

We are working Hard!

We left you last month with our arrival at Hog Island, ahead of us was another two weeks work of painting the decks, well actually, probably one week, but we like to live a little too, so the work expands to fill the time available!

The Hog Island Anchorage



Let me tell you about Hog Island. The anchorage is well protected from seaward by two reefs and the island itself provides shelter from the prevailing westerly trade winds. There are about thirty boats moored here but only about half of them have people on board, so we have a community population of about thirty. Most are refugees from the world of business, living out the cold of their homeland, mainly north American winter, in the warmth of the Caribbean; some are skilled tradesmen, working their passage through life by selling their skills to other boat owners – and there is always a market for such skills – and one crew comprises an HR Manager and a Civil Servant, both having skills that are totally useless in this practical environment, able only to keep the various bars around the bay in gainful employ by serving them cool draft beer at the end of a hard day's painting. The Hog anchorage is swell free; we lie silently to the cool trades each evening, the stars provide a canopy above us, and we are at least half a mile from the nearest mosquito.

Our little community is served by a "cruiser net" which wakes us each morning at 0730 with announcements on how we can run our day, how we can find a bus to the shops and where the ladies domino group meet for their afternoon session – its all very American! The net also keeps us in touch with what is

going on in the world, with a daily brief snippet from the BBC, so I know oil prices are going up and bankers are getting their bonuses and the USA are about to impose their law and order to some other part of the world – But then I knew that without turning the radio on! Our first morning on Hog, the radio net came up with something a little more locally real. A Charter Catamaran had been found heading north off the west coast of St Vincent with no crew on board. It was on automatic pilot with a hole in one hull, which had subsequently flooded, but no evidence of the one-man crew she left Union Island with the previous day. The request was for any of us cruisers headed up island, to keep an eye out for the lone delivery skipper taking this one-way charter boat back to its base. Regretfully, there were no sightings and the perils of solo sailing had struck home once again.

The net also operates as a security network during night hours, we all keep our radios switched on should there be any emergency, or help required by one of the boats. One evening we were sitting on deck watching a DVD when an emergency call for help was put out by one of the boats in the adjoining Prickly Bay. Somebody had fallen from their dinghy in the dark and was in the water – the caller was asking for assistance from other cruising boats to launch their dinghies and bring torches to help search for the casualty. We sat and listened, too far away to be able to add our dinghy to the efforts, but we heard every step of the search until the transmissions came to an end a couple of hours later when a body was recovered from the water. The sad reality was that a young British man, in his early thirties and living on a boat out in the bay. Well known locally, he normally rowed his own dinghy, but this evening he was using the powered version. Tragically, he collided with a buoy in the channel, possibly broke his neck on impact and received further injuries from the thrashing propeller as the boat passed over him. His rescuers tried hard with CPR, but he was pronounced dead when the ambulance and medical support arrived. This sad incident is now commemorated, as the buoy he hit now resembles the roadside shrines we are becoming so familiar with in the UK.

The Pool @ Phare Bleu Marina



On a happier note, the net also tells us about local activities and how the cruising can help the island. One such project is the Mount Aires reading plan, where cruisers go and help local children learn to read on a Saturday morning. Regretfully, I am always very busy on a Saturday morning but Carol, knowing that her career break encourages her to put in some voluntary service overseas, and fancying herself as a bit of a missionary, was keen to take this role on, so up Mount Aires she went. I stayed and toiled on the boat because I've never considered a missionary position very fulfilling and feel that I am much better employed in beautifying my boat, and anyway I had to watch the England v/s Ireland 6 nations match, though with hindsight, I may have been better up Mount Aires!

Our boat maintenance is spurred on by the fact that our "boat broker" is flying in from St Marten to get to know Moya; he thinks he has a buyer! My reaction is possibly less than enthusiastic and do my best to be "unavailable" for his visit, but Carol reminds me that "I know this is the best course for the long term future" and I meekly agree to bring him to the boat. When he arrives he is ecstatic about Moya and her condition, he thinks she has "presence" and announces that the first person who is interested enough to come and see her will buy her. I immediately take him ashore and change our phone number, so we will see what happens next!

What we paint



The painting continues; how many of you reading this and wishing for a life such as this have a “working bikini” Carol has two, she even has working flip-flops. I think she is secretly enjoying the work and now she has found my paint store, has likened it to having lots of little tins of nail varnish! – You have just got to hang on to something to get you through it, but we work as a team and within our allotted two weeks the work is finished. Moya has had her shine restored and we both feel satisfaction with what we have achieved; especially each time we remember the quotes for professionally carrying out the same work, but I am sure our work contained more fastidious detail.

