

## **ALDEBARAN** (15<sup>th</sup> Report)

### **U.S. & Spanish Virgin Islands to St Lucia**

This report covers our visits to the US and Spanish Virgin Islands and southwards to St Lucia via Saba, Statia, St Kitts, Nevis and onwards to St Lucia.

### **U.S. & Spanish Virgin Islands to St Lucia**

The US VIRGINS were our next group of islands. Their nearest point is less than a mile from the British Virgin Islands, but what a contrast in friendliness and attitudes. CRUZ BAY, the capital and only town on St JOHN the smallest of the three main US VIRGINS was our port of entry. With the ten year US visa that we obtained prior to leaving Dublin, the filling of the necessary forms for customs and immigration was a pleasure especially with the support and help received from the very cordial officials. However, they did emphasise in the strongest manner that:

**“as we were coming from a foreign port we were not under  
any circumstances allowed to bring garbage ashore”.**

I asked,

**“what about groceries etc that we buy in the US ?”**

to which the reply was

**“once you bring them aboard they are likely to be contaminated  
and therefore cannot be brought back to shore”.**

The only exception was if we washed and cleaned our cans and bottles they could be inspected by officials and we might then be allowed to dispose of them ashore. Other garbage could only be disposed at an authorised port and they believed (note, they only believed) the nearest one was in PUERTO RICO more than 70 miles or about 14 hours sailing away. Up to this and after 6,500 miles we had not even put a sweet paper overboard. Try keeping garbage even for a few days in this heat. No more details of the solution to this major problem will be printed but may be detailed at future talks.

**CRUZ BAY** is a charming small town with a variety of multi coloured traditional Caribbean buildings together with a very attractive modern shopping centre. Our favourite place was “THE QUIET MON” (man is pronounced mon out here) an Irish Pub complete with hangings of famous Irish patriots, writers, politicians and memorabilia. It’s here that I had my first Guinness since leaving Ireland, unfortunately it was in cans. I am looking forward to my first pint of draught when we fly home for four weeks in August. Anyway, I am happier here dreaming about pints back home than being at home dreaming about cans in the Caribbean.

**St JOHN**, as the result of a legacy from Laurance Rockefeller who had the foresight to purchase the land in the 1950s, is 90 % owned by the National Parks Authority. The following extract from one of the islands publicity brochures describes the people exactly as we found them “The population consists of about 3,500 kind, intelligent, charming individuals, and some 350 asses. That is a ratio of about 1:10 – much better than elsewhere (the National Park counts the donkeys).”

With hiking trails of varying difficulty crisscrossing the island, sheltered anchorages and lots of FREE mooring buoys, the nine days we spent circumnavigating this 9 mile long by 4 mile wide island were most enjoyable.

Our first overnight mooring was in Caneel Bay from where we took a taxi (\$2.50 each), together with Malcolm, Helen, Laura and Jenny Shaft from MUNA back to THE QUIET MON for the evening. The following three nights we spent in Cinnamon Bay from where we hiked across the island to Reef Bay, a return distance of 10 miles. We started at 0830 hrs and arrived back at 1700 hrs after spending about two hours swimming in the warm waters of Reef Bay. That evening we had a very good meal at the adjacent campsite restaurant and the following night watched a free two hour open air play depicting the history and environmental aspects of the island.

Leinster Bay, on the north coast and facing the BVIs was our next overnight anchorage. From here we toured the ruins of the Annaberg Sugar Mill. Up to the later half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century St John was a major grower of sugar cane. The last mill at Reef Bay ceased production in 1915. Hurricane Hole on the south east coast, a very sheltered anchorage among mangroves was our next stop. This was followed by perhaps our best overnight anchorage in Lamshur Bay. The snorkelling here was superb, with turtles swimming under us, pelicans diving for fish and seagulls landing on their heads and backs in the hope of sharing in their catch made fascinating watching. Having seen lots of turtles on our travels this was the first place we were able to swim with them and what an experience.

