

Darramy on tour No 13: Columbia and Kuna Yala (San Blas Islands) Panama January – May 2010

Hola Amigos,

Blimey, doesn't time fly; it seems only like 5 minutes since we last filled up the inbox on your computer! Any way this time we are trying a new formula, if you click on this link it will take you to the OCC site for Darramy's travelogue, go to number 13, or alternatively you can download the attachment as with previous travelogues.

http://www.oceancruisingclub.org/component/option,com_mamblog/Itemid,102/task,show/action,view/id,1910/Itemid,102/

For Christmas, we stayed in the Cartagina area of Columbia and had another great Christmas with Trevor and Jo on Malarkey in a beautiful place called Challon, an almost land locked lagoon, lovely warm calm water. It was good to get away from the bustle of the big city. The carol singing on Christmas Eve is becoming a tradition, and gets better each year, we go around in the dinghy wearing our Christmas garb, visiting the other boats in the anchorage, this year we had a good success rate in



One of the many private islands Challon

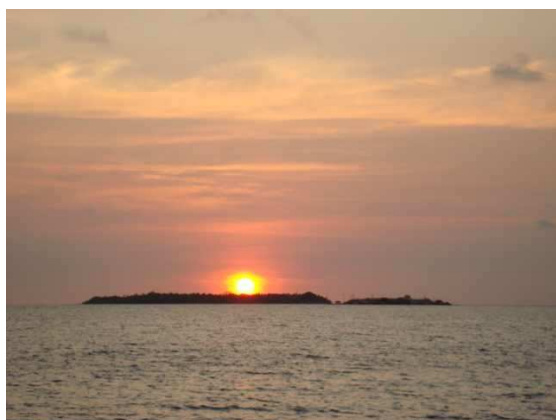
receiving many cups of good cheer, amazingly some boats really seemed to enjoy our visit. This year all records were broken as we found we had been out for over 6 hours, but voices were a bit hoarse for the full traditional Christmas day dinner, held once again on Malarkey! We stayed in Challon for New Year then headed back to Cartagina for our new galley work tops, this, we knew was going to be a long job, measurements and templates were taken, so whilst that was being sorted, we went back up to Puerto Velero for some more kite surfing. I finally managed to get up on the board and stay there for a reasonable distance (but no intentional tricks yet!). Kite surfing is one of those sports where you need to put in hours of practice to get to a good enough standard to feel competent and be on your own, so maybe another day if the opportunity arises.

Once again back to Cartagina, to get the work tops fitted, more delays "Manana" being the word of the moment. Anyway after many Manana's we finally had new Corean work tops in the galley and the heads (bathroom), and they look great, whilst the interior was having a make over I decided to get the anchor chain re galvanised, as it was showing signs of rusting. It was sent to a plant



Sue, happy with new work tops !

about 60 miles away, and came back looking not much better than when I sent it, anyway, to cut another of my long stories short, it was sent back to be redone, I went to pick it up with the agent, what an event, the galvanising was thick, but the finish was not good, so I ended up in the plant with a file cleaning up this chain, I finished



Sunset, San Bernado Isles

As it was now mid February we were really itching to leave Columbia so we checked out and headed west towards

Panama and the San Blas Islands, (known as Kuna Yala by the locals) calling in at various lovely Islands on the way.

with 5 Columbians helping me, and the manager insisted I wear a hard hat and gloves, which they duly provided, but did not care that I was wearing flip flops on my feet! We ended up with a good job, but the workforce had a good laugh at the Gringo getting his hands dirty!



Big Sue with Mrs Saila

Once we arrived in the Eastern San Blas, we met the local Kuna Indians. The Kuna, are really small, rivalled in tribal shortness only by the Pygmies. And Sue (4ft 11"), always known as "Little Sue" really enjoyed being taller than them all. They live a simple life, each village is on an island, and the huts are very close together, they are



High Tech sail cloth -- Kuna Style

ruled by a Saila (chief) and his congresso. They are very traditional, the ladies wearing beaded bands on their legs all made to a traditional design, and a bright colourful traditional Kuna dress and gold nose piercing.

