

ALDEBARAN

St Lucia to Grenada (17th Report)

Friday 9th June at 0630 hours we departed Rodney Bay, St Lucia for hopefully the last time. We were there since 23rd May awaiting express post from Ireland which never arrived. The 55 mile sail south to Wallilabou on St Vincent's west coast was pleasant and uneventful arriving there at 1715 hrs. The custom office here only opens between 1600 and 1800 hrs and they charge an overtime rate of approx US\$11.

Wallilabou is infamous for the number of "boat boys" which tend to hassle yachts in the hope of getting some business. However this being our 5th time here we were well prepared and had no problems. We met a couple of very nice "boat boys" from whom we bought fruit and gave them some old t-shirts and a new pair of shoes that Helen from Muna had given us for such an occasion. The boys remembered us from previous visits and knew we had friends in the nearby village of Barrualli. Early next morning we took the local bus to the village and met our friends Joan James and Coral Kirby. Joan is the lady whom we met in 1996. In 1997 I brought her a large umbrella, (courtesy of Gerry O'Neill) which she had requested the previous year. Coral Kirby is the mother of Sean Kirby, the 18 year old who died of a brain tumour in December 1996 and for whom the Howth Yacht Club cruising group had raised money.

Just prior to our departure from Wallilabou, the boat boy who we had given the shoes to came and presented Olivia with a little souvenir of St Vincent, a small carving of a dolphin with St Vincent on it. The shoes did not fit him but fitted his mother and he said she had already gone down the village wearing them.

Continueing south we stayed a couple of nights in Bequia and could not get over how few boats were there compared with our earlier visits in January and February. Tobago Cays was our next stop where we anchored close to Vincent and Sheila Osborne from Strangford in their steel yacht DARK LADY. I swam over and invited them for drinks the following evening. To have two Irish flags flying together in the "Jewel of the Grenadines" was nice, a pleasant memory for our final visit to this area.

Wednesday 14th June at 1145 hrs we anchored behind the reef at Clifden, Union Island and invited Ian and Jo (Josephine) Sims from the yacht TIMNA over for "morning tea and muffins". Olivia had just baked a dozen lovely blueberry muffins. In the afternoon we visited our friends John and Cathy in their home. We used their internet to send messages home. In the evening we had a very pleasant meal with them at the Beech Hotel on the shores of Clifden Harbour, (See our February 2000 report for details of John and Cathy). From St Lucia down we have been saying goodbye to a lot of good friends who we have known since chartering here in 1996 and 1997 and knowing that we are unlikely to pass this way again. Though such hospitality and friendships may draw us back.

Thursday 15th June we anchored off the exclusive resort island of Petit St. Vincent and went ashore for a walk along the beach. Later in the bar we had the cheapest drink on the list and even that was very expensive. Next morning we left for Hillsborough the capital of Carriacou, part of Grenada. Anchoring off Hillsborough in company with TIMNA at 1215 hrs I went ashore to Customs at 1245 hrs to be told that I would be charged overtime during lunch hour 1200 to 1300 hrs., "No thanks" I said and sat outside for fifteen minutes before checking in. This was the most depressing place we visited since Spanish Town on the British Virgin Island of Virgin Gorda. The only good thing about it was an internet café that was cheap. At 1515 hrs we lifted the anchor and sailed past the beautiful Sandy Island with its flawless strip of sand, a few palm trees and absolutely nothing else. Our destination was Tyrell Bay a popular anchorage 5 miles to the south. Hurricane Lenny in November '99 devastated the seafront. We spent two nights here frequenting the local Yacht Club where we found the hospitality and food excellent in a very relaxing atmosphere.

Sunday 18th June at 0740 we set sail for St Georges on the West coast of Grenada a distance of about 32 miles. Just off St Georges we were called on the VHF radio by our friends in MUNA who we had last seen in the Spanish Virgin Islands on 12th May. They were in Mount Hartman Bay on the south coast of Grenada and told us of a weekly beach bar-b-cue on the nearby Hog Island. Not wanting to miss such a social occasion we altered course and after a hard five mile beat along the south coast, we anchored in Mount Hartman Bay at 1515 hrs, from here we took our dinghy the ten minutes ride through the reefs to Hog Island. Our re-union with MUNA and indeed with other friends was a sight to behold with lots of kissing and hugging, you would think we had not seen each other for years. The bar-b-cue, which was excellent, concluded just prior to darkness falling which allowed us negotiate the return passage through the reef with the last of the days light. The Mooring charter company have a base, marina and hotel in Mount Hartman Bay (MHB) which they call Secret Harbour (SH). Other than a 45 minute walk to public transport, private taxis are the only way out. However, a taxi driver named Darius Frank collects people at 0900 hrs each day, returning from the capital St Georges at agreed times of 1200 or 1330 hrs at a very reasonable cost of approx. IR£1.25 return. Darius also gives island tours, which we partook in. The highlights of which are visits to a rum distillery and nutmeg processing factory, Grenada is the worlds largest producer of nutmegs, you can smell the nutmeg throughout the island. A visit to the local markets to see, smell and purchase some of the vast variety of spices is also a must here.

Secret Harbour and a bath:

Secret Harbour has a very attractive bar area and produce a very popular social gathering between 1700 and 1800 hrs daily, i.e. HAPPY HOUR. Other than HAPPY HOUR it is very quiet, long time cruisers are mean and are reluctant to pay the normal prices. It was during one such hour we met Marcus and Loretta Higgins from Dalkey in Dublin. They had chartered a boat from the Mooring Charter Company in St Lucia on a one way passage to Secret Harbour, Grenada. When it was realised they were spending a few days in the hotel prior to flying home, Olivia and Helen brought up the subject of baths. Please appreciate that such luxuries were a distant

memory for these ladies. Loretta, being of the intelligent type, took the hint and offered them the use of their bath. Next day Olivia and Helen duly arrived at the hotel room. The bath was so big that to fill it twice would have taken ages, so, one fill with the two occupants was the solution. Loretta also supplied them with glasses of wine during the bathing ritual. They both arrived back at the bar in a very clean and relaxed mood.

