

## FROM THE CARIBBEAN TO HALIFAX AND BACK: the US East Coast explored Ron Heyselaar

*(Ineke and Ron Heyselaar – and Boris the cat – live aboard Lily, their Amel 54. They crossed the Atlantic in November 2014 in the ARC+, and the following year spent five weeks exploring Cuba – see A Visit to the North Coast of Cuba in Flying Fish 2015/2. From there they headed north...)*

*Follow their travels at [www.facebook.com/sailingyachtlily/](http://www.facebook.com/sailingyachtlily/). All photos by Ineke Hayselaar.)*

When we joined the OCC in December 2014 we wondered whether it was really for us. Looking at all the pictures we wondered if, at 56 years young, we were too young and too inexperienced to join this interesting club. We actually joined on a bit of a selfish note. We intended to sail from the Caribbean up the US East Coast to Halifax, but had no idea what to see and what not to bother with, and neither had we any intention of being monks avoiding all social contact. So when Stuart of *Time Bandit* came by in St Lucia with his little brochures promoting the OCC we joined – and what an excellent move this was. We enrolled in as many US East Coast events as possible in order to meet people, but first had to get from St Lucia to the US East Coast.

As this story is about our experiences along the US East Coast rather than the Caribbean we'll skip the wonderful time in Sint Maarten (being Dutch it is always nice to stock up on Dutch goodies) and Saint Martin (only the French know how to ensure food tastes even better). The BVI was nice but very busy and our first experience with a lot of American boats. They all seemed to have a strong preference to be on a mooring, which was confirmed when we moved further north. Maybe we should ask our American friends why that is? Don't they teach anchor techniques in high school?



*Lily, our Amel 54*



We're not getting into a debate here about that subject except to say that, as Dutch and known to be misers, we think it's money ill spent.

Puerto Rico was our first experience, as yachties, of the US. For a moment we thought that, due to our lack of news (so nice), the fuel price had dropped dramatically. The filling stations showed petrol prices as 60 cents – kind of low per gallon. Only later did we realise that Puerto Rico is not really the US (as Puerto Ricans point out at every opportunity) and fuel prices were per litre, with distances and speed in kilometres.

We decided to enter the US at the Spanish Virgin Islands (we had a strong urge to do all the virgins ... British, US and Spanish) – Culebra to be precise, where a very nice Customs and Border Protection official helped us through the ample paperwork. For a moment we thought we had our navigation wrong and had ended up in some South American country. After two hours of filling forms and being questioned about our (honourable) intentions we were issued with our cruising licence and a long list of CBP office numbers we should call to report our progress along the Puerto Rican coast. No free movement in the US!

Puerto Rico is wonderful – poor but friendly people enjoying life to the fullest. With the full range of consumerism available to us (Walmart, PepBoys, West Marine, Kmart, Walgreens etc) we enjoyed being able to restock for a reasonable price! However, time is always precious so off we went to our next destination – Cuba. We needed a *zarpe* (outbound clearance document), but the CBP office in Fajardo refused to issue one giving Cuba as the destination due to the embargo, so we both agreed to go back in time and fill in a new form with the Dominican Republic as the destination. The Cubans seemed not to be surprised that the document said DR – it had happened before, they said.

With 25 knots of wind and the current both in the right direction it took us less than four days to sail the 650 miles to Puerto De Vita on the north coast of Cuba, as described in *Flying Fish* 2015/2. On leaving Cuba we made the brilliant decision (not) to sail directly from Havana to Key West. Nice and short at just 90 miles, so less than a day, meeting our requirements to limit overnight sailing.



*Bimini, our brief stop in the Bahamas*





### *Bimini's main attraction*

Let's say that the CBP officer in Key West was not as friendly as the one in Puerto Rico or the one we later encountered in Maine. We took the old mantra that we were unsophisticated foreigners with no knowledge of the local laws ('Sir, we

didn't know that this law was also applicable for foreigners' or, equally good, 'Sir, I thought that the US is now so friendly with Cuba that sailing direct is perfectly okay'). We were threatened – in sequence, as listed by the CBP officer – with (a) having Lily impounded, (b) paying a substantial fine (he didn't mention a figure but looked very serious), (c) going to jail, and (d) having our precious cruising licence revoked. Looking sad, with my wife showing some tears, we avoided all but the last. He did cancel our cruising licence, intending to make life very miserable for us. We had no intention of reporting physically to every CBP office whenever we changed county – yes, you read it correctly, county not state, although there seemed to be some conflicting interpretation among the various CBP offices along the coast – to obtain permissions to proceed. So we had lunch in the Bahamas (thus leaving the US for an 'approved' country), and headed for Fort Lauderdale where we obtained a new cruising licence from a very helpful CBP officer.

