

Darramy on tour No 19: The Galapagos Isles. Pacific Crossing and the Marquesas Islands. March - June 2012

Kaoha

(Marquesan Hello),

Well, if you have been following our Pangolin site you will be aware that we are now halfway across the Pacific in the Marquesas (French Polynesia). We arrived on 2nd May after 23 days at sea. But, more of that later, we left you last time with a nice pair of Boobies as an introduction to the Galapagos, so I'm going to back track and start there, and try to bring you up to date. I have tried to be as brief as possible, but the place is worth a few extra words (groans from the scanners amongst you)!

Apart from the Boobies, the Galapagos is definitely a place for wild life, most of the animals and mammals are not tame, but they are neither frightened nor wary of us horrible ugly humans! You can get so close to most species, it's really weird. The whole group of islands are strictly controlled, so access was limited, but we had a permit to enable us to visit four of the islands. Firstly we landed at San Cristobal, the anchorage was quite crowded, and besides transiting sail boats, there are a lot of organised trip boats doing island and diving tours. These are mostly quite large catamarans, which are full of people who have come to the Galapagos because it is such a different destination, and like us, most visitors, have come to see the natural beauty of being so close to nature.



Big Charlie D & Little Susie D

It all started with that Charlie Darwin fellow from Shrewsbury UK, where he got his ideas for his book "The origin of the species", Ecuador took over the administration of the islands in 1800 and something, and it became a National park in about 1950, before that one island was a penal colony, and life on the islands seemed pretty harsh. But, what a good job they have made of keeping the place as it was. Most stuff was so natural, you could only visit certain areas of each island, and there were park



Sue chatting up a sea lion

rangers everywhere. We did not find these officials power mad, they were all polite, extremely helpful and wanted the visitor to get the most out of their islands. Every trip we did we had a guide, who spoke some English, and they loved imparting information to us.

I did a few diving trips with a really good dive centre in San Cristobal, we saw loads of different sea life, but the high light for me was diving with the Hammerhead sharks. Pretty magnificent creatures, also whilst diving we were buzzed by a load of sea lions, whilst looking on land as fairly awkward animals, in the water they came into their own, elegant and powerful, and just fun to dive with, there were many other types of shark, Black tip, White tip and also the Galapagos shark, turtles in abundance as well. All the dive trips were well organised, we also had our own marine adviser on the boat as well as the dive master, so loads of

+information was being imparted to us by qualified experts.



All aged over 50!

Back on dry land, you were always met when going ashore by a host of Sea lions, lying around like stray dogs, (and they stank!), but it is their place. We did a few walks to different beaches to swim and snorkel, again with sea lions and in one place a few big turtles. We also did an inland tour where we visited a tortoise breeding centre, all very impressive, and we have even more pictures to bore you with when we come back home!



Iguana'n normal day

got nick named Billy! We did some good walking, to nearby beaches, one was beautiful white sand, with, loads of black Iguana's basking in the sunshine. They are really fascinating creatures, although they may not win any beauty contests, they were peacefully getting on with everyday Iguana business! On Santa Cruz, there is another giant tortoise reserve, now we are talking, giant here, not like the little fellows you get in the pet shop at home

We next visited Santa Cruz which is the main island for visitors and most activity starts from here for all the tours by boat. The anchorage again was pretty crowded, and a bit rolly, the ARC round the world sailing rally was in town so it was fairly busy, but once the ARC boats left, it was not quite so crowded, We met an OCC Roving Rear Commodore here, who was part of the rally and he



Muddy Waters

some were over 3 ft across and about 50 years old. In this reserve they were allowed to roam free, and seemed to like playing in mud pools, not the fastest of creatures, but

as they say speed isn't everything! We visited the Charlie Darwin Centre for



New Species (Susanus Tortoisus)

agent Johnny Romero was great and sorted it out no problem). Here we saw a few penguins swimming (that's right Penguins)! And, all the usual other animals we have become used to seeing, but it was so peaceful here to enjoy them swimming around our boat, and no one else about. Finally we sailed on to Isabella which was a wonderful anchorage, a lovely island, no real tarmac roads, just gravel and sand tracks, (our sort of place) life here was dead slow, but plenty to occupy us. Our first Saturday on Isabella, and it was horse racing down the main street, not really like the OK corral, more like whacky races, but good to sit and watch with a beer in hand! Whilst many locals were hoping they had backed a winner, apparently big money changes hands here.

