

Darramy on tour No 18: The Panama Canal and the Galapagos Isles August 2011 February 2012

Buenos Amigos,

When I last wrote, I said the next travelogue would be coming to you from the Galapagos Isles. Well it is, we made it on 10th February after 10 days logging 1004 miles, but direct is only 850 miles. That's sailing!

Anyway, I'm getting ahead of myself, so here is a quick (huh!) review. We came back to the UK between August and October, it was great to catch up with loads of you, see my two grandchildren Christened, (another two for one day!), and we generally enjoyed being back amongst family and friends for a while.

We flew back to Panama and launched Darramy in mid October. Then it was getting ready for our Panama Canal transit. We spent a fair time restocking, and having the boat measured etc by the canal authorities.



Canal Transit Crew

Sue and Pete flew out to help with the transit, and have a well earned rest!! We were also joined for the transit by Mark and Debbie off S/V Sea Cycle, a couple of Canadians whom we have spent a fair bit of time with over the last 4 years. They nearly get the British sense of humour (most of the time) which was a plus. Mark is still practicing words like "SOD OFF", "BARSTARD" etc.!

On 7th November our allocated transit day, we duly checked out of the Marina in Shelter bay and proceeded to the canal transit waiting area, where eventually our Canal adviser (Harold) came aboard. We motored up the canal to the Gatun locks. This is a staircase type of three locks which take you up to the Gatun Lake 120 feet above sea level. We entered the lock behind a large freighter, being in the lock was quite daunting even though Sue and I had done it before as line handlers for Limerick in May 2011. When the gates shut we were committed, it was all very quiet on board!



Line Handling - Easy!

Then the water started to fill the enormous lock. The line handlers had their work cut out as we were surging about all over the place, or that is what it

seemed like anyway. They had to keep their lines under tension so we stayed in the middle of the lock, whilst the advisor oversaw that everything was working ok. We did the three locks emerging into the lake in the dark of the night, luckily we had a

reasonable moon shining so that made life easier. We tied up to a buoy and Sue fed everyone with a big chilli, a few light beverages were taken, then a few more, and Peter entertained us playing his Concertina.



Night time accent Gatun lock No 3

Next day a 6.00 a.m. start. Another adviser (Franseca) boarded and we proceeded to cross the lake to the next set of locks into the Pacific. Franseca

must have been impressed with our seamanship, as he left us to transit the canal whilst he read his newspaper, and ate all the food that Sue, Sue and Debbie kept producing out of the Galley. On arrival at the locks, there had been a cock up, and we were kept waiting for a couple of hours. (Which, is why the impatient ones amongst you did not see us on the web cam at the Miraflores lock)! We proceeded through the last lock (going down was much easier than up) and under the Bridge of the Americas into the Pacific. It was no different than anywhere else really I don't know what all the hype was about, but here



Final lock, Pacific in background we have up to 6 metre tides, something we had not had since leaving the UK a while back. But going through the canal was definitely a commitment on our part, as there is no turning back now!

Mark and Debbie went back to Sea Cycle in Shelter Bay, and Sue and Pete stayed for another 10 days. We went out to some beautiful islands called Los Perlas about 40 miles from Panama City, sadly the weather left a bit to be desired, but we



Bridge los America's

visited a few islands, swam and spotted whales in one anchorage. We caught a few



Sue and Sue Isla Toboga

fish, and Sue F spotted a Humpback whale on our return journey. Well spotted. (These mammals are enormous), we also saw some dolphins which are always a treat to watch. Any way Sue and Pete flew home, and we restocked and headed back to Los Perlas, the weather improved and we visited some lovely quiet anchorages, we stayed out there until just before Christmas, we did a quick return to restock for Christmas, we had to get the sprouts for Xmas dinner (and we

did)! Then we headed back out to the Islands. We had arranged to meet Malarkey and Superted for Christmas at a lovely anchorage. A few other yachts were there, so once again on Christmas Eve we donned our Christmas Garb and went Carol singing around the boats, again a successful night, mind you we came across some humbugging Australians, who either did not celebrate Christmas, or they had just had a big row, and we turned up at the wrong moment.! Oh well you can't win them all! A lovely Christmas day was spent on Superted with every body contributing some fine xmas dinner offerings.

We spent New Years Eve with Malarkeys, we had a lovely meal on the island of Contadora, which is a really up market island for the mega rich of Panama. There were many large power boats in the anchorage, mostly with paid crew. A different world. Sorry, waffling again! We had a beautiful meal, and saw in another New Year. On our way back to the dinghy, we had to pass the local airport, now, you are meant to walk round this, but a gate was open so we thought we would take a short cut



Testing the Tri sail

across the runway (What about security I hear you ask?) No one in sight! I couldn't resist it we did a conga down the runway (try doing that at Manchester airport!) when I say we, it was just Trevor, Sue and myself, Joanne being the youngest was far too sensible and walked the long way around.!



