

Extended Cruising in the Caribbean

Installment 5 Cruising in St. Vincent and the Grenadines

This is the fifth installment of a planned seven article series that chronicles an adventure of sailing Windward Passage, our Beneteau 445, from the Chesapeake Bay to the Caribbean and down the island chain as far south as St. Vincent. After spending two months in St. Vincent we will sail back up island to Tortola where provisioning will be done for the trip back to the Chesapeake Bay in May, 2008. Previous articles covered Planning the Voyage, Preparing the Boat, The Outbound Ocean Crossing and Cruising in the British Virgin Islands (BVI). This article covers our trip south from the BVI and the first month of cruising in St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

On Feb. 2 Ken and Dodie Lehman and John and Betty Ingram came on board for the trip south to St. Vincent and the Grenadines (SVG). We provisioned in Road Town and left on Feb. 3 to sail first to Isle de Saint in Guadeloupe then on to SVG. The weather was unsettled with strong, gusty winds out of the SE so we decided to stay at anchor in Eustatia sound at the eastern tip of Virgin Gorda still in the BVI and depart the next morning.

We left Eustatia sound at 0700 on Feb. 4 with the winds down a little but still in the mid-20's and out of the SE.



Figure 1: John Ingram enjoys the sail

This made our course very nearly a beat and the seas were running with a swell of nearly 10 feet. It was very uncomfortable sailing and we were taking many waves over the bow.

We discovered considerable water in the bilge and two of the bilge pumps were running constantly. This is very unusual for Windward Passage as she almost never has

water in the bilge. Inspection showed that the anchor locker was filled with water and a considerable amount was coming into the boat interior through two holes in the bulkhead that separates the anchor locker from the interior of the boat. One of these holes was from the original construction when the builder had routed three large cables through the bulkhead to provide electricity to the anchor windlass. Instead of using bulkhead fittings for each cable individually they had drilled a hole large enough to accommodate the three cables and simply passed them through. The other leak was around a

hole that I had made in the bulkhead to route the hose for an anchor wash down system that I installed. I had calked around the hose but the pressure from the waves had pushed the caulk out.

We altered course to reduce the amount of waves coming over the bow. We then used a large piece of foam wrapped in a heavy duty plastic bag to plug the openings in the anchor locker cover that were there to allow the anchor chain to pass through. This reduced the amount of water entering the anchor locker and we were able to pump the bilge dry. Our new course was directly for Bequia in SVG so we decided to bypass Isle de Saints and go directly to SVG arriving in Admiralty Bay in Bequia at 2100 on Feb. 6.

It was a moonless night and many of the anchored boats in the harbor had no lights showing. After several close encounters with anchored boats, we tied up to a commercial mooring just off the channel for the ferry boats. We left this mooring at first light and anchored in Princess Margaret Bay. After inflating the dinghy, we went to the town and cleared customs, did some provisioning and just relaxed after the difficult passage.



Figure 2: Susan, Dodie, Winston and Betty

The next day we engaged Winston Taxi to take us on a tour of the island. Since our last visit in 2000 there has been a change in government and in the attitude toward development and tourism. Many residential and commercial developments are under way and this is providing badly needed jobs. The economy shows the effect. Winston told us that most of the residents were delighted

with the opportunities that the new developments were bringing though some do not like to see the changes taking place in their lifestyle. I sensed a decided improvement in the attitude of the people and a more positive outlook than I had ever seen in our previous trips to this beautiful island.

The next day we sailed to Young Island Cut at the southern tip of St. Vincent where we picked up a mooring ball owned by Sam's Taxi and Tours. Before leaving the Chesapeake I had arranged with Sam to reserve a mooring ball every Friday and Saturday of February and March so that our

outgoing and incoming crews could have easy access to the airport. Sam provides the transportation needed and arranges for our laundry to be done and returned before our departure on Sunday morning. The only problem with this plan was that there is no place in the cut where we could purchase water for the boat.

There are several nice restaurants along the cut so we could celebrate the completed week with the outgoing crew. We chose The Lime 'N Pub and found the food and service to be outstanding.

On Saturday morning John and Betty left us and Christine Pooler and her mother, Mary, came on board. Ken and Dodie stayed on board for the next two weeks. Christine and Mary have sailed with us on day sails in the Chesapeake but this was their first island sailing experience. The winds continued to blow unusually strong for this time of the year - rarely less than 20 knots. We sailed the nine miles to Bequia where we were able to



Figure 3: John, Susan, Randy, Ken, Dodie and Betty at the Lime 'N Pub



Figure 4: Taking on Water from Daffodil's Barge

purchase water from Daffodils Marine Service. The water is delivered to your anchored boat by a motorized barge and pumped on board while the barge is rafted to your boat. Of course as soon as the barge was rafted to us the wind increased to 25 – 30 knots and gusting higher. I was concerned about our anchor dragging so I ran the engine with the propeller engaged at a slow speed to relieve the pressure on the anchor. It took about 90 minutes to fill our three tanks.