We went on a trip around a part of the park where you saw more iguanas (all these creatures are so different though),

eagle rays swimming, sharks sleeping in the bottom of natural sea pools, more seal lions and again loads of these penguins, we actually managed to snorkel with the penguins, when I say with, they move so fast and gracefully through the water, you



Increasing the population !

only really glimpse them for a few moment then they are gone. Swimming with them was something we definitely did not do when we were in the Antarctic a couple of years ago! We visited another tortoise reserve, which was out of town, and you had to walk on a board walk for about a mile to get there, but well worth it, these breeding centres are there to increase the tortoise population on the islands as with the coming of man here, the early sailors taking the tortoises for meat (they used to store over 100 in the holds of the ships so they could have

We moved on to the island of Florina, where it was extremely quiet, no trip boats whilst we were there, and no other yachts, (we discovered that not many people got a permit for Florina, but our



Grand National Isabella style

people got a permit for Florina, but our

fresh meat), all pretty cruel, but we are now in different times, and also many of the hatchlings were being wiped out by vermin introduced by man years ago. Hopefully they have now turned the corner, and the natural tortoise population is beginning to increase. We woke one morning to find 6 Polynesian catamarans in the anchorage, these were replica traditional craft, on a two year passage around the Pacific, all were new ish vessels, very eco friendly; the whole project was being sponsored by a wealthy German guy. We managed to get invited on board one, and they were really interesting to a sailor's eye at least.

We met quite a few other cruisers who were also heading across the Pacific at a similar time to ourselves, so we arranged to keep in contact by a radio net as we crossed, but before that, we really enjoyed the laid back way of life on Isabella,

It is definitely a good place to visit. Towards the end of our permitted time, we studied the weather looking for a good time to leave, we readied the boat,



Traditional Polynesian Craft

topped up with plenty of black market diesel, cadged a few extra containers as well as we were hearing stories of no wind, and plenty of motoring seemed to be being done by boats whom had left before us. A big hand of bananas was procured and other last minute fresh produce put on board, then it was time to leave as we only had 2 days left of our permit, we checked out and on 9th April set sail for the Marquesas Islands over 3000 miles away.



Handy Bananas

We motored for a few hours, then a light breeze set in and we were able to sail. As mentioned previously Darramy does sail well even in light airs so we were able to make good westward progress most of the time. We got into our passage routine quite quickly, and slowly ate up all those miles. We also ate really well, Sue did her magic in the galley, and there is nothing like the smell of freshly baked bread during the day. The wind did pick up somewhat, and we had to watch out for squalls, which did seem to come out of nowhere, with little warning, but we had a good system, so we were able to take them in our stride.



Mahi Mahi being filleted

We kept our course and did not sail south as most other boats did we stayed at about 4 degrees south for over 2000 miles, then dropped down toward the Marquesas for the



Dinner for table 4

last third of the trip, this enabled us to have a favourable current with us most of the way, which meant up to an extra 20 miles a day towards our goal, for free, and you all know, we like free! Some of you have asked what we do all day on these long passages. Well without being too boring, a fair bit of time is spent catching up on our rest, sleeping for 4 hours at a time does tend to get a bit tiring on the old body, there are certain chores that have to be done each day for the smooth and safe running of the boat, checks on all the rigging is an essential

daily task as we don't want any breakage so far from any outside assistance. We had a radio net each day on the SSB radio with other yachts, sometimes these are a bit heavy going, but it is essential for safety reasons, and obtaining any weather information from boats around is quite useful to supplement the grib files we get each day. We tried, once the important elements were dealt with to make these contacts a bit more light hearted, but dealing with people from different nations is quite hard without a good sense of humour, and if they had never seen "Captain Pugwash" on the BBC years ago, they would not have understood some of the characters names! We also reported on our fishing successes or failures, (Darramy did fairly well on the first bit!), but I will tell you in a minute about that.

We had worked quite hard for this trip ensuring that the cockpit was as comfortable as possible. We had recovered all the cushions in Sunbrella fabric so if they got wet, it did not matter, and the screens we had around the back of the cockpit kept us dry when those squalls let rip, it was like sitting in a bus shelter at the back of the boat, but we were dry, warm and in good spirits whatever the elements wanted to throw at us.

We were fairly successful with the fishing, we caught a lot of Mahi-mahi, some yellow fin Tuna, so not only was the freezer kept full, but at one time we had to stop fishing as we had no where to store any more. We had left the BBQ attached for this crossing so often at lunch time we were able to cook some fresh fish, it does taste so good, (stop drooling you fish lovers!), but finally I am going to tell you about my record catch:

On day 21, I decided to have one last go as there was a bit of space in the freezer, Sue was having a nap, when the line ran out faster than ever, I slowly tightened the clutch on the reel, (normally at this time they either get



Our record breaking Wahoo

away or they are hooked) well this one was hooked, It took me 20 minutes to wind it in and get it to the side of the boat, Sue was still giving it zzzzzzz's down below

despite my shouting her to come and help. Eventually she stirred and with the aid of the gaff we landed our biggest fish ever. A 12.5 kilo Wahoo, 1.46 metres long and bloomin good eating, I will spare you all the gory bits, but it took a couple of hours to clean up afterwards. All was bagged and vacuum packed, and after our arrival, we had a great fish party on board with other people with whom we had shared our radio net.



