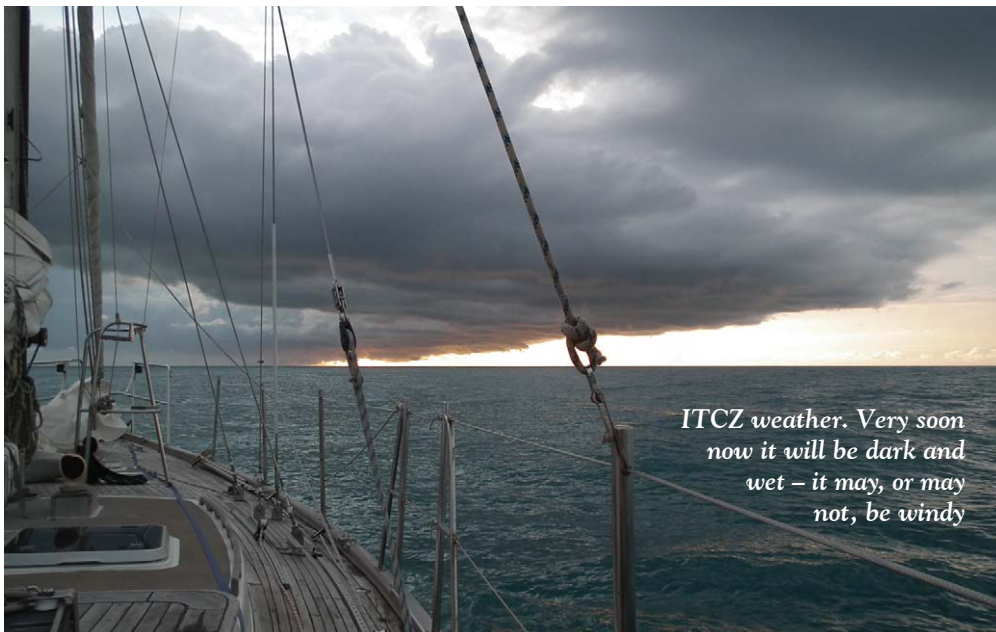


CAPRICORN AND BACK: ARIADNE'S QUALIFYING CRUISE, 2012–2013

Iain and Meg Buchanan

After several years cruising the Atlantic islands, it was time to sail *Ariadne*, our 45ft Bruce Roberts cutter, across the Atlantic. As part of the preparations we spent some time coaching a 'third hand'. We had had mixed experiences with the windvane which came with the boat until Iain sat down with some dimly-remembered principles from school mechanics to improve its performance, with excellent results. It then proved to be the perfect crew member – silent, needing no sleep, food or drink, and requiring minimal supervision. Our plan was to cross from the Cape Verde islands to northeast Brazil and then, taking account of seasonal weather patterns and visa restrictions, to sail south in Brazil, turning north again when the austral winter loomed. After that we would head for French Guiana and Suriname to see out the Caribbean hurricane season.

We left Mindelo on the morning of Christmas Eve 2012 and enjoyed a lively sail. Once clear of the island effect we activated the windvane and did not touch the steering for six days, trimming the sails and vane to keep us on course. The distance to our default destination, Recife on the Brazilian mainland, was about 1700 miles. At this stage we were getting our Sailmail forecasts from Lunenburg, Nova Scotia, though later Rock Hill, North Carolina, proved to be more consistent. We were in high spirits, as the Inter Tropical Convergence Zone width was forecast as '3/4 degrees' at our crossing longitude. Unfortunately this turned out to be 3–4 degrees, not ¾ degree. We followed conventional wisdom and aimed for an equatorial crossing point about 29°W, and at about 5°N we neared the ITCZ. Progress was very slow and punctuated by heavy rainfall with extremely poor visibility, though we were generally spared the squalls and thunderstorms which many experience.



We crossed the Equator in the very early hours of 3 January, but postponed celebrations until a later date. One dark night, in fairly light conditions, the shackle joining the bottom of the mainsheet tackle parted company from the traveller after a retaining pin moved sideways. No bits were lost, however, and we did a temporary fix, but while Iain worked on it Meg, at the helm, worried that she couldn't see him – less than 2m away. Beyond the doldrums the winds were somewhat contrary and progress was by a mixture of motoring, motor-sailing and sailing. We saw the lights of Fernando de Noronha, but sailed on by and eventually entered the estuary at Recife, mooring at an old yacht club. One objective had been met – we arrived with more than six months to run on Iain's passport – but any elation from that achievement was soon dissipated by our attempts to clear in.

