

Extended Cruising in the Caribbean

Installment 6 Cruising in SVG and Sailing to The BVI

This is the sixth installment of a planned seven article series that chronicles our seven month adventure of sailing Windward Passage, a 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 sailed back up island to Tortola to prepare for mid May return to the Chesapeake. Previous articles covered Planning the Voyage, Preparing the Boat, The Outbound Ocean Crossing and Cruising in the British Virgin Islands (BVI), Cruising in St. Vincent and the Grenadines (SVG) – the first month. This installment chronicles our second month of cruising in SVG and the trip north back to the BVI. The final installment will cover the ocean passage back to the Chesapeake Bay.



Figure 1 Carol Hanson enjoys a snorkeling excursion

Installment 5 ended with my description of breaking the middle finger of my left hand, my dominant hand. After flying home to Delaware on Feb. 24 for surgery on Feb. 26 I returned on March 8 to Windward Passage where post op rehab would take place throughout the remainder of our journey. Susan, Julie, our daughter, and her friend Kevin Velarde spent the week of Feb. 24 – March 1 SCUBA diving with Indigo Dives and exploring a variety of St. Vincent land sites including Dark View Falls and Wallilabou where Pirates of the Caribbean was filmed. Carol Hansen and Dennis Wallace spent the second week with Susan snorkeling and visiting St. Vincent sites. These two weeks in Sunsail's Blue Lagoon Marina were very good even without sailing thanks to these four people and to the many St. Vincent people who we met.

John and Kathy Reager, Jeff Arriza and Nancy Peffer arrived on board Windward Passage a few hours before my return. We celebrated the successful surgery on my now famous finger with dinner at the marina restaurant. The next day we left the marina for Tobago Cays which is not an easy task. The marked exit through the reef has only 5.5 ft. of water at low tide and around 7.0 ft. at high tide. We draw 6.3 ft. so passage at any time other than high tide is not possible. An unmarked, natural cut through the reef is only about 10 ft. wide and on a diagonal. Depth in the cut is over

12 ft. with reef just a few feet under the surface on either side. One charter boat captain attempted to maneuver this cut on his own and ran a brand new Beneteau 473 on to the reef with considerable damage. Michael, one of the local pilots, took us through this cut on our way in two weeks earlier and we engaged his services again to exit. I considered the \$20 pilot fee to be a great insurance investment!



Figure 2 Kathy Regar and Nancy Peffer enjoy the sun at Tobago

Over the next four weeks we sailed to four principal sites: Tobago Cays, the islands of Mustique, Bequia and our staging area –

Young Island Cut. Many people ask if Susan and I get bored visiting the same sites each week. Actually, we enjoyed these places in new ways through the eyes of many friends (ages 13 to 60) who were seeing them for the first time. Sharing these fantastic experiences with friends has been the highlight of this entire adventure for us. The wonderful – and sometimes challenging – sailing has been a bonus.

Tobago Cays: A three mile long horseshoe shaped reef and several smaller reefs enclose three small, uninhabited islands that make up Tobago Cays. Anchoring within the triangle formed by the three islands provides protection from the waves with excellent holding for the anchor in a sand bottom in depths of 8 to 30 feet. Anchoring the dinghy close to the reef is great for snorkeling where fabulous coral and fish abound. Large sea turtles swim freely around the boat and are fun to watch. There are also beach areas and cliffs to explore where magnificent views of surrounding islands can be enjoyed. I have long considered this location to be the most beautiful in all of the Caribbean. Most of our guests wanted to spend more than one day here and sometimes high winds actually caused us to stay put for at least one more day.

Our favorite boat vendor, Walter, delivered our pre ordered chocolate filled croissants and warm baguettes to us each morning. He also sold several tee shirts to Windward Passage crews.

Mustique Island A 1400 acre island that is owned and managed by the Mustique Company, Ltd. has 67 luxury privately owned villas which are



Figure 3 Susan, John Regar, Kathy Regar, Jeff Ariza, Nancy Pepper and Randy at the Firefly restaurant

available for rent. Many more are privately owned but not available for rent. Villa owners come from all parts of the world. Currently two villas are for sale and we arranged to visit one of them with a Mustique realtor. The asking price is \$3.8 million. Our friend who is a home builder described it as a definite fixer upper. The

other villa is priced at \$21 million. The six of us could not pool enough resources to meet the down payment so we decided to

not look at it!