Hiva Oa

For the last 24 hours the wind died away to nothing so we decided to put the engine on and motor in, and entered Atuona in Hiva Oa early evening. We had logged 3052 miles in 23 days mostly under sail, we were really pleased with our little selves, and this probably the longest passage we will ever have to do. It was fun, and a good experience. We had a good rest for a few days before starting to explore these lovely islands.

First job though, was to get Sue booked on a flight back home for the end of May for Sarah's wedding. This we achieved without too much problem, but it entailed four separate flights and three days travelling. Once the flight was sorted we went off to a nearby island Tahuata, to a wonderful anchorage with crystal clear water, Manta Rays used to come by in the afternoon and you could just swim with them, fresh fruit was lying on the ground by the beach, it did seem a bit like paradise. We just lazed about enjoying it all. We then headed off to Fatu Hiva an island with a stunning scenic anchorage, probably one of the top three in all our travels. There were quite a few other boats anchored there, and we knew a few of them, we met up with Charlotte, (Steph and Sue) whom we had met in Providencia last year and had an enjoyable time with them, we also meet two other OCC



Fatu Hiva (Bay of Virgins)

boats. We walked to a waterfall again with scenery to die for. After a week it was time to move on back to Tahuata and two more new anchorages all beautiful in their own right. The local people we met were so friendly and really pleasant.

We headed back to Atuona, for Sue to catch her flight home. She got away on time and spent the night in Tahiti with our old ship mates Malarkey who are now well ahead of us and on passage to Australia for October.



Fatu Hiva waterfall

Meanwhile I had plenty of jobs to do on the boat, and some exploring to do on my own. I started practising my French, and went to a few classes on a French boat we had met in the Galapagos, there were only two of us in the class Axil (age 7) and me (age 39 and many months)! Her Mum Eve was the teacher, it was all very casual, but slowly I found I had an idea what I was saying and amazingly people understood me most of the time (which makes a change whatever the language!) Sorry I jump ahead, French is the normal language here, and since we intend to spend some time in Polynesia, speaking the language is a real help. I just wish I had paid more attention at school! On the other hand, had I have achieved exam passes etc, life may have been quite different, I might still be working!

I also learnt about the hospital and met all the nurses there, as I had a scratch on my leg which got a tropically infected, bloody painful. Here's little ol me on my tod, on antibiotics, so no alcohol, self catering and a leg like an elephant. Any way all is now healing, Sue has returned, having thoroughly enjoyed a great family time at the wedding, and was still partying when she gets back to Tahiti being led astray by Superted and Malarkeys once again, but also she met up with El Vagabond whom we had not seen since we were in the US skiing in 09.

We are now anchored in the north of Hiva Oa at an other lovely anchorage called Baie Haniapa, the only boat here, the village is beautiful, the colours of the plants etc are amazing, everything, is so pretty. One thing we have noticed here that everyone takes a pride in their garden and their surroundings, they are extremely friendly, with no ulterior motive, we keep coming back to the boat laden down with more fresh fruit. The people and places



Colourful Haniapa

are so nice, it's hard to leave each place, but we do have to keep moving all be it slowly.

So that is a bit of what we are about at present, we plan to spend the rest of this season in Polynesia moving on to the Northern Marqueses Isles now, then on to the Tuamotu's, and finally the Society Islands and leaving the boat in for the cyclone season in November. When we plan to do some land travelling, probably Australia, so all you guys who have given us their Aus e mail, be prepared we might just take you up on that offer, (Katy B has already moved to NZ!)

So as usual it's TTFN
(Delete as applicable)

Best Wishes *Kindest Regards* *Love and Hugs* *Cheers* *Phiara*

Brian and Sue

You can view this and our previous travelogues of the last seven years on our OCC site

http://www.oceancruisingclub.org/component/option,com_mamblog/Itemid,102/task,show/action,view/id,2236/Itemid,102/

You can check our position on Pangolin click on this link

http://www.pangolin.co.nz/yotreps/reporter_list.php We are listed under DARRAMY so click and see where we may be, we try to update each week, but on passage we update our position each day.



Three Old Relics!



Colourful Marqueses