Fresh food is not available apart from, local vegetables, fruit, and sea food, but just our luck this was the closed season for shell fish, and we were having a run of bad

luck with our fishing.

The Kuna's mode of transport is a log canoe, (locally called an Ulu) the luxury ones have a small sail often made out of sacking or plastic sheeting. We were fortunate to meet the Saila of one island, and after Sue had brought some Molasses (traditional appliqué embroidered



Cap't Brian helming the Saila's Ulu

pictures, the Kunas main earner for the families), from the Saila's wife, the Saila himself called to Darramy in his Ulu, I persuaded him to let me go for a sail with him, and after a short time he let me control the Ulu, quite an experience, as the gunwales of the Ulu are only a couple of inches above the water, and no, I didn't capsize it either. The next day we printed off all the photo's of his family we had taken and returned to the village with them, They were chuffed to bits to have photos, and Arken the Saila told me he was taking me fishing that afternoon, well I knew it's the closed season, but when the Saila tells you to do something, who am I to argue. We went out in our dinghy, (think he just wanted a rest from his Ulu), and he used a snare to catch Langustinos. On returning to Darramy, he used our shower to wash, and we cooked the catch, and ate it in the cockpit with Arken as our guest. Before he departed he presented me with a snare to catch my own lobsters and langustinos It was yet another great and fairly unique experience.

Sorry I am getting carried away, The San Blas is probably one of the prettiest places, we have visited, beautiful small tropical islands, white beaches and palm trees, just



Darramy at anchor, in paradise

like you imagine paradise islands to be, and there's over 300 of them, mostly uninhabited, Although this area has a reputation for rough seas, most islands are sheltered behind a reef, so we can be quite snug in calm waters tucked behind the reef, whilst the surf thunders against the outside, pretty spectacular to look at each day with blue skies and blue green waters. The whole place is fairly remote, a cruise ship visits a couple of the big islands every month, but that is the only real tourism the area gets, There are quite a

few yachts carrying back packers between Columbia and Panama, other than that there are just us cruisers here.

We are able to buy fresh vegetables some weeks from the local boats that get supplies from the Columbian trading boats that visit the area. There are none of the usual facilities. No roads on the mainland, no electricity in many of the small inhabited islands, the larger ones sometimes have a generator for a bit of light.. Many of the Kunas have mobile phones, and sometimes there is a knock on the hull, you look out to find an Ulu there with the Kuna wanting you to charge their phone, funny though they always have a code on the key pad to stop unauthorised use!



Buying the fruit and vegetables

The snorkelling here is pretty good (Scuba is not allowed) once you have found the best places to go, and we have found a superb spot behind one of the main reefs, you realise you are in the big ocean as there are many different fishes from the usual reef fish we normally see. There are some big fish, stingrays from 2ft to 8ft, and every so often you come across a shark, yes, it does focus the mind at those moments, there you are snorkelling along, you look to the side and it's Oh Sh.....! a bloody great shark, anyway so far all has been ok, but when you see them up close, you realise what a dangerous fish it could be. (Nice Sharky, you say to it quietly)! Whilst, trying to stay relaxed as they apparently can sense if you are tense and nervous, and we don't want to get on the wrong side of Sharky do we, but they do look spectacular.

We had a major disaster last week when the water maker sprung a leak. This is an important piece of kit for our self reliance, so whilst we waited for a replacement part to arrive by plane then donkey. I focused our minds on how little water we could actually use, we caught rainwater when we could, and went to the nearby island to do the laundry in a fresh water pit, talk about back to basics. So that's where we are up to, we head to Colon before the end of May for a quick trip home for Michael Dunn's wedding then its hopefully a land trip to Peru and Bolivia before we come back on Darramy for a



Sue, using the old twin tub!

couple more months and head up to the northern part of Panama. (we understand they have Crocodiles up there. ooh ere!)

We are looking forward to coming home and having a pint or two, and so that's about it for now.

Adios Amigos

(Delete as applicable)

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

Brian and (Big) Sue

You can view 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,1910/Itemid,102/ Click on this link if you are really bored!

Our Panamanian phone number is 00507 6078 6328