Randy's SVG driver's license allows us to rent a Mule (a golf cart that holds 6 people) to explore the island and admire its scenic vistas with marvelous villas. The spectacular Macaroni Beach with a family picnic area is a popular destination. Firefly Restaurant/Resort is

also a favorite place for us to enjoy lunch or drinks and a view of the harbor where Windward Passage is moored.



Figure 4 Randy drives the rented Mule

We always tried to pick up one of the moorings close to the excellent harbor reef so that we could snorkel right from the boat. Brightly colored coral, fish, turtles and rays are seen frequently.

Dinner at Basil's Bar was a chance to enjoy dining over the water with the sound of the waves crashing on the reef below. The ocean swells were quite high during our entire stay in SVG so there were times when the diners at the tables on the perimeter of the restaurant would get a little wet when an unusually high wave would come ashore. These same ocean swells also caused sleeping onboard to be very challenging.

Bequia Island Admiralty Bay has a small town with a nice fruit and vegetable market, small grocery store, many interesting shops, two chandleries for buying boat parts, several restaurants including the Gingerbread House, Whaleboner and others. Daffodil's Marine Service has a

barge that delivers fresh water and diesel to boats anchored in the harbor. This is one of the few places to refill the boat's water tanks. We used this service often in addition to filling up at the Blue Lagoon Marina when we stayed there.



Figure 5 The Martin family pose at a set for *The Pirates of the Caribbean*

Bequia's Easter Regatta is a popular event in the Grenadines. On Thursday we were anchored in Princess Margaret Bay with the Martin family, Patrick, Nancy, and Anne-Grae for a prime view of all the activities. However, the northerly swells were rocking the boat more

than 20 degrees from side to side and were predicted to increase over the weekend. We decided to leave for

safer harbor at Blue Lagoon. From there the crew did a tour of Fort Charlotte on Friday.

On Sunday we headed for Tobago Cays with our new crew, the Brown family. Fortunately the Round Bequia Race for the Easter Regatta was taking place so we were able to sail a parallel course with them for a while. The winds were 20 to 25 knots but we did see a few spinnakers flying as we headed off.

Young Island Cut and St. Vincent Each Friday we returned to St. Vincent's Young Island Cut or Blue Lagoon. Saturdays were always "shifting gear" times. A driver from Sam's Taxi took our friends to the airport for their departure and later in the day brought the next week's guests to the boat. Susan and I provisioned for the week ahead, sent laundry out, and straightened up the boat. Saturdays were busy but we developed a routine that worked for us.

We enjoyed several interesting tours of St. Vincent during the two months. One hike to the top of the famous



Figure 6 The Brown family on Soufriere Volcano

Soufriere Volcano was enough for us! We climbed with the Brown family, Chuck, Debbie, Adam and Eric and our guide Cheeky for two hours up the 3000 ft. path which got steeper and more treacherous as we neared the top. Our destination was totally fogged in with a cold wind gusting at 25-30 knots. We waited at least 45 minutes for the fog to clear while huddled together for warmth and stability. There are no guard rails to keep one from falling into the crater. Some of our group did lie on their stomachs at the edge to peer into the foggy abyss. Clearing just never happened so we headed down, passing several people on their way up. Our early morning start really paid off.



Figure 7 Mary Polk sails in the 20+ knot winds

Mary and John Polk joined us onboard for our final Grenadines island hopping week. Mary is definitely becoming an expert at identifying fish and really appreciated our book entitled Reef Fish Identification by Paul Humann and Ned Deloach. John had surgery on a hand last year and Mary had arranged

for his surgeon, Dr. Sowa to do the surgery on my finger. John and I shared therapy exercises during the week.

North to Tortola All good things must come to an end and it was now time to begin the voyage back to the Chesapeake Bay. For the first leg of this trip from SVG to Tortola we were joined by Bill and Donna Zimmerman and Howard Freedman. All three are experienced SCUBA divers. We took two weeks to cover the 400 miles so that we could dive along the way. Dive St. Vincent led the five of us on four dives. We saw spectacular coral and marine life diving New Guinea Reef, The Wall, Turtle Bay and The Gardens. Howard has done over 200 dives in locations around the world and he rated these dives as some of the best that he has ever seen.