Clearing In

The general principles of clearing in are well documented, doing the rounds of *Polícia Federal*, Customs and *Capitania dos Portos*, the last run by the Brazilian navy. The *Polícia Federal* turned out to be in a closed area of dock which was not even accessible by taxi. We found it with the kind help of a customs official who took us in his car, and the duty officer cheerfully put us into his system, stamping our passports with visas valid for three months. Next, in Customs, the duty officer spotted that the entry stamp was dated 2012 not 2013 ... and this would have to be corrected before they could proceed. We offered to return to the nearby *Polícia Federal*, but this would not do because nobody there had the authority to cancel the stamp and issue the correct one. 'Somebody is on their way to fix it', we were told. We both spoke some Portuguese, Meg especially, and think Brazil would be untenable without it.

Customs went for a long lunch, and were packing up late afternoon with no movement on our problem. It was starting to get dark and we had only a slight clue as to our whereabouts, so we called it a day and said we would be back on Monday. We had entered the large dock area by car and envisaged a long trek to the gate when we saw a worker head down a well-trodden path. We followed, and found a pedestrian gate with buses and taxis beyond, but security at the gate were not inclined to let us out since there was no

A fishing boat under sail at Recife. These craft venture into the open sea





Inshore fishermen, Recife

proof that we had entered. Coming by car, the customs official and ourselves were waved through. Our visas were, of course, not valid, so I think we were 'not in the manual'. After some phone calls we made our escape and gratefully caught a taxi to the boat.

Returning on Monday, the same officer cancelled the invalid stamp and gave us a new one. Customs cleared the boat in for three months, and the *Capitania dos Portos* cleared us into port. Brazil has a federal structure, so on moving from state to state it is necessary to clear out with *Polícia Federal* and *Capitania dos Portos* in the old state and clear in with new officials in the next. This procedure, as well as that of extending our visas, was seldom quick or straightforward – it paid to be patient and take a book along.

Recife

The old club, on the port side as you head upriver, is cheap and welcoming if a bit remote. Best access to town is on a ferry, powered by a home-made outboard, about 15 minutes on foot from the moorings. Access to shops is difficult, and although you can get to some supermarkets by bus, a taxi is really required to get back to the boat if laden with bags. Diesel and water need to be taken to the boat by dinghy. There is a small pontoon, but only lightweight local boats were tied up. Another modern marina – with a tidal entrance – lies further upstream, but a yachtsman we met at the *Polícia Federal* office said he had touched on entry at high water. Since it was now just after springs we decided not to risk it.

The city grew wealthy on slaves and sugar and is now seeking to restore some of its lost grandeur. Together with nearby Olinda (a World Heritage Site) there is a rich

Ecclesiastical architecture, Olinda



mixture of architecture and culture, representing the assorted European states which fought for supremacy here – mainly Dutch, English and of course Portuguese – and the independent Brazilian state which followed.

Salvador

Sufficiently rested, we set out for Salvador in the province of Bahia, at the entrance to the Baía de Todos os Santos. We arrived shortly after dusk and were somewhat perplexed by the number of strobe lights on the water. At first we thought we had come upon an emergency and that there were people in the water wearing lifejackets. The speed at which the lifejackets were moving disabused us of that hypothesis, so our next conjecture was that there had been a change to the Colregs during our time at sea. As we got closer to the vessels we could see that the strobes were associated with boats under sail as well as others under power, and that many of said vessels did not show normal lights. We decided that the collective for strobes should be ‘a confusion’.

The Terminal Nautico was ‘full’ when we arrived, as they were awaiting a rally fleet, and the anchorage outside is now effectively filled with boats and the fuel barge. We did stay for one night after arriving in the dark, but there is a better option outside Marina Bahia. We booked into Marina Bahia, which is expensive but does

The church of Nosso Senhora de Rosário dos Pretos, Salvador, built by slaves in their ‘spare’ time



have some chandlery, again expensive, and an excellent yard if you have to lift out. Access to supermarkets is best by taxi, which are fairly cheap, and the office in Terminal Nautico directed us to a computer/print shop which has a large stock of charts. The vintage varies greatly, but they will print on demand and it worked out at about £7 each*. We stayed in Terminal Nautico on our return trip northbound. It is much cheaper than Marina Bahia and has helpful staff, but the infrastructure is in need of upgrading. Laundry (not self-service) is available at both marinas.

Salvador is Africa in Brazil – a legacy of the slave trade

* This may well have been illegal, as many countries' charts are protected by copyright. Ed.

– and though there are the trappings of a big city there is, as elsewhere, considerable poverty and deprivation. There are clearly many people with a subsistence quality of life, and the benefits of recent economic developments are far from evenly shared. Unlike the stadium-based carnival of Rio de Janeiro, that in Salvador is out on the streets. Crowds and noise are two things we normally avoid, so we observed the action from a suitable distance. At carnival time supermarkets offer beer at a big discount, and we were amused to see a lady at the checkout using a wheelbarrow to collect hers.