The next day we set out for the island of Mustique. As we were leaving the anchorage I attempted to adjust a line used to tie off the wind generator propeller when it is not in use. A large wind shift swung the generator propeller and it caught my hand, cutting the middle finger. Clinics in the Caribbean are not like in the US. We have had a positive experience

with one on Mystique so we decided to continue our sail to that island instead of looking for a clinic in Bequia. The doctor at the clinic took an x-ray of the finger from the top and said there was a hairline fracture. He applied several stitches to close the wound and taped the finger to immobilize it.

I had purchased a drivers license in Bequia so that we could rent a



Figure 5: Our Rented Mule in Mustique

Mule – a glorified golf cart that holds 6 people. We rented our Mule and took a four hour tour of Mustique. The homes on this island are owned by the rich and famous from all over the world. As we were riding around we passed Mick Jagger of the Rolling Stones who is one of the property owners. We ended our tour with lunch at the Firefly restaurant with its marvelous view of the harbor.

The next day we sailed to Tobago Cay. The wind was in the high 20's but off the quarter so it was not too uncomfortable for our novice sailors. This spot has to be one of the most beautiful in all of the Caribbean. There is a 3 mile long horseshoe shaped reef with three islands forming a triangle nestled in the middle of the horseshoe. We anchored in the middle of the triangle and enjoyed the breeze but had almost no swell or chop because the reef breaks the incoming waves. It is an easy dinghy ride from the anchorage to the reef where the snorkeling is excellent.

When we were last in SVG in 2000 the boat boys had become a bit of a problem. They were quite aggressive in trying to sell their wares – some of which were not legal – and they littered the island beaches. It was a pleasant surprise to find that the government has now declared Tobago Cay to be a national park and has restricted the boat boys and trained and licensed them. A park police boat collects a park fee each afternoon from the boats anchored in the park and ensures that the boat boys are operating within the law.

The next day we set out for the island of Canouan where a new resort and golf club have been built and The Moorings charter company has

established a new base. However, the ocean swell from the constant strong winds made the harbor too uncomfortable so we bypassed the island and continued north back to Bequia. From there we sailed on Friday back to Young Island Cut for our weekly crew change.

On Saturday Christine and Mary left us and we were joined by Cynthia Pyron and her friend Julie Cook. They had arrived a couple of days early and had used Sam's tour service to see much of St. Vincent. The movie "Pirates of the Caribbean" was filmed on St. Vincent and the sets have been left as a tourist attraction. Cynthia and Julie found this to be quite interesting and they also enjoyed visiting the waterfalls on the east side of the island.



Figure 6: Christine Takes the Helm

On Sunday we set out for Mustique so that I could have the stitches removed from my finger. However the winds continued to be in the high 20's and the ocean swell was over 8 feet. Knowing that this would make the anchorage at Mustique quite uncomfortable we elected to continue to Tobago Cay so we could enjoy the calm anchorage. Once we were anchored the winds increased to over 30 knots and continued at that level for the next day. We elected to stay in the anchorage and enjoyed the chocolate filled pastries that one of the boat boys (Walter) brought to us each morning from the bakery on Union Island. Tuesday was the same and we began to wonder if we were going to get a weather window for the beat back to Young Island Cut.

By Wednesday the winds had moderated and the swell was reduced so we set out for Mustique, arriving just after noon. I obtained a Mule and Susan and I set out for the clinic to have the stitches removed. We arrived to discover that it was closed on Wednesday afternoons. However, Susan flagged the clinic van that was passing by and a different doctor agreed to remove my stitches.

When he saw the finger he said he wanted to take more x-rays. He turned the finger on its side and resulting the x-ray showed that it was



Figure 7: X-Ray of Randy's Broken Finger

broken in three pieces with part of the knuckle severely displaced. He said that it required immediate surgery or I would lose all use of the finger.

We immediately got on the internet and arranged for me to fly home for surgery. The Sunsail Charter Company on St. Vincent agreed to let us put Windward Passage in one of their slips with Susan staying on board. Our daughter, Julie and her friend Kevin were scheduled to sail with us the next week and they said they would fly in and hang out with Susan while I got patched up. Our friends Carol Hanson and Dennis Wallace were scheduled to join us the following week and they elected to do so even though they would not be sailing. As I write this, the surgery has been done with four screws inserted to hold the bone together and a temporary pin used to immobilize the joint for a week. Today the pin and the stitches were removed and I am preparing to return to Windward Passage to continue our adventure.

In the next episode I will cover the last month of our stay in SVG and the trip north back to the British Virgin Islands where we will prepare for the sail back to the Chesapeake Bay. This last leg will be the subject of the final article to be published in late summer.