

Darramy on tour No 10: Venezuela, Chile and Bonaire
August 2008 – January 2009

Hello again, doesn't time fly? It does not seem 5 minutes since I last wrote one of these; anyway, here we go again.....

In August we were still in Venezuela, our object was to enjoy some of South America for the next 18 months.

We went to a place called Merida in the South west of the country, this is a pretty town near the base of the Venezuelan Andes. We travelled there by bus, a short 20-hour journey. I have to say the quality of the long distance buses were very good, reclining seats, but very cold as the air con is on full blast, so we were prepared with blankets and winter gear. Now we know how a pack of fish fingers feels when put in the freezer. Merida was full of visitors, a major destination for the wealthier Venezuelans.

Here is the highest cable car in



the world; sadly it was out of action! We did loads of walking, and a 3 night four day walk in the Andes, when I say walk, I walked and Sue had a horse to ride on, we stayed in mountain Pasadas, which were subsidised with a micro grant from the EU, so at least you know that some of the levy paid by Britain to the EU has benefited our trip! We walked up to 4000 metres where the air is pretty thin, the Pasadas were very basic, no

heating, it was 7 blankets cold at night, these were spent at over 3000 metres, anyway we survived, it was good to be high again, the mountains were quite different from the Alps at that height, as the snow line did not start until about 4000 metres, and flowers could be seen quite often at 3500 metres.

We stayed in an apartment in the town with a lady called Gioia, who often had cruising folk stay at her home; she spoke good English so it made communication easier. We also met David and Emma off Five Flip Flops, a boat we first met in Portugal. So we were able to share a few beers with them some nights.

After 2 weeks we returned to Puerto La Cruz (PLC), to get ready for another trip.



This time it was my turn to go and do some skiing in Chile, whilst Sue was going to get some R & R round the pool and socialising with the other cruising folk and was spoilt especially by Vicki and Roger on El Vagabond.

I had read that skiing in Chile can be quite extreme, and I booked on a trip to climb 7 volcanoes, and ski back down, the whole thing was totally off piste, and involved what I had enjoyed in Europe, Ski touring.

So off I set from Venezuela on an internal flight to connect with a flight to Santiago in Chile, where I would meet the rest of the party flying out from the UK. After sitting in the local airport in PLC for 2 hours, we were transferred to a different plane on landing at Caracas, I discovered my bags, and ski equipment etc had not arrived. No



Villarrica Volcano (Pucan)

problem (always worrying words) I was told it would be on the next flight, we will send it on. I was committed to the Santiago flight, so had to get that. Arriving in Santiago, with no bags, I met the rest of the party the next day, and you know when you go on these trips there is always one person who has problems, guess what it was me this time! Any way we flew into Southern Chile to the Lake District

area. Here we had our first volcano to climb Corrolaco. I had managed to borrow some old gear and boots, as hiring touring gear out there is a none starter. The weather was pretty foul, and we were towed up the first stage on a rope behind a piste basher, then it was 4 hours skinning up, by the time we reached the summit, the weather was pretty bad so a few minutes at the top was enough. The ski down was good snow but my lack of practice and old gear from the 80s told. I have never been the most elegant of skiers, but at least I could blame lousy equipment for my first decent in powder in over 2 years. Next day it was off to another place, however after 2 hour of walking in, the borrowed boots were destroying my feet. To cut a long story short, I lost a weeks skiing after the hospital told me not to ski and give the newly acquired holes in both feet time to heal. After a week my own gear turned up, but my glee soon lost its shine when I discovered a lot of stuff had been stolen out of the bag.



Snow Fun

To compensate for no skiing I went horse riding, and used a snowmobile for a day, that was very different, and good fun, but it seemed a shame to spoil the silence of the mountains by these screaming engines. A bit like Jet skis that whiz through quiet anchorages.

Any way I finally got some skis on my feet for the last 3 days, the last volcano was Osorno. This is in a national park, and a small ski resort is at its base. We had arranged, as the lifts were not working to get a lift up the mountain for the first stage in a VW microbus with catapillar tracks on! A real mean machine. They dropped us off and we had 3 ½ hours skinning up, then we put on crampons and did 2



hours climbing followed by ½ hour of rope climbing to the to summit. What a sight, on one side you could see into Argentina, also across other volcanoes and the Andes, many of the Chilean mountain lakes, and best of all a view of the Pacific Ocean. It was a tremendous sight, even



better for me as I had missed out on so much of the trip. The decent was amazing after climbing down back to our skis we skied down about 2000 metres through untracked powder. Finishing at the bottom just as the sun was starting to set. Absolute magic. Real adrenalin stuff! Big thanks go to Phil Smith

from Snoworks UK and also Christian from Amity tours Chile, for putting up with me and really making sure I got the best out of the trip.