The state of Bahia was one of the best that we visited for sampling different cuisines, with a mix of South American and bits of West Africa, and this proved to be some of the best cooking in Brazil. The old town is of considerable interest, with colonial and slave-related buildings and artefacts. Since the slaves were not allowed to attend the white churches, they built one of their own, *Nosso Senhora de Rosário dos Pretos* – a very impressive edifice where Christian and West African beliefs and images were intertwined and overlaid.

The Baía is a favourite cruising ground for local and visiting boats but, anxious to move south, we left any exploration for our return and departed on 1 March for Rio de Janeiro, about 760 miles away. Although the passage was out of sight of land it was not without interest. En route there is a large reef-strewn area, *Parcel dos Abrolhos*, over 50 miles offshore. With nothing in sight, not even a navigation mark, for a long stretch the echo sounder indicated a depth of 18m, but we drew comfort from the presence of a large container ship overtaking us close by. There is another *Abrolhos* – derived from the Portuguese for ‘open your eyes’ – off the west coast of Australia, named by a Portuguese navigator ... or cartographer?



Portuguese tiles in Salvador

Brazil has an extensive offshore oil and gas industry, and this is so fast-moving that developments do not make it onto (even digital) charts in a timely way. Accordingly, one night we found ourselves surrounded by rigs, with the wind at 25–28 knots, *Ariadne* powering along with a bone in her teeth and the Benny Goodman Quartet playing a suitably presto rendition of *Running Wild* on the iPod.

Rio de Janeiro

Landfall at Rio is spectacular, with the entrance to the bay beyond the cliffs of Sugarloaf surprisingly narrow. For visiting boats, options on the Rio (west) side of the bay are limited to one ill-regarded marina or anchoring with attendant security problems. We opted for the east side of the bay at the Club Naval Charitas in Niteroi, where you can anchor off or go bow/stern to a pontoon, and where we were met by the legendary Susy, an



Rio landfall – the Sugarloaf!

Anglo-Colombian woman and circumnavigator well-known for her help and hospitality to visitors. There are fast catamaran ferries to Rio and we found an easier motion from their wash at anchor. For the senior citizen, the ferries have the benefit of being free!

The Club Naval has bars, a restaurant and a swimming pool, and there is plenty of help and advice about yacht bits and supplies. We also got Campingaz butane and Calor propane cylinders filled with butane at the Club. Supermarkets are best reached by bus out and taxi back – the nearby Pão de Açúcar supermarket was our best find. The water quality is very poor and we had divers down to clean the hull, who removed boilerplate pieces of growth after only three weeks at anchor.

Rio has all the good and bad aspects of modern Brazil – beautiful from a distance but tackier close up, vibrant but sometimes chaotic, and enormous disparities in wealth. When cruising we find that it is not always the big ticket items which are the most memorable, but the smaller, more distinctive events. Courtesy of Susy, we were taken to a concert to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the birth of the composer Ernesto Nazareth – no we hadn't heard of him either. The performers were a German-Brazilian soprano and a Japanese-Brazilian pianist – the products of earlier migrations – and the venue was a large room in a small museum in Copacabana. The music has been described as Latin Scott Joplin, though Nazareth has more of a classical feel, and the infectious rhythms, especially of the solo piano pieces, had the audience jiggin' in their seats from the shoulders up.

Baía de Ilha Grande

About 120 miles west of Rio lies the Baía de Ilha Grande, a cruising ground with an island for every day of the year and where even the largest – Ilha Grande itself – does not have any roads. Everything arrives by ferry, or helicopter if you are rich. We sampled a number of quiet anchorages before moving to Abraão, the main town on Ilha Grande. The scenery reminded us of the west coast of Scotland – if you ignored the greenery, sunshine and bikinis.

We have had our share of anchoring experiences over the years, usually involving resetting it when unhappy about the boat's behaviour. Until Abraão we had not experienced a full-blown drag, but that was about to change. Some anchorages in the Baía have a long fetch, depending on wind direction, but Abraão is fairly sheltered from most directions. The overnight forecast was southwest force 2–3, though being in the lee of some high hills there is the potential for winds below or above that level.

By mid-evening a major squall was blowing with heavy rain, and we were checking our position regularly. About an hour into the blow it was clear that we had moved, and with Meg on the wheel and Iain on the bow we fired up the engine and started to bring in the anchor. After a few seconds the engine cut and would not start again. Iain tried dropping the anchor again – it had not yet come fully in – but although the chain was running out, there was no tension to it. We could now see the approaching shore through the driving rain and let off a red handheld flare. We put out a Pan Pan in English and Portuguese (Meg!) and let off a second handheld. A couple of small RIBs from neighbouring boats and a larger RIB used for tourist trips appeared and took a line from us, towing us clear of the shore. We had not touched, but it must have been damn close. We were taken back towards the town anchorage, but managed to explain that we could not anchor and asked to be put alongside the dock used by local ferries. None are located there overnight and we had an easy time parking.

