

Darramy on tour No 16: Panama (Caribbean side) December 2010 – April 2011

Buenos Amigos,

Here we are again! We have not been doing too much since our last travelogue, but here is a short update for you.

We relaunched Darramy in early December, despite unbelievable rain falling every day, we eventually left the Marina in Shelter Bay and headed off to the Bocas del Toro archipelago, in the north of Panama., First discovered by Christopher Columbus. The rain kept on falling. We had been advised not to be in Panama during October and November because of the heavy rain, well someone forgot to tell the rain gods that it was now December, and they did not get the message until mid January. Once the sun started to shine all the wet days were soon forgotten.. We had a few days respite though and on Christmas day the sun shone so it was a good day swimming and body surfing at the beach, the same went for New Years day as well.

We found some great places to anchor despite the weather; it was wonderful to find secluded anchorages on our own. Once the sun shone everything was back to the normal cruising mode of life.

There was good snorkelling to be had around the Jackanally Cays, and even the snorkelling around the mangroves was interesting. Lobsters have not gone up in price working out on average of 1



Bastimentos Town



Posh Indian Home

dollar each so we had to have some of that! We buy these off the local Indians who are the Ngobe, they can be seen most days paddling their Kayooka's these are again similar to what the Kuna's in the San Blas used for transport, and called them Ulu's which are hollowed out logs in various sizes from 8 feet to 40 feet, all carved out of one tree. Around the surrounding area are many different Indian Tribes many who try and uphold their traditional way of life, but it seems to be an

uphill struggle for them, the youngsters naturally want a better quality of life, but here family ties are very strong. We wonder what will happen to them in the future? We also regularly see the children even from the remotest community going to school every day, all wearing a uniform, often they will paddle a small kayooka past us on their way to and from school.

In February we met up with Trevor and Jo on “Malarkey” again, and also Matt and Jean on “Super Ted” all of us had competed in the Triangle race although at different times back in old Blighty. A few parties were had over the next month; one memorable one was at a new Marina called Red Frog on Bastimentos Island. They had a free open weekend to celebrate their expansion. Free marina berths, food,



Zipping through the forest

booze, and lots of activities. Poor Matt on Super Ted had a back problem so had to be taken to the party in a wheel barrow! Red Frog had a great canopy tour, over the rain forest .which had just opened, so Jo, Jean and I had a go at this, although Jean was certainly apprehensive, she overcame her fear and finished the day with a big smile. We were sometimes 150 feet up on these zip wires flying along over the tree tops, one was about 1/3 of a mile long. Besides the zip wires, there were various rope

bridges etc to cross, safety here was important, but to be skimming over the top of the trees .Wow!!

We sailed right into the inner areas of the Archipelago through some interesting channels. One area is actually called the “Dark Lands”! You had to pay attention to the depths as the sea bed went from 50 metres to 5 metres and less in seconds. We have learnt to read the water quite well, but if there is no sunlight, navigation can get a bit tricky, especially as there are no accurate charts of the area, however the scenery by the mainland was quite stunning.



Into the Darklands



The new BBQ in action, Kebabs mmm mmm!

One of the problems of being so remote is getting hold of stuff when it breaks or wears out. We have now been in warm climates for quite some time and not everything is designed to last for ever especially in a harsh environment, a major disaster was our trusty gas BBQ which had given sterling service finally got fed up and fell apart.

Since we use it most days it was a problem. We managed to order one from the US, and it was finally delivered with a load of other stuff we needed. The last 150 miles of it journey was on Malarkey who picked everything up for us in Shelter Bay. Thanks guys.

We have just completed a trip inland and onto the Pacific coast for a week, we visited



Boquete Flora

Boquete a lovely place in the mountains. This is a region which is much cooler than the coast, and a good part of the area is put over to agriculture and food production, also there were many



More Flora



Don't worry Sue has not shrunk she is standing by an enormous flower pot!

flowers. It was really a nice change to see such an array of beautiful colour with the flowers and shrubs. Much of this has come about by the influx of the Gringo who has started to settle in the area; slowly the local indigenous Indians are being pushed out as land is developed.

You see great big houses going up, and the poor Indian is moved out to the outlying district, (Hasn't this happened before with the white man)?

After Boquete we headed to the Pacific Coast which is on the southern side of Panama. (Yes, Panama actually runs more East to West than North to South, its really



A Bloody big Green Moray eel

weird trying to work out which direction you are heading in!)

We found a few lovely places with nice beaches and possible anchorages, getting around was not easy because although we had a hire car the only real road is the Pan American highway the rest of the roads especially to the more remote regions were in a very bad state, and there is no real detailed map of the road system, and a total lack of road

or direction signs (probably because there aren't many roads), so we had a few interesting experiences finding our way. Eventually we got to Santa Catalina, a great surfing spot, but although surfing used to be on the agenda years ago, we wanted to visit an Island called Coiba. This is a remote island which used to house a penal colony, which was closed about 10 years ago, and



White Tipped Nurse Shark

not been fished until recently, so it has become a great attraction for diving as there are many different fish species here, not only the variety, but the abundance of the fish in such large numbers and also the number of rare species that can be found here. We did three dives in one day, although the visibility was not as good as on the Atlantic side of the



Frog Fish

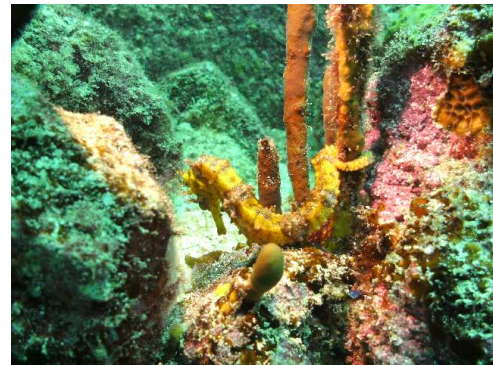
the same fish, I'm not sure what she was on at the time because, she actually got back in the water when another snorkeler spotted a mass of sharks, and she lived to tell the tale proudly!

We are now back on board Darramy, and we have now made the decision to go through the Panama Canal and head into the Pacific Ocean towards the end of this year, so a lot of our time is being spent in planning for this, making sure that the boat



Electric Ray, Try pressing its Button!

the whole area is now a National Park. UNESCO site etc etc. Due to the fact that no person would go near or was allowed near the place in its former use, the waters around the island have



Spot the Sea Horse

country, and the water a little cooler. What we saw was amazing from loads of Sharks, Sturgeon fish, shoals of large Jacks, different Rays to 8 Frog fish, and 5 seahorses. In all the time diving in the Caribbean I have seen only 3 Frog Fish and 3 Sea Horses. So you can tell this was an exciting day. Fortunately one of the other divers had a camera so I was able to copy some underwater shots to share with you. Although Sue does not dive, she snorkelled, and saw loads of

is in tip top shape for what we hope will be a couple of years in the Pacific especially the Polynesian Islands before we head to New Zealand. We will let you know how we are doing with this in our next travelogue. In the mean time we will probably sail back to the San Blas again before coming back to see you in the UK in August.

So as usual it's TTFN

(Delete as applicable)

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

Brian and Sue

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

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

Our Panamanian phone number is 00507 6078 6328

When sailing 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 try and do it each day