So here we were in the 'real' US, at Loggerhead Marina in Hollywood which is really fancy with great facilities. It was also our first experience, albeit only a short one, of the Intracoastal Waterway and its bridges. Drawing 8ft (2.5m) and needing overhead clearance of almost 80ft (25m), we quickly realised that the ICW was not for us. We did all the usual stuff that I assume everyone does in Florida. We went to Orlando, to downtown Miami and to the various malls, and wondered about the obsession with looking good. We tried to match the latter, but after being at sea such a long time we gave up and stuck with our weathered sailor's look.

Next stop was Charleston, South Carolina. Motoring with the Gulf Stream (no wind, which became a theme throughout our time along the East Coast) we covered the distance fast doing an average speed of just over 8 knots ground speed. We chose the Charleston City Marina as our home for a couple of days. Exploring old Charleston was amazing – so much history, well-maintained buildings and great food. We thought we were experiencing southern hospitality until we chatted a bit with the various waiters and learned that most were merely escaping the cold weather further north. Not much different to us snowbirds...

It was time to head for the starting point of our first OCC event, the Southern New England Cruise, excellently organised by Bill and Laurie Balme of *Toodlee-oo!*



### ***Shelter Island Yacht Club – quite fancy!***

To make up time we sailed directly from Charleston to Shelter Island, New York State. Once again we rode the Gulf Stream north making good progress, regretfully leaving it behind us just north of Cape Hatteras. Gone were the high ground speeds and warm weather. Overnight the temperature dropped from a balmy 25°C to a mere 10°C. Suddenly we had to remember how to start the heater and where we'd hidden our cold-weather clothes.

Of this four-day passage we only sailed the last 12 hours. As we were new to the shallow waters around the Montauk and Shelter Island area we decided to anchor near Montauk. It looked like a Dutch winter, with cold winds and even colder water. There was nobody around, so we had plenty of space to anchor and get some sleep.

Both Shelter Island and the Shelter Island Yacht Club, where the OCC fleet was to assemble, are really nice. When the weather turned warmer we rented bikes and happily pedalled around the island and the Greenport area. Great fun!

It was good to meet other OCC members when the Cruise started – what a nice bunch of people! They were an interesting mix of Europeans and Americans, with some old friends such as Ann and Stuart of *Time Bandit* whom we'd met in Las Palmas, Sally and David of *Alcedo*, met in Cuba, Frances and Rob of *Alia Vita*, met in the Cape Verdes, and lots of new friends. The atmosphere was great from the beginning. Bill and Laurie had this merry bunch of people well under control, though started to realise that organising something for sailors who are used to complete independence is like herding cats!





*The floating Raw Bar at Cuttyhunk,  
with excellent New England  
Clam Chowder*



The itinerary took us to Martha's Vineyard (Menemsha and Edgartown, both brilliant), Marion (very small and sleepy, but nice in its own way), Newport (so nice we ended up staying six weeks), and Bristol to celebrate the 4th of July (impressive, but we were surprised by the focus on the military). We made some enjoyable stops at various locations along the way and, looking back, decided we liked this area best of all the East Coast cruising grounds we visited. Obviously, the great group of people participating in the cruise also contributed considerably to our enjoyment – well done Bill and Laurie!

*The Southern New England Cruise participants at Newport, Rhode Island*



As we wanted to visit both our cousins in North America, one living in Miami (visited) and one in Halifax, we continued north. Navigating Nantucket Sound in calm weather – once again, no wind – made us appreciate the area's bad reputation when the weather turns nasty. Definitely not somewhere we want to be with serious wind and swell!