The following morning we started to sort ourselves out and perhaps confirm our hypothesis about the sequence of events. Abraão has been a busy anchorage for centuries, and Iain had reckoned that the seabed could be foul with debris. Accordingly,

At the Niterói viewpoint above Guanabara Bay, with the Club Naval Charatis beyond the catamaran jetty and Ariadne a white blob anchored off

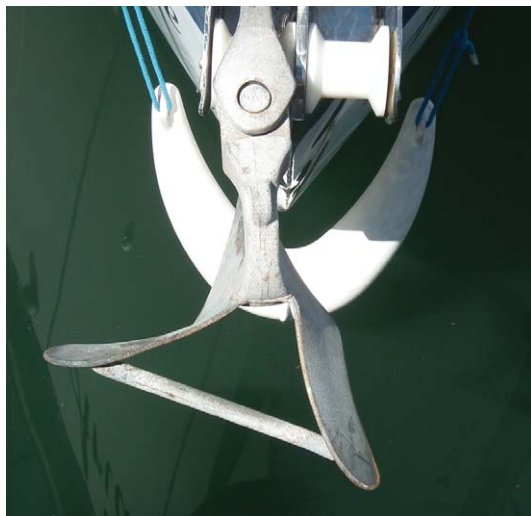




Ariadne at anchor, Baía de Ilha Grande

we had set a tripping line on the anchor. In the dark of the previous night we could not see it, let alone attempt to recover it, and our closeness to the shore meant that we had no time to go down that route. The line was found wrapped round the propeller – yes we have a rope cutter, but the line probably balled too quickly for the cutter to operate effectively. The line was so taut that it pulled the anchor hard against the hull, so dropping the chain would have little effect. There appeared to be no damage to engine or transmission, and we set off for the anchorage. When we got the 60lb (27kg) CQR back to the bow it was clearly distorted – the boat had bent the anchor as it pressed against the hull! The anchor was still intact, if somewhat lopsided, and we continued to use it, sometimes in testing conditions, until it was repaired months later in Chaguaramas, Trinidad. We had the boat lifted at the same time, and could not find a mark left by the event.

The 60lb CQR after being distorted by the hull!



We spent time in a marina at Bracuhy, on the mainland, where we employed a rigger and canvas worker to make some repairs. Both trades were to a high standard. Our last stop in this area was at Paraty on the west side of the bay. At just over 23°S and about 15 miles north of the Tropic of Capricorn it was to be the southern limit of our journey. The town itself has an old colonial centre, with buildings raised on stone platforms and the streets laid with slight inclines, nominally to allow the tides to cover and clean them.



The old colonial centre of Paraty

Heading north

We returned to Rio for a spell, then on to Salvador to prepare for our exit from Brazil. We had originally thought of a stopover on the way to French Guiana, perhaps Natal or Fortaleza, but time was running out on us and we cleared out of Salvador for the sail north on the day our visas expired. A major football match was taking place that day and the Brazilian navy was out on exercise. We reckoned the sailors were unhappy at not seeing the game and we had four separate hails on VHF 16 as well as a RIB with marines coming close for a good look.

The direct route to French Guiana was about 1700 miles, though we reckoned we sailed nearer 2100, crossing the Equator three times. We kept well offshore, seeking wind, and saw no land until, many days later, the landfall buoy at Degradés des Cannes, French Guiana, showed up on the bow. Thank you, DoD*, for GPS.

* The US Department of Defense

General Comments

Despite going in the 'right' directions at the 'right' times, offshore passage-making was a mixed experience. For the legs between Recife, Salvador, Rio, back to Salvador and from there to French Guiana, we ventured well offshore to be free of coastal weather effects. The sea area forecasts off the southeast coast were typically of the form: 'wind northeast to southeast, occasionally southwest, force 3–4 or 5 ...'. The net effect was that we sailed about 70% of the time, often slowly, and motored the rest. Off the northeast coast we did benefit from the substantial current heading northwest.

We found Brazil surprisingly expensive, probably as the result of recent inflation. Provisioning for passages was more limited than in the European ports we had been used to, though there were some novelties to try. Payment for fuel and for work was sometimes cash only, so it's best to check in advance.

Personal security figures prominently in some guides. We were diligent about lifting the dinghy at night and locking it while ashore, and on shore we were fairly vigilant about our movements and certainly avoided some areas after nightfall. We had no real problems and felt little threat. Indeed many people – on buses, in shops and on the street – were polite and helpful, as well as curious about us, where we came from and what we thought about their home country.

