

Three Months, Three Hundred Miles

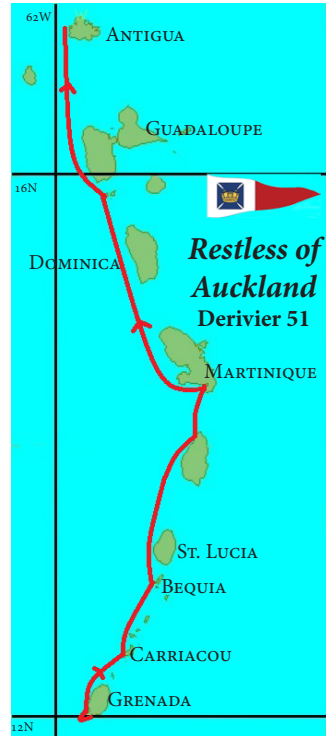
Cruising from Grenada to Antigua

Roland Lennox-King with Consie Lennox-King

Restless was sitting quite isolated at Grenada Marine in St. David's when we returned to Grenada in late January. Virtually all yachts had been launched months before, at the beginning of the Caribbean season. One item on the pre-cruising to-do list was to check the fuel tanks for water. Since filling with diesel in the Bahamas last March we had been plagued with water and dirt in our fuel. We ended up removing all 1400 litres of fuel, cleaning the tanks, polishing the fuel and refilling. No easy job. We didn't get away from the yard until mid February as new window screens, sails and covers kept us near the sailmaker.

Clarke's Court Bay about seven miles west was crowded with boats. It had been some 15 years since we were last in Grenada and we could not believe the development. We found a good spot to anchor and settled into cruising mode. It was obvious from the morning VHF net that a great number of boats were there for the duration with no plans to cruise, but we learned a good deal of useful information.

The arrival date of new crew or visitors is always



Close inspection by the crew

an incentive to 'get the boat ready' and we had a nephew, his wife, and two young boys due to arrive the next day. The Pirate Flag was duly hoisted. They arrived, as did a deep pressure system, strengthening the trades to a good F5/6. Needless to say, our visitors were happy with short sails

Three Months, Three Hundred Miles

around Grand Anse Bay in relatively flat water. The favourite pastime of the trip was jumping off the stern of *Restless* in crystal clear water near to the beach. Five days passed in a flash.



Family dinghy ride

After re-provisioning, Consie and I set off north to Carriacou at 0800 on 22 February. Craving a good stiff sail, we were rewarded off the northern end of Grenada as we hardened up to pass east of 'Kick 'Em Jenny' Grenada's underwater volcano. Once away from the tidal rip the breeze dropped to a steady F3 as we covered the remaining 35nm to Tyrell Bay, where we anchored at 1400 hours.

We had a wish to see Carriacou's Carnival; although we have spent time in the Caribbean, we had not experienced Carnival. Often in a large bay full of yachts we prefer to anchor well out. We were surprised at how many boats were crowded along the shore-line, and not surprised to see that, the next day many had moved further out to avoid the perpetual noise from the bands, giving many a sleepless night. Sunday was the finale of five days of celebrations and we went ashore to join the fun. The sight of well-endowed locals in neon and bright coloured skimpy swimsuits was mind-boggling. With a young English couple we had met we boarded a local bus to Hillsborough where the Carnival was taking place, only to learn that the action would start about 2100 until about 0200. After a few hours of noise and drinking, we decided we were a bit too old, and returned to our boats.

After a brief visit with Kate and Chris Russell (RCC) aboard *Absolute* we cleared out of Carriacou to sail north on 27 February in a nice sunny 28°C. We had spent time in the Grenadines and St. Lucia in the past, so decided this season we would spend time exploring Martinique, Dominica, and Guadeloupe.

Our first day's sail of some 43nm found us with anchor down in Bequia at 1500. After another 0600 departure and a brisk reach across Bequia channel, we were becalmed. We motored on and by 1000 were clear of the lee of St. Vincent, to be met by hundreds of small dolphins, in a great hurry to get south. At 1300 we spotted a large three-masted schooner coming south with all sails set: it was the Superyacht *Athena*, a great sight. The brisk breeze faded as we approached the

Roland Lennox-King with Consie Lennox-King

lee of St. Lucia, and we spent the last hour motoring into Rodney Bay, where we anchored at 1630 with 74nm on the log. We always trawl a lure as the first mate is a keen fisher-lady, but she had to admit defeat as nature has given fish a chance this year, for no sooner had one put out a lure than it was covered in sargasso weed, and had to be hauled in and cleared.

28 February, another brisk trade wind sail across to St. Anne's at the SE end of Martinique. We anchored at 1230 after a 25nm passage, clearing customs in a local café on a computer with a European keyboard. A visit to the local patisserie was a great reminder we were in France, with all the wonderful French food that goes with it, but where to start exploring? A visit to Rendezvous restaurant on the beach was an excellent start. We visited *Wild Thing*, a New Zealand yacht with a family of three teenage boys with lots of enthusiasm, who gave us plenty of ideas for exploring.

