

ALDEBARAN

St Maartin to the British Virgin Islands (14th Report)

On Thursday 31st March 2000 after an uneventful night passage from St Maartin (St Martin) we sailed into the SIR FRANCIS DRAKE CHANNEL in the British Virgin Islands and proceeded directly to the capital Road Town on Tortolla to clear in with customs and immigration, as is the rule.

All the tourist literature say “**welcome** to the British Virgin Islands” however it is a great pity the immigration authorities do not give the same impression. Having cleared with the very pleasant and helpful customs personnel I was directed down stairs to the immigration office. There a notice on the door said “**KNOCK AND ENTER**”. Well, I knocked, opened the door, wished the female officer behind the desk a good day, saw three chairs on front of her desk with one occupied by a man.

He like me was a yachtman checking in. Well, the abuse I got from this “lady” was most unpleasant, part of which was “can’t you see I have somebody with me” I explained that the notice on the door said “KNOCK AND ENTER”. I apologised for entering and offered to wait outside. Well the abuse continued and I was told “you are in now and might as well stay”. While completing forms, that she gave me, I listened as she continued to exercise her very abusive manner against the other yachtman. He like me was afraid to say the wrong thing and as he left he very politely said “goodbye and thank you” and the officer just ignored him. On getting my papers stamped and just as I rose to depart I told her what I thought of her attitude and that it was **not a very nice welcome to the British Virgins**. Again on the 19th April when checking out of the BVIs from Soper’s Hole I again came face to face with yet another very unpleasant female immigration officer. The custom officers, I am glad to report, in both ports were most pleasant.

Without doubt the British Virgin Islands are a cruisers paradise with an abundance of good sheltered anchorages and all within easy sailing distances. However, they are also very expensive with mooring buoys costing US\$20 per night and marinas \$42 per night, i.e. a dollar a foot. The more popular anchorages are densely covered with mooring buoys and leave very little space for free anchoring. During our 19 days there we managed to avoid both and did our own anchoring.

Ocean Cruising Club:

Our arrival in the BVIs was to coincide with the opening dinner on 1st April of the O.C.C. rally at the LAST RESORT on Trellis Bay, Beef Island. We were guests of Peter and Moira Haden from Galway who together with friends Joe and Eileen Dundon and Mary and Michael Kennedy chartered a boat for the rally. Peter is the new Irish admiral for the O.C.C. The dinner attended by over sixty was a great success with a superb carvery and a very entertaining one man show performed by the owner Peter Snell assisted by his five dogs and donkey. No, the dogs and donkey did not cook or serve the meal. If you are ever in the area I would highly recommend this resort for a good evening. The next rally venue was a party on a small beach on Little Jost Van Dyke Island. This was another very enjoyable get together assisted by a case of JAMESON WHISKEY which Peter obtained from Irish Distillers via Richard Burrows. The final gathering was another excellent dinner on Friday 7th at the BITTER END RESORT on Virgin Gorda. The OCC, with members throughout the world, is open to sailors who have completed a 1,000 passage from port to port.

While anchored in Cane Garden Bay on Tortolla we, together with a number of other yachtman helped an elderly couple re float their 26ft yacht which had gone aground. On re floating her they, David Baldwin the local Vet and his wife, invited us back to their beautiful house overlooking the bay where we had drinks and local grown produce. This is just another little story typical of the

many we can relate to but are too numerous to write about in these reports, perhaps we will tell them all in a book if ever we get the time to compile one.

Little Harbour on Peter Island where we sheltered for five days must rate as one of our favourite anchorages in the BVIs. Maybe it was because for three of the nights we had beach parties, at one of which we were joined by Fergus and Kay Quinlan from Galway in their steel yacht "PYLADAS". They are now on passage to New York from where they will re-cross the Atlantic to Galway hopefully in time for the Kinvara traditional currach (boat) regatta in August. The fourth night here we were entertained on another boat and the fifth night saw us entertain on ALDEBARAN. This will give you an idea of how "lonely !!!" we are. It was here also that we first met the lovely Canadian family of Rob and Charlene together with their children Brian 7 and Hanna 4. Having bought their boat JUNO, in St Maarten last Autumn they were now sailing with no engine, it having succumbed to a fatal disease. To negotiate anchoring they used their dinghy, operated by Brian, lashed to the side of JUNO. To sit and watch Brian and Hanna swimming, snorkelling and messing with the dinghy was an absolute joy. Here again we could write more stories especially of Brian's birthday party on the beach if time permitted. They are hoping to sell the boat and return to Canada and before taking up teaching jobs in Indonesia in September. It will be very nice if we meet them in two or three years time in Indonesia.

Annegada Island, 14 miles north of Virgin Gorda is the most northerly of the BVIs. It is very heavily fortified with reefs. We spent two nights at anchor here. There are \$20 a night mooring buoys available if you are nervous of anchoring. Most of the charter companies forbid their boats going to Annegada. On going ashore, together with the crew of MUNA, we took a taxi to the beautiful white sanded Loblolly Bay on the north east shore where we swam, snorkelled and had lunch. Walking through the island from the anchorage we came upon a salt lake, home to about fifty pink flamingos. On the way back we passed a bakery and as a treat bought an **APPLE TART** for \$10 (about IR£8.60), we very seldom have such treats but it looked nice and was indeed lovely to eat (slowly).

Our last major stopping venue before leaving the BVIs was SPANISH TOWN the capital of Virgin Gorda and the BATHS two miles to the south. SPANISH TOWN was the most depressing and dirtiest town we have yet been in, enough said about it. In contrast the place known as the BATHS are a must to visit if in the area. They are a most unusual formation of large granite boulders where the sea washes in between the huge rocks. Large pools have been created, where shafts of light play upon the water, creating a dramatic effect. Dinghies are forbidden ashore, so on picking up a free mooring buoy you take the dinghy to a dinghy mooring area about 40 metres off shore and swim the remainder to the beach. We went early in the morning before the large daily hordes of tourists arrived, we don't consider ourselves as tourists but rather travellers of the seas. Arriving in SPANISH TOWN on large cruise ships they are then transported to the BATHS by taxis. Transiting the passage through the boulders requires bending, crawling and climbing to be rewarded with white sandy beaches and good snorkelling.

From the BATHS we sailed to Sopers Hole, on Tortollas western coast, and checked out of the British Virgin Islands and set a course for the US Virgin Islands.

Keep up your e-mails we love to get them.

Pat and Olivia

Yacht ALDEBARAN , British Virgin Islands