Chile was a super place, the people so friendly, good food and local wine, which was tremendous value, a country I would like to return to. These volcanoes were a magic sight 3500 meters of mountain appear from nowhere, the top half covered in snow. I feel I have unfinished business there!

Back to PLC where we booked a flight back home for 4 weeks, again great to see family and friends, whom like us have not altered a bit since we last saw you! We celebrated Sues big birthday, and caught up with business etc. then back to PLC Darramy went to the boat yard to have her bottom scrubbed and painted, so we could get away quickly, we had planned to do more cruising in Venezuela then return to

PLC to check out with immigration and customs however one Saturday night a US boat was attacked and the owner shot dead in an anchorage not far from us. This was



really sad news, and marred the rest of the time we spent there. We put stores on board and checked out, heading first to the Islands of Tortuga, then on to Los Roques. What a change from the mainland, beautiful white beaches, a real paradise, and we found for one night only

an anchorage with no boats in, the first since we have been in the Caribbean sea. We had 3 weeks around these magic islands, caught a few fish and just chilled - this is what we really enjoy about being on the boat. It was now



mid December and we had planned to be in Bonaire (Netherlands Antilles) for Christmas so we headed west and arrived in Bonaire, where there is no anchoring allowed, you have to tie to a mooring provided by the National Park. A flat island whose income is derived from salt flats, and also tourism, it is rated as one of the top five dive centres in the world.

On our first visit ashore we felt fantastic, it was so relaxing, friendly, we did not realise how tense it had been in Venezuela, this was like another world. We met a few other

cruisers whom we new and so soon got into the Christmas spirit. Trevor and Jo turned up on Malarkey so we knew we were in for



a great Christmas. Turkey was bought together with all the traditional trimmings, including sprouts! And once again Malarkey hosted Christmas dinner we were able to

have the company of 2 ½ Texans (Hanna was only 7) and a Kiwi as well, they had never had the full-blown British Christmas dinner before. Jo had made crackers hats etc. and after 3 servings of turkey we were stuffed, but I'm getting ahead of my self, I forgot to mention our Christmas Eve, when we went carol singing in the dinghies around the moorings. Me dressed in my Santa outfit and all my helpers dressed up as well. We sang several well-known carols we got quite choral with Gloria in Excelsior, and in return received hospitality from most people, but there is always one. In the Marina was a US motorboat, loads of lights looked like Santa's Grotto, so we made a B line for it. It just shows how looks can be deceptive. Done up like a Christmas tree, at the first sign of uninvited guests we were told to come back tomorrow. Some people have no Christmas spirit! Bah! Humbug to them! (Yes we made a note of the boat name)!

New year was like Baghdad on a noisy day, fireworks everywhere people had boxes no sorry, cartons full of fireworks, not very organised but pretty colourful and often deafening.

Lots of diving has been done here, and Sue has really got into snorkelling. She spotted an Eagle Ray under the boat.

Maybe in our next report she will have tried scuba properly.

So far, the range of different species of fish is amazing, the coral and sponges are so colourful, and there are over 100 dive sites to choose from. One day diving off the back of the boat we saw a spotted Moray Eel swimming about and then savage what seemed a fairly big Octopus which was already wounded or nearly dead, a bit like watching the Hyenas attacking a Gazelle in these nature programs on TV.

Another day, we took Darramy to the north of the island to two super sites. On the first dive we saw a giant spine backed lobster out for a walk it must have been 5 feet long in total, I

thought it was like Jurassic Park, it is not often you see them out during the day, on the next dive we saw some massive Green Moray eels the girth on them was like an elephants leg, they were really big and scary, ok! we were wary anyway! That was a great day, but the fun was not yet over whilst heading back to our mooring the fishing line went wild. Baz, the Kiwi grabbed it. The line started running out we looked astern and saw a large fin. It all went quiet then this bloody great Marlin leapt out of the water behind us, the line went slack again as it had bit through the wire trace and



Ready, willing and able

was gone, but the sight of it leaping out of the water left us on a high. We like this place.

You may have noticed in these fishy tales, there are no pictures, as ever, there is never a camera when needed, but on top of that the waterproof case leaked so we now have one buggered camera and a leaky case!

Well that's it for now people. Future plans- we are off to Colorado in a week for 4 weeks skiing with Squander and El Vagabond, and a few more new friends who don't know us yet! then we are back on board heading west towards Cartagena in Columbia.

You may have noted that we now have a blog site, so a big thank-you to George Curtis from the Ocean Cruising Club for sorting that out. You (or Yo all (yaw!) as these Texans say!) can read all our previous reports on this site; have a look, pictures as well.

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

So as usual:

(Delete as applicable)

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

Brian and Sue