

9 May 2009  
Falmouth Harbour, Antigua

Dear All,

It doesn't seem possible that a whole boating season has gone by without sitting down to write. When I envisioned the cruising life, I thought there would be days and days with little to do but how wrong I was! Between exploring new islands and endless boat maintenance and repair and occasionally sailing from A to B, the days are pleasantly full. Anyhow, here is an update on Tashtego and her occupants, since I wrote at Christmas. We remained in the Virgin Islands (both US and British) for almost three months. We found life in St. Thomas very convenient, if not particularly scenic, thanks to the availability of US mail and US phone rates. Boxes of space-consuming winter clothes and books went to live with my sister Martha for a while. The highlight of our stay in St. Thomas was watching the Obama inauguration, together with 300 other folks at a big bar near the cruise ship dock. It is hard to convey the excitement and joy that Obama's election has meant throughout the English-speaking West Indies. T-shirts and signs communicated it everywhere:



US Virgin Islanders are in a weird position – they are US citizens but cannot vote for President. I wrote about this, along with other observations about St. Thomas, and posted it to my blog: [www.sailblogs.com/member/tashtego](http://www.sailblogs.com/member/tashtego), along with a number of other essays about Caribbean cruising. Hope you have time to look at them.

British Virgin Islands: We spent 10 days having a quick look-around. They really are lovely sailing grounds but I was glad to be seeing BVI during a season with a reduced number of charter boats on the water (800 charter boats sat unused at the Moorings dock in Tortola) because finding space to anchor when all those boats are in use must be quite demanding. We had a day of lolling on Jost Van Dyke about mid-January-- what it most reminded me of was lunchtime at Alta or Killington: the well-heeled having a very good time. Our other BVI stops included only Road Bay, Trellis Bay, and Virgin Gorda. We were in Trellis Bay for a Full Moon Party, its claim to fame: large bonfires are burned in several beautifully cut-out round deep-sea

buoys and everyone tries to connect with his/her primitive inner self – while busily snapping photos with a digital camera.



In Virgin Gorda we had the privilege of wandering around The Baths when very few people were around. I posted a visual essay about it on the blogsite but in case you don't have time to check it out, the Baths are HUGE (40'-80') granite boulders tumbled along the shoreline and it is possible to weave your way under and around them, with fascinating interplay of rock and water. Here is one shot:



I think the Virgin Island we liked best was St. Croix, for its preserved 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Century Danish architecture, its trees and open space, the fishing community at Gallows Bay,

and “The Wall” – a spectacular dive site that inspired me to get scuba certified. I can explain it to skiers: imagine you are traversing a cornice, with snow chutes between rock ridges. Except now the rock ridges are coral ridges, the snow chutes are sand canyons that drop from 30’ down to 3000’ under the sea (all you see is them dropping down into endless blue) and instead of being tied to skis, you are floating in 3 dimensions. It was ethereal. You will just have to visit St. Croix next year in March or April while we are there (we think ..) and take an introductory dive to see for yourself. St. Croix is under-developed for tourism and therefore to be recommended.



Fredericksted Waterfront



Building a fish trap in Gallows Bay



Just PADI certified !!



And you thought Maine was furthest east . . .

On leaving St. Croix, we got a lesson in why people avoid sailing due east in the Caribbean. We left on what was supposedly the last of a string of small craft warning days, with fairly calm weather and flat seas predicted on subsequent days. Instead we got nailed by a trough and spent 3 days tacking back and forth in the Anegada Passage from St. Croix to Saba, in 6-10’ seas and 22-29 kt winds for all but the first and last 5 hours. It wasn’t scary, just very

rough (eg seasick-making) and tiring. We hove to for a whole night somewhere out in the middle – so glad we learned that skill. Even without the bad weather it would have been a tedious trip – more than 200 mi of tacking to cover 100 miles of ocean. But our little misadventure caused us to discover Statia, another little-visited gem of an island with beautifully preserved 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> C Dutch buildings, being used to this day. It is also the gas station for all commercial vessels in the south Atlantic – fascinating to watch the lights of the tugs as they ferry fuel barges all night long to some waiting LNG tanker or ship bound for Japan (we talked with the chief engineer of the last one – he had been flown in from his home in Punjab) . In the 1700's, Statia was the trading and smuggling capital of the West Indies, forming the basis of great Dutch and English family fortunes that I conjecture are still quietly enjoyed to this day. (The Dutch decided early on that plantations were not for them – they became the Levi Strauss's of their era).



