour** it was time to join in the St Patrick Day National Holiday celebrations, in the local schoolyard. These commenced at midday and entailed dancing, music and games, of which marbles was the most popular and played by young and old. There were stalls exhibiting and selling local craft. All variety of local foods including “goat water” were available for purchase. As usual the only chicken parts on sale were wings and legs. I would love to know where all the breasts go. Most people were dressed in some form of green outfit complete with shamrocks.

A jeep arrived flying an Irish flag and carrying Michael D Higgins our former minister of the Gaeltacht, Arts and Culture. He was accompanied by an RTE (Irish National Television) crew, led by Jim Fahy. They were doing a documentary on the aftermath of the volcano. Michael had filmed a documentary prior the eruption and while here this time gave lectures on the Irish connections with Monserrat.

**MUCH APPRECIATED:**

The fact that we had sailed almost 6,000 miles over eight months to be here on this auspicious occasion created great interest and we were made very welcome. The Governor of the island, Tony Abbott, OBE, came over and introduced himself. He was very friendly and hospitable and gave us his card if we needed any help. Jim and his crew interviewed us and hopefully it will be part of the documentary. A pageant re-enacting the failed slave uprising on St Patrick’s Day towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century was being played out later in the evening. Unfortunately we had to catch the ferry back before it commenced. We eventually arrived back home (our boat) at 2000hrs. It had been a long day but one we will never forget. Three days later there was a huge dome collapse spewing lava and rocks over a wide area and causing mud slides in the vicinity of the volcano and raining ash over the whole island and indeed as far as Antigua over twenty miles away.

**Lastly, following the many requests, the name of the local Tobago Cays arthritic pain relieving remedy as described in a previous report as XYZ is nothing other than “WD40”. If you read it’s label it claims to “loosen parts” and “frees sticky mechanisms. How about that?**

**Keep up your e-mails, we love to get even the smallest bit of news or better still “gossip”.**

**Pat and Olivia**

**Yacht ALDEBARAN, West Indies**