As planned, we spent most of the next week relaxing and doing boat maintenance, but trade wind showers, however brief, are not conducive to good varnishing results. We explored Marin, some three miles inshore from St. Anne's and the biggest yacht base in the Caribbean, with thousands of boats. One marina had 131 identical catamarans. Marin boasts some of the best Yacht Chandlers in the Caribbean, not that we needed much, but fellow sailors would do well to take note of what the area can offer.

Over the last weeks we had been in contact with Gabbie and Johnathan Lyne (RCC) on *Aqualuna*. They had sailed south to the Grenadines from USA but were now working their way north. They arrived in St. Anne's whilst we were there and we had a great evening together with drinks aboard followed by dinner ashore.

During our time afloat we had started hearing and reading of the spread of Covid-19, but like others we met, did not think it would affect us, miles from populations. How wrong we were! On 13 March we set sail around the coast, past Nelson's 'ship' Diamond Rock, to Port de France, with the idea of exploring. Passing L'Anse Mitan we changed plans and anchored having sailed only 22nm. Mitan was interesting, but rumours that France was going into lockdown over the spread of Covid-19 made us think we should top up with fuel and water, not knowing what would happen next. Too Late! On Monday morning we crossed the harbour to find the fuel dock, water hose and Marina tightly closed, and even the fuel pumps were removed, with big signs, 'Closed for Covid-19!' We re-crossed the harbour, and



Dinner with Jonathan, Gabbie and friends

Three Months, Three Hundred Miles

anchored in Trois Islets, outside the former home of Napoleon's wife, Josephine. A young French couple, University professors, anchored nearby and filled us in on the news: as Martinique is part of France, all restrictions imposed in Europe would be imposed there.



Roly and Consie

We decided we should leave, but found Customs & Immigration closed. The Caribbean Safety & Security Net painted a bleak picture of the situation, saying that Antigua was soon to close its borders. Friends managed to pre-register our arrival online, so it was Antigua or Bust! With no way of clearing out, we set sail at dawn on 21 March, passing close to two French Patrol boats closing the borders to incoming vessels,

and sailed north, keeping out to sea. We were fortunate to leave when we did, as several American and British boats who remained were stuck there for some ten weeks with limited access to shore, and supplies.

Our passage across to the lee of Dominica was brisk with heavy rain squalls, and even up the west coast of the island we had many gusts of F6. We did not stop at Portsmouth at the northern end of Dominica, as the forecast was for strengthening winds. We pressed on, the wind eased and backed, our reach across to The Saints was the best sail of the season, with our log showing an average of well over 9 knots. It was a very black night, and with the tensions of the previous few days, an anchorage beckoned, but where? We had never been to The Saints, but apart from a rocky outcrop near Terre de Bas, it did look do-able, and we crept in with sails furled and engine on, between the islands, planning to anchor at the main beach of de Haut. A large swell was noticeable so we motored towards the lights of yachts out to port behind the islet of Cabrit, which signaled a possibly more attractive anchorage. The mate reported that the Chart said 'No Anchoring', but we had a look anyway, to find the yachts were all on buoys. A searchlight and a shout invited us to pick up the only vacant buoy, which we gratefully attached ourselves to, thanked our new neighbours and fell into our bunks, after a passage of 92nm.

With another 90-odd miles to go, we left under a leaden sky at dawn and had a sleigh ride for 10nm across to Fort de Vieux on the SE corner of Guadeloupe, where the wind deserted us. The rain persisted as we motored north then a severe line of squalls off the Deshaies (Guadeloupe). Once out from the protection of land, under staysail and mizzen alone, we had one of our roughest sails ever, in a good F7/8. We fought to maintain a tight reach in thunder and lightning for the 45nm across to Antigua.

Roland Lennox-King with Consie Lennox-King

Once under the lee of Antigua conditions improved, and we anchored off Jolly Harbour at 1730 on Sunday 22 March. Due to the Covid-19 Pandemic, both Jolly Harbour and English Harbour Immigration offices were closed: only St Johns, the main port, would accept entries before the borders were shut. We spent the night anchored next to the Coastguard/Customs cutter, before proceeding five miles up the coast to check in at Heritage Quay in St. John's. Our pre-registration ensured a quick clearance, although we did have our temperatures taken. Consie's written explanation of reasons for not clearing out of Martinique were taken in good grace. We drew breath, before returning to join the hundreds of yachts anchored off Jolly Harbour in the late afternoon.

Monday saw us up anchor and proceed to the fuel dock, to top up with fuel and water, as we did not know what the future held. We have been to Jolly Harbour several times, and had spent time at our friend Eve John's dock and villa on the north finger. Affectionately known as 'The Hummingbird Yacht Club' she has been visited by many RCC members in the past. After visiting her and Christopher by dinghy, we were invited to bring *Restless* in to her dock. We did, it was 23 March. The borders closed a few days later and all commercial flights in and out of Antigua were cancelled. We went into lockdown.

Eve and Christopher managed to get on a British Airways repatriation flight to UK some six weeks later and we moved into their villa. We eventually flew to London on the second BA flight out, on 6 August, 18 weeks later. *Restless* had been shipped to Palma, and currently sits in a marina south of Barcelona, awaiting our return to her, whenever we are allowed.



Restless moored beside Jolly Harbour Apartments