Restoration of 2<sup>nd</sup> oldest synagogue in Western Hemisphere, built in 1739. The oldest is in Charlotte Amalia, US Virgin Islands.



Mango tree in Fort Oranje (restored). Site of the first foreign (Dutch) salute of an American naval vessel, leading to a brief war between England and Holland and English confiscation of all the silver they could find, searching coffins (an unusual number of funerals were being held) and linings of merchants' clothing.

Contrary to all the pictures you see, big healthy complete trees like this one are rare in the Leewards.

After Statia we sailed on to Antigua, noting with satisfaction how much more competent we had become as sailors compared with our arrival a year ago. Antigua is the first place where we have overlapped ourselves, not counting Nevis in December, briefly. I will send a short second part of this letter separately, with some pictures of the Classic Regatta, which is why we came here. I intended to write a blog about it last year and never did, so I will produce a blog-ette (blogino? blogito?) to mail all of you.

For now, let me just wind up this letter. We enjoyed 10 days of Classic Regatta related events and reunions, a week at Jolly Harbor with Fred's sisters during Race Week, a few days in Barbuda (11 miles of beach to ourselves !!) until threatening weather loomed, whereupon we skedaddled back to Falmouth Harbor, where a few minor boat improvements are being made.

From here we will head south, stopping mainly in the Saintes, Dominica, and Carriacou. The Barbados plan is cancelled – no stomach for it (literally. It really sucks still being susceptible to seasickness, although now it takes many hours of very rough motion to get it going. But once going, it takes about 48 hours to subside. I am not alone in this – quite a few cruisers admit to it). We bought our boat insurance in BVI from a B-rated Ukrainian company that doesn't care where we are during hurricane season but withholds twice the deductible for claims made due to a named storm. According to the broker (Offshore Risk Management), the company really does pay claims; I hope we never have to test that. Anyhow, our stated “plan for hurricane season” is to be south of 12°; this means we can move around between Tobago, Grenada, Trinidad and Isla Margarita as we wish. I know we will be in Trinidad for several months, probably Aug-Oct, because we like it, and we will be in Grenada for most of July because Fred is going to fly home then for 2 weeks, to see family and friends and check on our house, etc. The cat and I will hold the fort on the boat, with lots of other boaters around if help is needed.

And we have learned not to utter plans for longer in advance than that.

On a personal note, my mother died in February, 3 months short of her 94<sup>th</sup> birthday. I will be flying to Tucson in September, when my sisters and I will scatter our parents' ashes, -- some in Arizona and maybe some in Utah. (The next sister to ski Alta may get deputized to make a discreet drop off the Germania lift – I think that would amuse my mother.

Fred and I are both in good health and I hope like hell that he has no major health events until at least a year from now, when he will be 65 and the Great God Medicare will kick in. Thanks to my long-time distrust of the stock market, our funds have shrunk very little (except for the disagreeable surprise that the state of Massachusetts considers us residents and will take us to court if we don't keep paying state taxes on our income). The economic climate does discourage a too-casual use of credit cards, so we rarely eat off the boat. But barring some really major boat expenses or the tenants losing their jobs and leaving our house, we get to keep on sailing. Which is exactly what we want to do.

Remember, lots more details available on the blog site. And if you send me mail, which I hope you do, please please check the size of any attachments and make sure the whole message is less than 2MB. Or send me a warning and then I can go read the message directly on the Gmail site instead of downloading it to this computer. Caribbean pipeline for internet is teeny tiny.

Hugs to all.

Connie and Fred



Barbuda

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