

ALDEBARAN

ANTIGUA to St MARTIN (12th REPORT)

After using up our five free nights on the marina that we had been presented with on winning the “Spirit of the ARC” award we departed Jolly Harbour and motored to the totally deserted Five Islands Bay just 3.7 miles to the north. At 0715 the following morning we weighed anchor and sailed to the reef strewn Barbuda Island 32 miles to the north and anchored at 1425 hours in 2.5 metres (our draft is 2 metres) just off an old stone jetty between Cocoa and Spanish Points in position **17 degrees 33.01 minutes North and 61 degrees 44.7 minutes West.**

Acting as pathfinder we led “ACEDIA”, a Freedom 35, sailed by Ted and Muriel Hunter from Scotland, into the anchorage. We were the only boats there. The anchorage to the west of Cocoa Point is the more popular as it is the much easier to enter. In passing I should mention that Muriel Hunter is Irish and also that they sold their previous boat to Freddie Woods our eminent Irish heart specialist, its a small world

Barbuda, 13 miles long by 7 miles wide, is the type of Caribbean Island you dream about. It has miles of deserted beaches the longest of which is 11 miles.

The following is an extract from a sailing guide of the island;

“200 shipwrecks attest to the hazards of Barbuda’s reef invested waters. Because the island is so remote the charts are incomplete. Navigation is a challenge and unless you proceed with your heart in your mouth, you may be getting overconfident. You need to plan your arrival so the sun is behind or directly overhead and never ahead of you. A sharp lookout wearing polarizing sunglasses should be stationed in the bow. If you cannot clearly see underwater where you are going, you should wait, or turn and go back. This is no place to press ahead regardless.”

Our friends in “MUNA” who accompanied us from Five Islands Bay chickened out and anchored west of Cocoa Point. During the night a swell from the northwest made this anchorage uncomfortable resulting in a mass exodus early next morning. MUNA came round to our anchorage and I went out in the dinghy and guided him in. The swimming, snorkelling, beach partying, sunsets and colours of the lagoon against the background music of surf breaking on the outer reef was exquisite. Until we left three days later we were the only three boats there. The disgraceful history, orchestrated by Europeans, of this island we will leave for another day, other than to say ‘it was used as an experimental breeding place for Africian slaves’.

At 0850 while monitoring our daily SSB net frequency prior to leaving Barbuda I responded to a somewhat worried Geoff Cross who was skippering the boat MOONDANCE to the UK. He was 65 miles east of Barbuda and had two very fast open speedboats pass him, one astern and the second across his bows. Being concerned that perhaps their intentions were not in his interests and especially when after about a half hour a third boat entered the scene. He asked that the coast guards be informed. I agreed to keep in radio contact with him throughout the day while relaying his concern via a boat CHANTELLE to the coastguards. The coastguards flew a plane over him and monitored his position; there was also a helicopter on standby. Later at 1800 hrs when Geoff was no longer concerned we agreed to end the incident. At 1810 hrs while informing the Marine Rescue Control Centre (MRCC) in Martinique I learned of Irelands rugby win over France, the controller had recognised my accent. Dare I say it again “it’s a small world”.

As all good things must come to an end, so it was that at 1215hrs on Thursday 23rd March we departed Barbuda, again in company with MUNA and ACEDIA, and sailed through the night to St Maarten / St Martin 88 miles to the northwest. The island is divided between the Dutch and French, subsequently the two spellings. Due to little or no wind we motored for the first few hours and then had a superb sail arriving in Simpson Bay, St Maarten at 0730 hours on Friday morning. The conditions in the bay were atrocious, we anchored for two hours awaiting the bridge to the Inner Lagoon to open at 0930. It was while in the bay we met our friend Michael Clear in "OYSTERHAVEN", an Oyster 53. I had worked with Michael at ECCO in Dundalk in the late sixties. Through radio relays during the past two weeks we learned of each other's whereabouts in the Caribbean. He was to have sailed south to Antigua but agreed to await our arrival in St Maarten. Having safely anchored in the Inner Lagoon he came aboard ALDEBARAN and we had a good old natter, reminiscing on the "old days" and of course "old friends". That evening Olivia prepared another of her superb meals and the three of us continued our reminiscing. Next morning Michael exited the Lagoon and sailed for Jolly Harbour in Antigua where he leaves the boat during the Summer,(hurricane season) and returns to Ireland.

St Maarten / St Martin being a duty free island and with anchoring in the lagoon being free we utilised our week doing lots of small jobs on the boat and restocking our dwindling supplies of alcohol, water and fuel. Our next stop, we hope, will be the Virgin Islands where we have been told things are very expensive. A trip in our dinghy to Marigot, the capital of the French side of the island took about 20 minutes. Philipsburg the capital of St Maarten was a US\$1 local bus ride from our anchorage. It is a huge duty free tourist centre There were five very large cruise ships disgourging their passengers the day we visited. Our main purpose for the visit was to enquire about digital cameras as we feel it is about time we moved into this phase of modern technology. Having standard films developed on this side of the Atlantic is very expensive. If anybody has any advise on this subject, or better still any contacts, it will be much appreciated.

Not being a suitable place to swim we were happy to exit the lagoon during the 1730 hours bridge opening and set a course for the British Virgin Islands (BVI) 95 miles to the northwest.

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.

P.S. We are preparing a separate report on "**LIVING ABOARD the pros and cons**" and hope to have it finished before the end of April.