FORCE 10: While Olivia and Helen relaxed in the bath the rest of us at the bar were in anything but a relaxed mood. A squall was coming through, whipping spray off the tops of waves the size of which we had never seen in this quiet sheltered anchorage. Boats started to drag their anchors and a state of mayhem ensued. Even getting back to your boat in the dinghy was dangerous. Luckily ALDEBARAN'S two anchors held. A number of boats recorded over 50 knots of wind. These were by far the highest winds we have experienced on our trip and we were lucky not to have been at sea.

SEEING IS BELIEVING:

Patrick's is a local restaurant near St Georges. With twenty courses on the menu it is very popular with Yachties. But what an experience !!! On Saturday 24th June, together with the crews of Muna, Karma, Whimsey and Blue Moon, a total of 11 people, we dined there. Half way through the meal I asked Joanne, from Karma, as to who was the lady who was serving us and I wondered where Patrick himself was. She started laughing and eventually was able to explain to me that the lady I referred to was not in fact a lady but Patrick himself. To this day I have not got over the shock. More details of this "memorable" meal can be had over a pint or two when next you meet us.

The Rain Forest in Grenada is an excellent hiking area. On Thursday 29th June together with Helen and Malcolm we took the local transport to the Etang National Park and while Olivia and Helen hiked round the lake Malcolm and I climbed Mount Qua Qua. While it only took us one and a half hours to reach the summit it was a very arduous climb being very wet, muddy and steep. On the way down we slid most of the way with each of us taking the lead at various times by sliding past each other. Malcolm recorded that I had the most falls but that he had the longest and most spectacular one. Who am I to argue with such a learned gentleman.

WOBURN Regatta on Sunday 2nd July was without doubt the highlight of our visit to Grenada. Woburn is the next village to Mount Hartman Bay and this regatta was an annual event co-inciding with the annual Fisherman's Birthday Celebrations. Olivia and I dinghied over at 1030 hrs and I got involved in helping one of the local boats set his rig. These are local work boats 18 ft long and with a beam of about four feet, they carry a gaffed mainsail and jib and a crew of four or five. The mast is made from a hard wood while the gaff and boom are made from bamboo. To see some of the crews carry down freshly cut bamboo and shape them with machetes to make booms and gaffs was an eye opener. Racing was due to start at 1200 hrs but nobody was in a hurry and it eventually started at 1400 hrs. I managed to get a crewing position, after I might add completing a satisfactory trial sail. Olivia got involved in

helping with the Optimists. The six Optimists were sailed with a crew of two in order to get as many youngsters on the water as possible. Olivia recorded all the names and finishing positions of the three races. All racing started from the beach on a 3, 2, 1 GO command, no stopwatches or complicated flag procedures. Initially I was delighted to be given the task of sheeting the jib, I say initially, because with a 6mm nylon sheet running through a 25mm pulley controlling the fair size jib it did not take long for blisters to appear on my hands. However, luck was with me, but not so much with the local skipper and rest of crew. While lying second of the six boat fleet and nearing the weather mark, which by the way was a beach from which we had to collect a handful of sand before returning back to the finish, the mast broke during a tack. After I was recovered from the water, we were eventually towed back by a rescue boat and, obviously in keeping with the local tradition they passed us a bottle of rum and a bottle of coke from which we drowned our misfortune on a continual rotation basis and, somehow the rum also helped to ease the pain in my hands. On reaching shore we were offered a replacement bare mast, to say it was straight would be a total fabrication of its true contour. During my career I have rigged hundreds of masts but no previous experience could have prepared me for this rigging lesson. Firstly, all the old rigging was removed from the broken mast by extracting all the holding **nails**. These were straightened for reuse. By undoing the wire grips on one end of the wire shrouds, the other end was swaged, they were removed through the hole in the mast. For those of you who are not sailors please excuse this big of technicality. A hole was drilled through the “new” mast, with great difficulty, and the shrouds rove through, the old forestay position was measured against the new mast and both shrouds and forestay secured with the re straightened nails. Halliard blocks etc. were also secured with nails. We missed the second race, but might have made it if there had not been so many breaks for “refreshments”. With the re-rigging complete we managed to start the third and final race. On reaching the windward beach, a distance of about a mile, in third place I, out of curiosity, asked the skipper who was jumping out to get the sand, to which he answered “**you of course, you are the nearest, I will tell you when to jump**”. As the beach got closer and closer I awaited the order to jump. Eventually, when about 20 metres from the beach, we began to tack when I heard the command “GO”. I jumped into waist high water, scrambled to the beach, grabbed a handful of the **white** sand, the sand back at the starting beach is **black** so you cannot cheat, rushed back into the water and just managed to grab the starboard quarter gunwhale as the tack was completed. We had a good downwind leg back to the finish and got second place. It was a great day and I was thrilled when the skipper asked if I would be available for the next regatta in October. My hands were in bits for three weeks afterwards, it was suggested I should keep taking the scabs off to slow the healing process and have something to show when I got home in August.

Following advice from fellow cruisers and prior to leaving Grenada we obtained visas for Venezuela.

Finally, remember we love to get your e-mails, but if possible please do not include attachments.

Pat and Olivia, West Indies