Emergency Rudder Test

After the festivities were over we stayed at the anchorage, and started to prepare Darramy for our future voyage. We checked all the equipment, serviced everything that moved, and tried to eliminate problems before they could occur. We had the storm sails out, rigged the emergency rudder, and just worked through our lists until we had everything that we could think of and more checked. Then it was back to Panama City for the big stock up. Don't forget we will not find any large supplies for at least 4 month or longer,(probably Tahiti). We created a lot of extra storage space and bought plastic boxes, which had to be strapped in place for our extra provisions. Then it was filling the boat with food and not so much drink. It was a long tiring job, supermarkets each day, taxis, loading the dinghy to ferry our purchases back on board, then labelling and listing all the stores, and where they were located. After nearly 2 weeks we were full.



Vacuum packing meat

Just a few items left to check, one being our foul weather gear, as it had not been out for years. We discovered that our special ultra expensive super duper sailing boots which had hardly been worn had decomposed soles. Bugger! you can hear me saying. Luckily we had come across a smashing little shop in the City, and they stitched all sorts just like an old fashioned cobbler back home. We took a load of footwear in, and the old Panamanian Cobbler stitched the lot back together and resoled our not so super duper boots so we could use them. As an aside, we have noticed after being in the heat for quite some time, that glue does not survive the elements very well. Even

in the boat head linings are starting to sag, the glue just is not up the job, also elastic just does not last, Sue is always checking her special store of underwear in case of elasticity problems!



Beautiful Isla Contadora

waited at Isla Contadora for the right weather to start our passage to the Galapagos. Incidentally Malarkey and Superted were doing the same passage, and although we don't buddy boat we knew we would all be around the same bit of the ocean, so we used the SSB radio to

We checked out of Panama as a country for the last time. It is a place we really enjoyed, but it was time to move on. We



A Hitchiker to the Galapagos

stay in contact all the way across. I won't go into too much detail of the trip, as its pretty boring reading for you non sailors, and probably the sailors as well! However after a flying start of 140 miles in the first 24 hours, we came into a different weather system, and had very light winds on the nose (which is where we were heading), so we had to beat for about 700 miles. Now normally no sane person goes to windward for that distance, but honestly with such light winds and flat seas Darramy is a dream to sail even in 5 knots of wind we could make over 3 knots. Not always where we wanted to go, but we just had to keep the vessel moving. We were becalmed for 10 hours one night, and that was ok, but the next time we lost the wind the sea was very sloppy, so to save everything banging about, we motored slowly towards our destination. About 6 hours later the wind came in again so we could resume sailing. One of the high points of the passage was crossing the equator. Now I know some of you have been to the Southern hemisphere, but normally on a plane, so when you "cross the line" under your own steam it's a bit of a milestone. If I can get the pictures in the correct place it will show you the GPS coordinates turning from North to South.



Heading South to the line



On the Equator

(There did it!)

We also had to toast King Neptune, the god of the sea, and there is quite a lot involved in the ritual. Apparently, we first timers historically are know as "Poly wogs", or "wogs" for short, (yes I used a word you won't hear very often, and also no offence intended to you PC lovers)



Sue toasting King Neptune

Well, as there were only two of us we had a short ceremony dressed up in odd clothing, and had a toast to Neptune! Crossed the line and became "Shellbacks",



Skipper? toasting Neptune!

all this whilst taking photos of the GPS and keeping the boat sailing. Phew!

We then proceeded to sail into counter currents, and had a continuing slow trip to arrive at Isla San Cristobol in the Galapagos Isles. 10 days 3 hours after departing from Panama. Logged 1004 miles and motored for a total of 20 hours and only caught one fish!

On arrival we were boarded, by customs, and various other officials all earning their crust. Loads of paperwork was undertaken, but eventually we cleared immigration picked up our special pass that allows us two month here, and went to sleep.

Next morning we explored ashore, we were greeted by loads of Sea Lions lying on the promenade, they occupied seats, stairways, and climbed aboard a lot of the boats in the anchorage.



Literally stepping over Sea Lions



Puerto Baquerizo Moreno, San Cristobol

Not us though, as they could not or have not as yet managed to climb up our ladder! So far, we have been swimming with giant turtles, and sea lions, and loads of other wild life plus you can get so close to them, but I will cover that another day, I just wanted to give you a glimpse of where we are. But to end, here is a photo of a nice pair of Galapagian boobies!



Nice pair! Blue footed Boobies

After the Galapagos in early April we will depart for the Marquesas. 3100 miles away, these Islands are at the Eastern part of French Polynesia.

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

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

Brian and Sue (Shellbacks)

You can view this and our previous travelogues of the last six years on our OCC site
<http://cic.oceancruisingclub.org/publications/2558>

We will advise you when we leave for the Marquesas (French Polynesia), 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.*

