

Darramy on tour No 9 : Caribbean and Venezuela
April – August 2008

Hello everyone,

Here we are again, it's hard to get down to writing these travelogues, but having now started here we go... At the end of March we left St Marten, and headed off to St Bart's where we anchored in a lovely bay, and we ended up staying for 10 days as the seas were big, we watched these huge swells surge past our anchorage for ages, on one side of us a turtle used to come and say hello each day, and on the other our



A neighbour

friends,
Roger and
Vickie (El
Vagabond)
joined us,
Eventually
the swell
died down
and we



More neighbours

headed off to Antigua as Sue, Pete and Max were flying out to join us for two weeks and we were hoping to crew on a boat in the Antigua Classic week, one of the top 5 classic boat regatta's in the world. The deal was they would sort out the boat to crew on and Sue and I would provide the accommodation.



Summer Wind, Carraicu Sloop

Well, they got themselves a boat to crew on, but we were struggling. Fortunately for our guests I managed to get a better deal in the end as I ended up skippering a Cariacou Sloop for the racing and did the single handed race also, we did not disgrace ourselves had some good tactical racing with a third and two fifth place in our class. It was

amazing to be sailing amongst some of the finest classic boats in the world from 25 to 140 feet, we felt privileged to be amongst them. It was great fun, and good to have old friends with us, and thank you, for bringing my snow skis out with you, even though you got plenty of stick at Manchester airport flying to Antigua with skis!



ALTAIR



Sue, Pete & Max arrive with skis

When the winds and seas became more favourable we headed off to visit more of the Leeward Islands, Monserrat, a very sad island still under the influence of the volcano, which seems to rumble on, to see so much land covered in ash, some of it 25 feet deep you have to see it to believe, you can only imagine the hardship the islanders suffered but the people seemed resilient, and are still smiling. Then it was off to Guadeloupe we had already stopped there overnight on our way north, but it was now time to spend some time on the islands we had used as stepping stones on our way North in the New Year. A very French Island, with a lot more charm than Martinique, the Isles de Saints in the South were really gorgeous, and quite like Brittany. Then to Dominica, where we had wanted to do lots of exploring. The diving was superb, with many new species of fish to be seen, the island is extremely poor, and tourism is big for them, the people have very little, but they all smile and we felt welcome and safe. We did an island tour and saw how the Caribe people still lived, the guides we used were very informative, and good ambassadors for their island, we even watched a cricket match in the local ground sitting under an large tree, a bit like England on a hot sunny afternoon!



Sue quenching thirst native style

The time soon passed, so we headed south to St Lucia which we had visited before, but had had a good time, we went inland this time on a tour in the rain forest, and saw



some wonderful bird life, swimming in a waterfall, and a bit of good walking. In Soufrie there are two peaks, called the Pitons, the Grand Piton is tracked and you can walk up it, but the Petit Piton is another story, but it had to be done. I arranged with a Rasta man to guide me. So 5.30a.m. the next day he picked me up and I thought off we go. No, it turned out that his Rasta brother would take me I discovered his name was Bushman, and he lived in a cave (honest!) Over two hours later we reached the top me in all my climbing gear, and Bushman bare foot, and just a pair of shorts and an old vest on. I did feel overdressed, and lacked the dreadlocks but we made it up, the decent was a bit hairy at times but by 11.00. I was back on board Darramy safe and sound.

From St Lucia we went to St Vincent and called at the Rock Side Café again. We were made most welcome now and felt like regulars there, Rosie the proprietor took us into Kingstown the capital of St Vincent the next day, it was great to see the colourful goings on at the market and on our way back she stopped at the butchers at our request, this guy had been a butcher in England and could not give it up, he had proper hung meat like you get at home so we took as much fillet steak as he had and pigged out for a while. I should say most of the red meat over here is killed one day and sold the next, so our purchase was succulently enjoyed. Mmmmm!

Then it was off to Bequia, although we had been there before, we had not spent much time there, we met a few now, old friends in the cruising world and had a good time catching up with everyone, we did a bit of walking and a tour to the Moon Hole, a type of Eco living area which was started in the late 1950's and is still going today. Interesting but not really for us.

From Bequia we went to Canouan, Mayreau and Union Island in the Grenadines, then South to Carriacou, which had not lost its charm since we fell in love with it last year, a couple of weeks there then down to Grenada to restock before heading to pastures new in Venezuela

Whilst in Grenada we took part in a Hash, that is the Hash House Harriers which is an organisation all over the world who go out every two weeks and run, a bit like Hares and Hounds, but this time you followed pieces of paper to complete the course, you just hoped the wind did not blow it away, it was about five miles distance, and we saw parts of Grenada we would never have found, sadly at the end we had to drink beer and eat from the BBQ, but we felt we should join in just to be sociable!!

