

Darramy on tour No 17: Panama, Isla Providencia, and Isla San Andres May – August 2011

Buenos Amigos,

Just a quick one this time – Honest! Well that is the intention at the start of the travelogue writing anyway. We left you last time still in Bocas del Toro Panama, we were Bocased out, and it was time to move on. We left the area and after a couple of overnight stops we did a superb 90 mile passage in one day to get back to Colon (entrance of the Panama Canal). What a good sail we had over a knot of current with us, and made it into Shelter Bay before dark. On the way there we caught a whopper (fisherman's tale coming up). The line ran out, we grabbed the rod and started winding in, well it was quite a struggle, we slowed the boat down to make the recovery of the yet unknown species. After about 15 minutes it broke the surface – A blooming big Wahoo.

A fish we had never caught before but had eaten in restaurants. After a lot of struggling between the fish, and ourselves, we won. We managed to land the fish in the cockpit. It was massive just over 4 feet long., it filled the front part of the cockpit floor, and stuck its head into our cabin window. Anyway to

spare the more squeamish ones amongst you, this fine specimen of aquatic life met its end, and was soon filleted and put in the freezer. It is one of the biggest fish we have caught, and we dined well for quite a few meals.



Wahoo !!



This could be a lock in!

Whilst in Shelter Bay, we got the opportunity to help some US people (Tom and Susan) we had previously met, do a transit through the Panama Canal. They had a 40 foot trawler type boat, "Limerick" (Nordhaven 40), and they were setting off on a 3 year trip ending up in Alaska.

Well I have to say the Canal trip was fantastic, a great chance for Sue and I to experience it before we take Darramy through. The whole thing was overwhelming when you see the size of the locks, and the ships that only just fit in them with inches to spare. The whole thing is a totally man made creation, although at a cost, as you are probably aware in terms of the loss of lives during the construction. The canal advisers we had were extremely helpful, and we had no problems, emerging into the Pacific Ocean on the second day of the transit.



A well laden container ship

After the Canal we sailed in Darramy to Portabelo. It was here that our great hero Sir Francis Drake met his sticky end, something the Spanish make a big thing about. We have been in Portabelo before, a pretty anchorage, but the town needs modernising. A



Plain sailing

good start would be a bomb and start again. It seems endemic with some people that they don't seem to want to better themselves, but I suppose if they are happy, and it's not our country, I should mind my own business. We stayed there a couple of weeks and then set off for Providencia. We followed "Superted" and gave them a run for their money the first afternoon as we were able to fly our lightweight spinnaker, but during the night, they had left us a long way behind. We did make some ground on them on the second night, and arrived in Providencia about 5 hours after them.

Providencia is a small island 100 miles off the coast of Nicaragua, this Island and its sister

Island San Andres belong to Columbia, but they used to be British, and the original islanders still say English is their first language. Providencia is extremely quiet, with diverse scenery. We were joined again by Malarkey who had been in San Andres for a couple of months. We hired scooters and toured the island, lovely white beaches with

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Easy Riders

tranquil waters lapping on the sand. On one beach they have horse racing most Saturdays so we thought we would have a day at the races. Well that particular day it did not happen the tide was too high, and only one horse turned up. They usually have two horse races, the betting on the races apparently is where big money changes hands. We walked the highest peak on the Island about 300 metres and had some splendid views. We did some good diving and saw quite a few sharks. Some were feeding on Lion fish which



Providencia Race Course!

another diving chap had caught, well, we watched their feeding frenzy close up, they are really amazing creatures, but they have my respect. The local carnival took place, although a quiet island, the loud speakers came out, with music all night, events such a pet show, where half the canine population were dressed up, one even had shoes on! The beauty pageant was pretty good, and Trevor and I joined in the



Local Classic Boat

water sports in our dinghy, managing to sneak up and squirt water all over

the pageant boats and the beauty queens and their entourage. They did get us back, and we were soaked, but all was done in good spirit, they enjoyed the Gringo's joining in what was really a local event. The classic boat racing was interesting, if they stopped sailing they capsized, and their race was over!

We left Providencia for San Andres after about three weeks and had a superb sail in company with Malarkey and Superted, we being the smallest boat, set off first, followed by Malarkey then Superted we were passed eventually but we all had a great time chasing each other.