Before leaving St. Vincent we invited Sam and Roz, owners of Sam's Taxi, to join us for dinner at Excape. It was the first time we had met Roz and it was great to be able to thank her in person for all of the help that she had given to us and to our guests over our two months stay.

We left early the next morning to sail to Soufriere on St. Lucia. It was a great sail with the boat on a starboard tack the entire time. We only made

minor adjustments to the sails and were in Soufriere by 4:00 pm – just in time to clear customs. We picked up a mooring just off the Bat Cave on the north side of the harbor facing the majestic Pitons – two peaks that rise over 2400 feet from the ocean.

We contacted Action Adventure Divers to arrange two dives each for the next two days. Fairy Land, The Pinnacles, Fairy Land (different area) and Superman's Flight were declared by our experienced divers as at least an 8 or 9 on a 10 point scale. The sponge coral were incredible and the colors and variety of coral and marine life took you breath away – not a good thing to have happen when over 60 feet below the surface! The name for Superman's Flight dive came from one of the Superman Movies when he flew over one of the Pitons to get a flower for Lois Lane. He would have flown directly over the location of the dive. The locals are very proud that their most famous landmark is in one of these popular movies.



Figure 8 Donna and Bill Zimmerman pose in front of the majestic Pitons

Following our last dive we sailed north to Marigot Bay where we had Windward Passage in a charter fleet for 5 years with The Moorings from 1995-2000. We were blown away when we entered the bay. The old hotel has been rebuilt into a 110 room hotel complex which includes many shops and a nice grocery store. The original restaurant has been totally renovated. The dock has been extended and refurbished and now accommodates mega yachts up to 210 ft. long and has space to accommodate more than a dozen!

We were delighted to see some of the workers who had been there during our charter time. Lynn is now the office manager and she was delighted to see Susan and me return. Several of the workers remembered the party that we gave for the staff when we left in 2000. Nixon, formerly the dock manager, stopped by to visit for a while in the evening. We enjoyed a spectacular dinner at The Rain Forrest, a new restaurant across the bay.

Susan, Donna, Bill and Howard took a taxi tour of the island including the capital, Castries, and the largest bay on the island, Rodney Bay. Both



Figure 9 Howard Freedman at Fort Rodney

have seen tremendous change over the last eight years with Rodney Bay accommodating the construction of several multi story hotel resorts. Susan was dismayed that the character of the beaches is being lost with these resorts but the economy is definitely benefiting and the people have many more work opportunities.

The crew voted to bypass Guadeloupe and sail straight to Tortola. Strong winds off the quarter or the beam enabled us to cover the 335 miles in almost exactly 48 hours – an average speed of 7 knots. We cleared customs at Spanish Town on Virgin Gorda and sailed on to Gorda Sound to schedule 3 dives with Dive BVI. Our Wednesday afternoon dive and two Thursday morning dives included the Chimneys on George Dog Island then Wall-to-Wall (named for the wall to wall fish population) on West Dog Island and finally to Vanishing Rock off of Cooper Island. All were great dives and it was wonderful for Susan and Randy to dive with the instructors, Andrew and Zani, who had certified them a few months before.

On Thursday, April 17 we sailed to Trellis Bay in time to pick up a mooring before the start of their first annual air show at the Airport on Friday. Howard gave Bill lessons in wind surfing and then Howard demonstrated his skill by surfing over to Marina Cay while Bill and Donna followed in the dinghy. We enjoyed a reunion with staff and customers at De Loose Mongoose restaurant on Friday night and then our crew departed on Saturday.

Susan and I sailed to Road Town where I received a replacement linear drive for the auto pilot. The old unit was making some noise that bothered me and I wanted to replace it before we began the ocean trip. I was delighted that it took less than an hour to replace the unit. We then continued to complete maintenance chores in preparation for the return voyage.

By Friday we had reduced the maintenance list to a few minor items so we motored (wind was less than 5 knots) to a lovely anchorage, Benures Bay, on the north side of Norman Island. We will enjoy this and several anchorages that we have not yet visited until it is time for Susan to fly home on May 1. I will then solo sail until the first of the crew for the ocean voyage

to Norfolk, Chuck and Judy Stadler, arrive on May 10. The three of us will sail the BVI for a week until Sut Anderson and Gerry Hunter arrive on May 16. We will leave for Norfolk on May 17 or 18 if the weather cooperates. That final chapter will be covered in the next article.