A few more days in Grenada, one spent taking in a one day test match West Indies versus Australia, then it was off to Los Testigos, a small group of lovely islands North East of Venezuela. Typical deserted white beaches; the islands are inhabited by fishermen and their families, no shops or anything. The authorities only allowed us to stay for 4 days, so then we moved to Margarita, a holiday island, and checked in with customs etc. We had a great sail with the spinnaker up most of the way so that made pleasant change as we had not used it since heading towards the Manamo River last November.

Margarita was not our sort of place, a lot of crime, we did not feel threatened, but after the relaxed way of living in the Caribbean Islands for so long, it came as a shock. Also we found it was more expensive than we were led to believe from our friends who had been there last year, that is partly due to high inflation, but also here you get two exchange rates, the official one of about 2.1 Bolivar's to the \$US, and the unofficial

one (black market) of 3 to the \$US, last year we heard of stories that you could get up to 5 to the \$US,



so although more expensive, its still cheaper than Europe, so we won't moan! Beer is about 20pence per can, but that's inflation for you!

Before we left we got a message on our phone "Dad, phone me as soon as possible today" These are the sorts of messages we dread, what's the problem? So, dutifully we called Amy to be told I was going to be a Granddad in January so that was super news.

We left Margarita and headed for the mainland calling at a few islands on the way great spinnaker sailing again, but we were glad we were not flying it when we got hit by a 40 knot squall out of nowhere. Yikes!!!

We went to the Gulf of Cumana, which was beautiful, a lagoon we visited was surrounded by a red or orange coloured mountains, absolutely amazing and then we



sailed up the Gulf and on the return journey again flew the spinnaker, but this time we were accompanied by hundreds of Dolphins

for at least an hour, they really are the most fantastic creatures. We always tried to anchor with other boats as there is at this time a bit of piracy going on in the area, one night we were on our own, and spent the night sleeping fitfully and stirring at every

noise. The anchorage was full of colour but we decided then that we would not take the risk of being on our own again if we could help it.

We are now in a Marina in Puerto La Cruz, a largish town, with quite a few security problems in some areas, so again we have to watch where we are going. It focuses the mind when the taxi drivers lock the doors going through one area!

We celebrated completing three years of cruising last month, and Both Sue and I agree, that it does not seem 5 minutes since we left the UK, the time has really flown, but when we read through our travelogues we realise we have done a fair bit in our own way.

Now we are here we are exploring inland, we have just returned from a trip to the Angel Falls, (highest waterfall in the world). This entailed a four hour bus ride to



Bolivar City, then a one hour flight in a 6 seater Cessna plane into the interior. The plane seemed only to have half the instruments working, but we arrived safely at Canaima, where we then had a canoe journey for four hours when I say canoe it was really a 35 foot hollowed out log with seats and a 75HP Yamaha outboard on the back, we went up rapids, past amazing scenery of flat topped table mountains to a camp where we slept in hammocks with Mosquito nets over them, a first for us both, the next day, a one hour climb to the base of the falls through the rain forest. When we arrived at the base of the falls, the top was covered in cloud, but when the cloud lifted WOW! Water cascading down over 1200meters, that is higher than Mount Snowdon in North Wales is from sea level, an unbelievable sight. Then it was the reverse route, this time we seemed to be racing another canoe (log) down the river, real James Bond

stuff! back to Canaima for a night in a Pasada which is between a hostel and a Guest House, (basic but clean). Then a visit to more falls, one of which we were able to walk behind, although we got soaked it was good fun, we swam off a wonderful white beach in the lagoon at Canaima, it was strange to see such a lovely beach so far inland. Then it was back to Darramy to get ready for another trip.



So that's about it for now, next

week we head to Merida, where we hope to ascend Pico Bolivar (5007m) in the

highest cable car in the world, and also do some walking, may even try horse riding. Then back here before heading off to Chile to hopefully do some ski touring, which entails climbing up 7 different volcanoes, and ski back down; snow conditions at present look good, but just heard one volcano is occasionally active, so that will be interesting!

Must dash now for happy hour beer at 1 Bolivar a glass (20p)!

We do enjoy hearing your news so keep it coming maybe we will catch up with some of you when we return to the UK for a month in Sept/Oct.

Cheers from both of us

Brian and Sue

P.S. the site we use for our position report seems to drop us off if we have not updated every two weeks, so we will restart using it properly when we start sailing again after our visit home.

Adios Amigos

*Nothing seems really to matter, that's the charm of it.
Whether you get away or whether you don't, whether you
arrive at your destination or whether you reach somewhere
else, or whether you never get anywhere at all, you're always
busy, and you never do anything in particular; and when you
are done there's always something else to do and you can do
it if you like, but you'd much better not.*

Kenneth Grahame, The Wind in the Willows