Our last two nights were spent in Rendezvous Bay, where, while Olivia, Jenny (MUNA) and I were trying to reach the road from the beach to walk to Cruz Bay, we met Mark and Kim from Boston. They were renting a lovely house on the beach and offered us water, it was a very hot day. The results of this brief encounter was that Mark drove us into Cruz Bay, which was a lot farther than we had thought. He very kindly waited while we did some shopping and e-mailing at THE QUIET MON, before driving us back and inviting all six of us to dinner that evening. The evening began with Mark and Kim joining us on ALDEBARAN together with the MUNA crew for sundowners. On going ashore we were treated to a most wonderful meal and very enjoyable evening. We had bar-b-cue steaks, fresh salmon, baked potatoes, vegetables, and salads (provided by MUNA and ALDEBARAN) etc followed by pie (sorry I cannot spell the name of the pie, sounded like pecan). There is no point in saying we did not have any alcohol because you will not believe me, and of course you would be right. I must mention also that on entering the bay, which is not mentioned in the guides, that morning Olivia and indeed Malcolm on MUNA were not impressed and very nearly insisted on moving to a different location. Weren't they lucky I am so insistent; after all it was Fergus and Kay on PYLADAS who recommended Rendezvous Bay. Thank you Fergus and Kay for the recommendation and of course Mark and Kim for a most memorable evening. Next morning MUNA departed for St Thomas and the Spanish Virgin Islands from where Jenny was to fly home on 5<sup>th</sup> May. Olivia and I stayed another night and were treated with a large number of *nurse sharks* surrounding the boat, no skinny dipping that night.

**St Thomas** the next US Virgin Island we visited with it's capital Charlotte Amalie is much more commercialised and populated. Other than a couple of anchorages adjacent to the capital and the marina at Crown Bay we did not explore the island like we did St John. Our fridge packed in four days before Jim and Rita Stanley from Malahide were due to join us on 3<sup>rd</sup> May for two weeks. Without a fridge, living out here is not very pleasant, you cannot keep fresh meat, milk, butter or even more important, cold drinks. The day prior their arrival I fitted a new capacitor and had it back in action. On the morning of their arrival we docked in the very nice Crown Bay Marina, which is

within walking distance of the airport, although, because of the heat, we took a taxi there to meet Jim and Rita. They had arranged a flight through Gatwick with the charter company Sunsail. The flight arrived on time and we were back on the boat within 30 minutes of leaving. Jimmy and Rita looked so pale we wondered were they ok health wise, but so were the rest of those disembarking the flight. The first thing they said was “look at the colour of you”, we had not noticed any change in our colour and, wondered if at some time in the past we had looked as pale as them!!!!!!

Naturally the first couple of hours with them were spent hearing news and of course gossip from home while trying to open and read the multitude of post they brought with them, that unfortunately included a couple with see through windows, you know the type. That evening, together with Ian and Ann from the yacht “MISS CHIPS” and their newly arrived crew Fergus, we took a taxi to Charlotte Amalie where a carnival was in progress. **A warning** to anybody attending such places of amusement, **BEWARE OF THE RUM PUNCHES, THEY ARE LETHAL, ESPECIALLY THE SECOND ONE.** If we had not negotiated such an attractive deal for each round it might have been ok. Anyway while floating, I mean walking, we came upon a very nice restaurant where a much needed alcoholic absorbing meal was consumed and, of course with additional liquid to ease it's passage to the inners of the body. Enough said.

Next day, not too early, we said goodbye to our Scottish friends who were heading back across the Atlantic to Scotland via the Azores and hopefully Howth. Keep an eye out for them and if Fergus is still with them, don't go drinking with them, only joking !!! After stocking up with food and more beers, we motored all of 2 miles and anchored in **Honeymoon Bay** off Water Island. We thought this appropriate for Jimmy and Rita's first night. The Honeymoon got off to a bad start with us unable to get the anchor to hold for the first time since leaving home. After numerous attempts and many dive checks we were secure. Here, as arranged, we again met our Canadian friends in JUNO, they joined us for sundowners, while the children Brian and Hanna had lemonade. They are indeed a very charming family, and we will continue to keep in touch via e-mail.