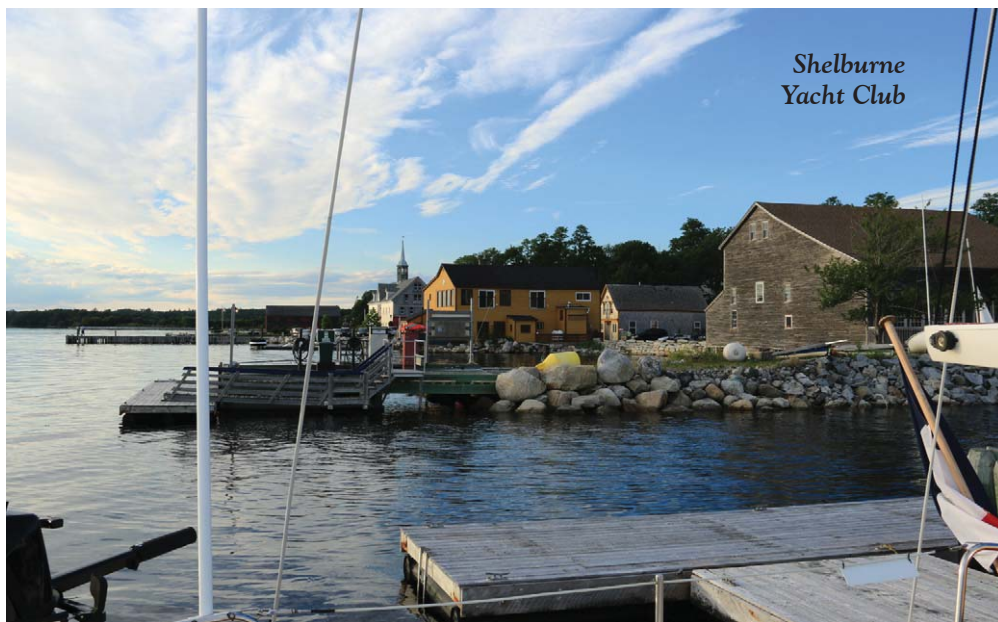
Sailing (well, motoring) to Nova Scotia went very smoothly, with little entertainment but for the visit of the Canadian border patrol aeroplane which passed low over us whilst asking pertinent questions. Clearly they are serious about their borders. Shelburne is very nice, and so sheltered that we had a hard time seeing it – though that might



have been due to the heavy fog which blanketed the last 50 miles. It had been a long time since we had last navigated by radar and chart plotter, but we made it to the Shelburne Yacht Club.

The Canadian immigration officers were very helpful – it was the first time since Cuba that we'd had immigration officials onboard, and also the first time since Cuba that they completed the paperwork (not that much). We merely signed on the dotted line. We were asked to stick our file number somewhere that any official could see it from shore so they wouldn't need to disturb us. Quite a contrast with the US where we had to inform the CBP on our every movement!

Sailing along the Nova Scotian coast is amazing. So many wonderful anchorages, with no boats and brilliant scenery – we were waiting for a grizzly bear to wander







***Lunenburg, Nova Scotia***

along the beach. It looked like Maine, but without the yachts and the million lobster floats. Our favourites on this part of the trip were Shelburne and Lunenburg. Halifax was fun as our cousin lives there, but otherwise not that cosy. Obviously the weather was as one could expect at that latitude – sunny, not so sunny, rain and lots of fog!

Soon the rain started increasing and the temperatures dropping, a clear signal to start our trek south. First we had to get back into the US. Based on various recommendations from fellow OCC members, plus Active Captain, our main source of information, we decided to make landfall at Northwest Harbor in Maine, sailing in company with Rob and Frances Lythgoe of *Alia Vita*. Being a fast cat – and keen to prove that they were sooooo much faster than our Amel 54 – they arrived a few hours ahead of us and started the clearing-in procedure for both of us.



***You can't visit Canada without having the national treat – Beavertail. Halifax, Nova Scotia***

We were welcomed at the town dock of Northwest Harbor by two very friendly CBP officers from Bangor Airport. After taking our lines and chatting for some time about our





*A tad over-ambitious? Boris earlier in our cruise*

trip north, they realised some official work was required when they encountered Boris, our cat. Boris clearly distracted them even more, but after about 30 minutes (it could have been more as it was a very pleasant time) they were ready to step ashore. We reminded them that they still had to stamp our passports, so they looked at them and informed us that all was in order. An excellent way of entering any country! As the wind was shifting we decided to move to Southwest Harbor (all very original port names), where we found an excellent anchorage. We enjoyed the brilliant hikes and free bus rides across Mount Desert Island – really nice!

The considerable group of participants on the OCC Maine Cruise were all gathering in Camden, Maine, so it was

time to move on once again. Sailing from Southwest Harbor was quite an experience. Various friends warned us of the Maine phenomena – lobster-pot floats. They forgot to

*Somes Sound, Mount Desert Island, Maine*



*Jordon Pond and Sea. Mount  
Desert Island, Maine*



mention that there were thousands and thousands of the things. Rob got snared a couple of times so, trying to outdo our good friend, we snared four floats at once! We wondered why we were suddenly going so slowly, and why we were being chased by a couple of brightly coloured floats! We were lucky to lose them without having to dive.

The Camden gathering was very well organised by Regional Rear Commodore Pam MacBrayne of *Glide*, with a good itinerary amid nice scenery, of which we saw relatively little due to the heavy fog. We were getting the hang of avoiding the floats, however, by pretending that there is logic to their placing, so only snared one whilst anchoring. Ineke and I came to the conclusion that Maine is very beautiful, but that the floats and the many boats seriously spoil the fun. All in all we preferred Nova Scotia.