Darramy underway to San Andres

Upon arrival in San Andres, we were staggered at the wonderful colours of the water, beautiful shades of blue and turquoise and green. You could see the bottom clearly 50 feet down. San Andres is the tourist island of the two islands, and here we had good restaurants to pick from, a good selection of food and wine could be purchased at duty free prices.



The Money Laundry

We always had good wind whilst in San Andres this meant that going ashore in the dinghy was occasionally pretty wet, and on one occasion all the cash got soaked so we had to do some drying out when back on board

We spent a fair while snorkelling and diving. The coral in places was superb. There was one spot where you could swim with Stingrays, although it had become a tourist attraction it was still pretty

cool, and word went around that there was a Hammerhead shark in the bay, but we failed to spot it although we did see quite a few Nurse sharks hiding under ledges.

We did quite a bit of walking and generally relaxed. As the end of July approached we went to the Bolivar Cays, another picture postcard type place, with more unbelievable snorkelling. We started to watch the weather for the return trip to Panama.. Tropical storm Emily was just brewing in the Eastern Caribbean, although it looked like it would head to the North of



Snorkelling in the clear water

us we felt it was probably prudent to get going. So we set off back to Panama with fairly light winds but flat seas making for a good sail.

We did a safety check in on the SSB radio with Malarkey and Supeted, and a couple of other boats joined our net each day. All was well until a US boat we had met earlier said they had a problem. They were one hundred miles from any land, and had broken the propeller shaft and were taking in water. We had seen them around since our arrival in Providencia, and they always seemed to have one problem after another, earning the nick name of "Captain Calamity". Well, we realised that this was fairly serious situation, and they did not seem very confident. We knew another US boat was near to them, we, were 50 miles ahead.. After some discussion as to what their predicament really was, we spent the night talking to them over the radio, and

assuring that they were still sea worthy and there was no imminent danger to life. The fellow US boat that was near them reckoned he had his own problems and was pressing on to Panama, (I'm all right Jack) which in our book is a pretty selfish way to act, but there nought as queer as folk. We talked them through the situation, and persuaded them that they had to keep sailing, they could not just give up. We don't think they were very confident at the sailing bit either, but slowly they made progress, and the next day we were able to arrange a tow for them into Colon, where they gratefully tied up the boat and stood on dry land, We are not sure what the final outcome will be but a couple of things did spring to mind (divorce or boat for sale were a couple of possibilities). Hopefully they have learnt that you have to be well prepared and self sufficient on the ocean. But we probably have all learnt something from their experience.

This leads me nicely on to our future plans. In November we plan to transit the Panama Canal into the Pacific Ocean. We have been working on this for a while and we are both now really excited, as it is the largest ocean in the world, and the distances involved together with the remoteness of some of the islands is quite daunting and make our preparations quite intense. Compiling lists, stocking up, how many toilet rolls do you need for 6 months! And, all those spare parts, not sure where they are all going to go, but I don't think we will be taking a spare propeller shaft! We are hoping to spend a couple of seasons in the South Pacific before heading for New Zealand in 2013, so our next travelogue should be coming from the Galapagos Isles in February after cruising the west of Panama in December and January.

So as usual it's TTFN

(Delete as applicable)

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

Brian and Sue

*** When we transit the canal which is pretty magic, there is a web cam on the locks, so you will be able to see us. The link to see all the bits about the canal is www.centenarioconsulting.com, and we will endeavour to notify you as to the time of our transit, etc, if you wanted to see us starting the next phase of our travels..... ***

Visiting Boats: *Two yachts we have met, one in 2006 "Alchemy" in the Azores (Dick and Ginger) and in 2009/10 "Equinox" (Dick & Moira) we seem to have met quite a few Dicks from the US A during our travels! These folks are now in UK waters, both boats are hoping to stay the winter in St Katherine's Dock London. If any of you sailing people notice the boats, go and say hello from Darramy, they are lovely people and a Great British hello would go down well.*

You can view this and our previous travelogues of the last six years on our OCC site http://www.oceancruisingclub.org/component/option,com_mamblog/Itemid,102/task,show/option,view/id,2236/Itemid,102/

We will advise you when we leave for the Galapagos, and if you want 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.