DEPARTURE TIME; This is the time of year that boats start leaving the area to avoid the hurricane season. Our daily SSB radio chats, since 1st August last year have been one of the continuing highlights of our daily routine. Now, sadly we are saying goodbye to many of our friends who are departing for the east coast of America or to the majority who are returning to Europe via the Azores. You would not need to be a speech therapist to detect the emotions in the voices. I know on ALDEBARAN tears were shed and I am sure the same was happening on other boats. Some of the boats departing which we were in most frequent contact with included, DUCHESS (who gave us 100 litres of diesel in mid Atlantic), VIVA (who became our father figurehead), SHILLING, PIMPERNELL, SILENT WISH, VITAMIN SEA (whom we first met in Carlingford two weeks prior to leaving Howth), ALICE AMBLER, BRANDAMAJO, ASTOLATA (the first boat we ever spoke to on the SSB), DIVA, FANAI, FLYING CHAOS, MALO, OCEAN BREEZES and NEREIDA.

### **The Spanish Virgin Islands:**

Friday 5<sup>th</sup> May at 0845 we weighed anchor and had a lovely 20 mile sail to DEWEY on the Spanish Virgin Island of CULEBRA (6 miles long x 3 miles wide) arriving and anchoring there at 1330 hrs. The position for those interested is 18 degrees 18.4 minutes north and 65 degrees 18 minutes west.

As required we had to check in with the authorities at the airport where we experienced our worse case to date of **“bureaucracy gone mad”**. The very friendly officer explained that I was to read the first of eight framed A4 size pages on the wall and then complete the **seven forms** as highlighted on the remaining seven framed examples. Each form was slightly different but each required boat name, port of registration and number, dimensions, owners names, voyage details, crew names, nationalities, dates of birth, passport numbers etc.. On completion and on examining our details the officer said we were the first IRISH boat he had checked in during his years there. To our surprise, even though they are American citizens, the majority speak Spanish, and even their way of life is more akin to Spain especially with their siestas in the afternoon.

Another of the Spanish Virgin Islands is VIEQUES, 10 miles to the south of CULEBRA. The natives of VIEQUES as described in a cruising guide “as refuges for all stripes, from army deserters and runaway slaves to the renegade *portugee*, as were called the whites of any extraction who were on their own in the Caribbean. Today the island hosts a fiercely independent and proud population dotted by (sometimes dotty) expatriates”. For the most part of this century Uncle Sam’s Navy have been using a large part of the island for bombing and firing practise. When a civilian was killed last year by an unexploded bomb, the populace decided enough was enough and thereby started a programme of demonstrations against the Navy. While we wished to visit the island, the Navy’s recently imposed 3 mile exclusion zone round the island prevented it. We continually heard, on the vhf radio, the warships warning off yachts approaching the zone. The latest news is that the Navy have agreed to move out in three years. Another victory for the populace.

DEWEY, the only town on Culebra, did not initially impress us. However after a few visits, happy hours and craic (sorry, I should not use that word out here it might get confused with “crack”) with the locals it grew on us and in the end we were sad to leave, especially having spent, without doubt the most memorable night of our adventure so far turtle watching. The night spent watching for and observing the magnificent **LEATHERBACK TURTLES** under the supervision of a local ranger will be detailed in a separate report later. **Be sure to read it.** We again met up as arranged with Malcolm, Helen and Laura on MUNA. They had been to Puerto Rico from where their daughter Jenny flew back to England.

The neighbouring small island of CULBRITA has a lovely anchorage on its northern shore in a 400 metre diameter bay surrounded by white sanded beaches. A short walk to the rock pool known locally as “the Jacussis” with its clear water is to be highly recommended. While quite small, the variety of small tropical fish to be observed by snorkelling, no need for flippers, was perhaps the nicest we have seen to date. A more energetic exercise was the hike to the lighthouse on top of the island where poor Olivia did not duck low enough while negotiating the ruined building and received a bad bang on the head. Glad to say she has now fully recovered.

From Culebra and Culbrita we sailed back to our favourite island of St John and spent another five days re circumnavigating it with Jimmy and Rita prior to their departure from St Thomas on Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> May.

Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> May saw us provision for the 380 mile passage down the island chain to St Lucia. We departed at 1305 hrs with a plan to go direct with 3 night passages. However with very little wind we spent the first 20 hours motoring and so decided to stop at the island of SABA.

SABA, a Dutch colony, looks like a fairy tale picture of a forbidden land. A mere five square miles, it reaches a lofty 3000 feet. Tall cliffs of red, pink and brown rise vertically from the sea. If ever there was a hidden Shangri-La in the Caribbean, it is Saba. Until the early 70's the island was thoroughly inaccessible. Everything had to come and go via Ladder Bay with it's over 800 steps cut into the rock. Boats could only approach in calm weather and even then people had to wade waist deep in the water to convey cargo. After an hour snorkelling among the rocks at the northern end of Well's Bay I decided I would like to climb the 800 plus steps known as the LADDER to the small village on top called BOTTOM, yes BOTTOM, how they ever came up with a more inappropriate name I will never know.

#### **A Near Broken Marriage:**

Having landed on a very narrow shingle beach and secured the dinghy we began the arduous upward climb. It was about 1530 hours, and the sun had little sympathy on it's two northern European victims. Olivia succumbed to the steepness of the climb and heat. To say the conversation going up was cordial would be a total disregard for the truth, but it was memorable. I had to keep sufficiently ahead, out of Olivia's firing range, yes she was firing anything she could find at me. The distance of separation also helped to reduce the level of verbal abuse I could hear. However, we eventually reached our destination and all was forgotten, well almost.

**BOTTOM** was the cleanest and perhaps the nicest village we had encountered. It boasts a new international medical school whose students, when in residence, add up to 10% of the island population of 1,400. The other main village on the island is WINDWARDSIDE and up to the early fifties the only way to get to the villages was to walk along a steep mountain track. The road building here is a story in its self. To day the Sabans have an airport and small harbour.

The next morning at 0705 hrs we left Saba and motor sailed pass the island of St Eustatius (Statia) to the island of St Kitts where we anchored in White House Bay at 1550 hrs. We had a walk ashore and were invited for sundowners aboard an American chartered boat. The following morning Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> May we set a course for MONSERRAT although being warned of an imminent dome collapse on the volcano. On route we anchored at the island of Nevis and went ashore for a short time. Continuing towards Monserrat we passed within 100 metres past the "Kingdom of Redonda".

**REDONDA** is described as a handsome rock one mile long and 1000 feet high. Being uninhabited, there are no proper anchorages and climbing on the island is difficult and dangerous. It has a very interesting history with phosphates being mined from 1865 to 1914 and in 1880 an Irish-Monserrat merchant Matthew Dowdy Shiell landed with his 15 year old son and the Bishop of Antigua and had the Bishop crown his son “King Filipe 1st of Redonda”. The crowning and subsequent life of the new king is a separate story in it’s self.

At 1600 hrs we anchored in Little Bay, Monserrat. As we had already visited the island on St Patrick’s Day we did not check in, being Sunday we would have been charged overtime rates in addition to the normal entering charges. Next morning at 0630 we left and sailed down it’s east coast past the old airport and massive lava and mud flows while watching smoke and steam billow from the volcano. To sail down the west coast with the prevailing wind would have been irresponsible especially with the warning of the imminent dome collapse.

The 180 mile overnight sail, yes sail, pass the islands of Antigua, Gaudeloupe, Dominica and Martinique to St Lucia was pleasant and uneventful. We anchored in Rodney Bay Lagoon just off the marina at 1800hrs on Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> May. Next morning we went into the marina for three nights and had our fridge fixed with a new compressor. After the third night we re-anchored in the lagoon, it’s free, and discovered it was our generator that had been causing the fridge problems. So here we are on Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> June, the official start of the hurricane season, trying to get the generator fixed and awaiting post that was expressed from Ireland on Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> May, a full two weeks ago.

When we clear St Lucia we will speedily head for Grenada or on to Trinidad. We hope to lift the boat out while we return home about 10<sup>th</sup> August for four or six weeks.

**Our next report will detail that memorable night turtle watching on Brava beach Culebra.**

**Pat and Olivia  
Yacht ALDEBARAN  
1<sup>st</sup> June 2000**