*Typical Maine!*







*At a mooring off Waterboat Marina in downtown Boston*

The weather still being not too good we continued our trek south. Time to head for Boston via Rockland (not so nice), Boothbay (beautiful) and York Harbor (we obviously can't read – something our friendly CBP officer in Key West had also pointed out – Vs our 54ft was clearly way too big for this cute little port). Then Boston, again very nice with moorings smack downtown and the subway roaring under your boat, which gave it all a very special feeling. Great fun, great food and great history!

Arriving in Newport (again) via Provincetown – a great anchorage with hundreds of seals playing around the boats – we completed the circle started some months earlier. It was a lot quieter than before, with much more space to anchor. Our good friends Paul and Maggie of *Paradise* were there, however – seeing another OCC burgee always causes us to anchor close by. More social time! Getting to know other members is one of the perks of joining the OCC. We had met Paul and Maggie through Kitty and Scott of *Tamure* on our previous visit to Newport. All three boats were anchored close to each other, and one day Scott came rowing over to invite us for drinks. We met Paul and Maggie aboard *Tamure*, and have remained friends to this day.

*Seals near Province Town, Massachusetts*







Sailing through New York City was something we could not pass up, so we headed down Long Island Sound, visiting Kitty and Scott in Norwalk as they'd very kindly arranged a mooring for us at the Norwalk Yacht Club (we were clearly turning into American sailors and using our anchor less and less). There we left *Lily* to go visit our daughter in Toronto – nothing like a quick road trip and change of scenery.

Once again on the recommendation of other OCC members – Anne and Stuart of *Time Bandit*, and Lyn and Ju of *Domini* – we picked up a mooring at Port Washington, a great stop. The little town has everything, including a huge supermarket with its own dinghy dock, a branch of West Marine, cinemas, and a great library with excellent internet. Most importantly though, the town has a direct link to Penn Station – 40 minutes and you're in downtown New York – great fun! Just when we were planning to leave, a (very) cold front, Hurricane *Joaquin* and the Pope were all headed our way. *Joaquin* never made it but the cold front and the Pope did, the latter's visit causing the closing of the East River. Well there are worse places to be stuck than Port Washington!

After quick visits to Sandy Hook, Atlantic City, the Delaware River and the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal, we ended up in Annapolis with about a million other snowbirds just in time for the boat show. Annapolis is a great town. Seeing the Naval Academy and, later, the fleet in Norfolk I can only say that I'm glad the Netherlands is friendly with the US!

Another OCC gathering was looming on the horizon, so it was soon time to leave Annapolis and head for Deltaville, where our welcome was second to none. Lydia and Bill Strickland of *Dragon Run* arranged a car for us, organised a very nice barbecue, and helped us with anything they could. Another perfect example of the 'family' called the OCC. Even so, we were quite glad to be nearing the end of our Chesapeake tour – a great piece of water but a bit shallow for our 8ft draft. Norfolk, which would be our



#### *Dinner at Greta and Gary's in Norfolk, Virginia*

jumping-off point to leave the USA and head south towards the British Virgin Islands, was getting closer. Not realising what it actually meant when somebody told us that Norfolk is the largest naval base in the world, we were dumbstruck sailing past row after row of aircraft carriers, submarines, destroyers and other vessels. I have no idea what they were, other than huge and naval.

Port Officers Gary and Greta of *William Barron*, whom we'd met in Bristol, Rhode Island, had kindly offered us a slip at their place in Norfolk. What we hadn't realised is that Greta and Gary don't just offer members a place to stay, but a level of hospitality which is beyond words! A perfect stay and, once again – it becomes almost repetitive – so much what the OCC stands for.

All in all, sailing the US East Coast and Canada was a really nice experience. We particularly enjoyed the Newport/Boston and Nova Scotia areas, but weren't so keen on Maine or the Chesapeake from a sailing point of view. We liked the whole of the US East Coast from a social point of view, and made many new friends. As a foreign-flagged boat we found the bureaucracy considerable but doable. The most irritating element is that each CBP office seems to interpret the instructions differently, so one never knows exactly what to do.

We will be back, however – as I finish writing this article in March 2016 we are sailing along the Cuban coast heading for Havana (again). After stocking up on rum and cigars we plan to sail back up the US East Coast, but in bigger steps than last year. Once in Nova Scotia we'll prepare *Lily* for the ice while we wait for it to clear further north, then head for Newfoundland, Greenland, Iceland and finally the Netherlands and home. We'll need the rum and cigars for that trip!