Grenada is a busy Cruise Ship destination and I think our prolonged painting session has turned us into a tourist attraction. Each day, as these leviathans of the deep disgorge their 2000-3000 passengers into the purpose built terminal in St Georges, thence to be harangued by local taxi drivers with all sorts of offers, it appears that two groups elect to take part in excursions to Hog Island. The first arrive on a catamaran, beach their craft on the island, play loud music for half an hour, drink lots of rum and then weave their way back to their mother ship. The second group are more selective; they arrive by canoe about an hour later, picnic quietly on the same island and then paddle back home. It is here we come into our own. As the paddle past us, Carol models that days working bikini, whilst I try, a little, to hide the “builder’s bum” cut of my designer shorts as their cameras click in appreciation of Moya’s beauty. Some compliment us on the beauty of the boat, others just gasp – I’m not sure if the gasp is caused by what they see, or just the effort they are putting in as they wonder why they chose this particular excursion.

We smile back, basking in their appreciation, just wondering when we can have a normal holiday too!

The daily cruise party visit



On Sundays, the island comes alive as it is the party centre of the south of the island – for those with the ability to get there – Roger’s Bare Foot Beach Bar opens for business – it does not have any doors to open, nor any facilities to offer, but if you don’t look too hard at the hygiene arrangements you can buy a very acceptable chicken or fish BBQ and beer, or rum served in cups that were probably designed for the beer. Then the band strikes up, it’s normally very good, but always very loud – it has to be loud to kill the noise of the generator used to power the amplifiers. The dancing starts and the customers party on into the night and I’ve noticed that some smoke cigarettes that are much larger than those normally on sale in the UK, but then there is a darker side to Hog Island that is reflected only in the occasional sight of large anonymous speed boats powering by in the night, totally unlit and boasting engines more than able to compete with any Coastguard patrol craft I have seen in these waters.

One Sunday night, Carol and I were sitting in our cockpit having a nightcap when suddenly there was a loud bang. We looked around but saw nothing, then moments later Moya rocked violently as if disturbed by the wash of a passing pirogue, but no boat had passed us for several minutes. Then, on the cruiser’s net came a “Pan Pan” message – an emergency call – three of the local boats returning to base in the dark had collided. I responded to the call and launched Moya’s dinghy immediately and set off for the scene. Being one of the first to arrive, and the only boat present with a radio, I took charge

and passed slowly through the carnage looking for bodies in the water. One of the three boats shot off toward their home beach, with the casualties, whilst the second was assisting the third, holed and sinking, to the safety of the shore. We asked repeatedly if anybody was still in the water, but those involved were reluctant to talk to us, preferring to handle the matter without outside interference. I recovered the bow section of one boat, nailed plywood, but no bodies – eventually somebody did say that everybody was accounted for, so we stopped looking and returned to our home craft. We learned later that three people had been hospitalised with lacerations, broken ribs and teeth knocked out – one of whom was a baby – but there seemed no official interest in the incident. An interesting postscript to the affair was that later that night, other local boats returned to the scene with powerful lights, searching the water for other wreckage that was clearly very important to them that nobody else should find. Its quite exciting being here!

As we approached the last week of the month, I heard that my younger son, Richard, had been spurred on by the fact that Moya was on the market and he had never seen her, he had surprisingly taken time off from playing rugby, and was coming out to see us together with his girlfriend, Sarah. Carol and I planned their week to take in a “snapshot of Grenada” at the same time as planning activities for Richard to take him off Sarah’s hands whilst she concentrated on the sunbathing – well somebody has to help Carol with that important area of a sailing holiday!

Doug & Richard



We planned the week to start at Phare Bleu Marina, an old lightship providing the marina facilities and finished in Port Louis, formerly the lagoon in St Georges before Peter de Savary got his hands on it, but in between we visited Roger's beach bar, did the cultural thing by taking them to a waterfall, we sailed up Grenada's west coast on a fine reach at 7 knots under a main, two jibs and a mizzen, which really impressed Richard, and we even went snorkelling in the underwater sculpture park. This is an area where they have created concrete sculptures and sunk them to provide interest for divers and snorkellers – the Angel of the North was down there, John Lennon on his piano and even Elvis had been seen there – a bit like Crosby beach really and the iron men but the water was warmer! Still, it was different. All this leisure did not prevent me using Richard's skills – he climbs masts for a living – so I found some aerial work for him to do and sent him up Moya's main mast, several times, where I am pleased to say he did some excellent work fitting a new deck working light for me.

Birthday at Petit Bacaye



The highlight of the week for me was my birthday lunch – in a tree top hotel at Little Bacolet – with just the four of us dining. The only interruption being Richard receiving a text to say his team had won their weekly game despite his absence, and I'm not sure if that was good or bad!

All too soon the week passed and they left us to return to work – whilst we soldier on in the sunshine!

And that's a good place to end for this time – one more to come!

Doug & Carol