



Postcards from the Caribbean #6
S/V Polyphonic
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and the cats Sarge & Shadow
Dateline: Martinique

Before we start the postcard, some of you maybe wondering what the difference is between a regular land mile (statute) and a Nautical mile (nm). Well, as Captain Aubry notes, “a nautical mile is like a land mile, only a bit longer and very, very much wetter!”

Our fleet of five boats set sail from Montserrat, about a week before the eruption, heading to the NW corner of Guadeloupe and the village of Deshaies (pronounced “DayHay”). This is a very quaint and scenic village with many small French restaurants and Patisseries. Fortunately, Jean speaks basic French which greatly smoothes our visits to the French Islands (Guadeloupe, Isle De Saints, Martinique). We are to meet our friend Deborah in a couple days and we take this opportunity to do a stem to stern “spring cleaning” of the boat.

Deborah will be bringing our long sought watermaker parts and our latest mail package. Without our watermaker, we are low on water, again. We borrow jerry jugs from three other boats and make three trips from the free water hose on shore. This equals about 670lbs of water or a little over 80gls. Note that in Florida, hose water would be barely drinkable, here it is fed from the mountain streams and is as good as bottled water. We rent a car for a few days so we can pick up Deb at the airport and do some touring of the island. After only going 4-8kn for the last few months, it was a bit of a change of pace suddenly doing 45 on winding mountain roads (with the local drivers on your tail until they can whiz by).

Our first sightseeing stop was a zoology park and botanical garden located up in the rainforest. Here they have winding paths through the forest and gardens with large cages set off to the sides with the wild life exhibits. They also have a path rigged through the canopy of the trees! They equip you with a harness, with double tethers, and you climb a flight of stairs to the first landing. From here two 2x6 planks are laid side by side, with cable “railings” at waist level, and a clip on cable at shoulder level. The planked runs went into the treetops from landing to landing and were between 50’ and 100’ long. The runs ramped up until the highest were about 150’ off the ground. This path wound through the rainforest for almost a quarter mile! I kept expecting to see Tarzan go swinging by, but saw only Jean swinging on the planks up ahead.

We climb back down out of the trees and go pick up Deborah at the airport. “Welcome to Guadeloupe, Deborah!” and we whisk her right off to the Rum Museum. The Museum tour was fascinating with displays of the machines and processes they used to make rum from 17th to the 19th century. After the tour came the tasting. A dozen bottles of different kinds of rum were suspended upside down with little pour spigots, and mounted on a wheel. They even had the labels upside down on the bottle so you could read them. With the little cups provided one can taste away on the variety of rums. We managed to buy only about 6 bottles between the three of us. The Rum Museum also housed an incredible, world-class display of insects. A very large room has walls covered, and display cases full, of an astonishing display of butterflies, beetles and a wide variety of other insects. Fortunately, we viewed the bugs before we hit the rum wheel.



By the way, Deborah had the needed watermaker part. And it fit, sort of, seems the in and out plumping on the part had been upgraded to one size bigger and my fittings no longer fit. Spectra said “oops, we will send the fittings” ... so we return to the status of visiting delivery services looking for watermaker parts.

Over the next few days we toured most of the island, covering the mountains, waterfalls and beaches. We hiked for an hour through thick rainforest, along the side of Mt. Soufriere (last eruption was in 1990), to reach the Chutes d’Galion. This is a series of small waterfalls, cascading past large round boulders, and spilling into emerald pools. We had the place to ourselves and Deborah and Jean played water nymphs swimming in the pools. The water was way too cold to get this Floridian in! Another one hour hike takes us to the top of Mt. Soufriere. As you climb, it is clear that this volcano is just taking a nap at the moment. The smell of sulfur is frequent, the rock outcroppings are very jagged, and there is sulfur, charcoal, ash, and cooled lava scattered about. But in the 13 years since the last eruption the rainforest has taken hold and carpeted every possible surface with lush green growth. Our last hike (after Deb left) was to the Chutes d’Carbet, a set of three cascading waterfalls totaling 1000’ in height. We hike and rock climb for four hours (round trip) through the rainforest to the upper falls, on what was called a “sportive” trail. Spectacular!

While we were anchored in Deshaies, a strong Tropical Wave came through. The wave shifts the wind so it blows down a narrow valley into our little bay. For almost 24hrs the wind howls at 35-43kn with occasional rain. Most of us hold just fine, but a few boats drag back. The seas between the islands built up to match the wind. A vessel hailed on the VHF noting that they had just tried to cross from Guadeloupe to Montserrat and turned back because the seas were “crazy out there”. Turns out it was a 2000ton ship bound for Montserrat loaded with cement. If this ship thought the seas were crazy, gee, just think how much fun it would have been for our boats! The ship tucks up behind the last boat in our anchorage and joins the pack waiting out the blow. The Tropical Wave eventually formed into Hurricane Claudette and went to visit Texas.

Along with the great pastries and excellent fresh vegetables in Deshaies, we also ate in some great restaurants. The highlight was a restaurant on the hillside, on the south of the bay, with its own dingy dock, who’s specialty was beef or chicken “brochettes” served on a 2’ long Sabers hanging in a rack. Really cool presentation and exceptional taste. We hope to eat there again on the way home.

After shore tours with our friend Deborah, we finally take her sailing and head for Isle De Saintes. The Saints are a sprinkling of small islands just 5nm south of Guadeloupe. Though the islands are so small that only one has a village on it, they all have hills and peaks up to 1000’ tall. The village is very small and quaint, with no cars, but many restaurants and shops. As we round the SW corner of Guadeloupe the wind pipes up to 30-35 with gusts to 40. With a wide eyed Deborah, we motorslam across taking 3 hours to go 8 nm. But two days later what a fun ride back! It took us less than 1hr with just a half of jib and we were hitting 10 to 11kn on the surfs!

Deborah left us in Basse Terre, but no sooner than we got back to the boat, than a boat sails in and the skipper is yelling Hi Jeff! Turns out we knew John from the Mexico race last year. We mentioned John in our last postcard as the one who was told to leave Montserrat because of the volcano. John had numerous other wonderful stories about his adventures single-handed sailing from Florida on Trink, his 28’ Bristol Channel Cutter. Our favorite was when he dumped a can of sardines on the head of the customs agent in Samana, Dominican Republic. You must realize that these DR agents have very little sense of humor and carry pistol stock shotguns. John claims it was an accident and he managed to survive the incident with out injury or jail, damn he’s lucky.



Guadeloupe has been our favorite of the islands, it has it all; beaches, mountains, cool pools and waterfalls, rainforests, French pastries and baked goods, good harbors, good snorkeling, good supermarkets and marine stores! We really look forward to returning here in the fall.

From Guadeloupe we sailed with Trinka for another visit to Isle De Saints, and then on to the island nation of Dominica (pronounced “DominEEKa”). Dominica does not have any beaches, or natural protected harbors, therefore there are no resorts, big hotels, or even big cities. Only 70,000 people live on Dominica as opposed to 700,000 on Martinique, though Dominica is almost as big as Martinique. The island realized that any appeal to tourists would have to come in the form of Ecotourism. They have protected the natural wonders of the island, and there are many, and you must have a guide to visit any of them. The guides all attend training on both guiding in general, and specifics of the area. If you sail to Dominica, then a guide in a boat will meet you, often several miles offshore! The guides live by the rule of “first come first serve”, i.e. who ever reaches that boat sailing in first gets the business. However, if you know a guide you wish to work with, then you can ask for him specifically.

We had used Raymond “Ravioli” three years ago, and hoped to find him again. As we rounded the corner to Portsmouth harbor we’re pleasantly surprised that Raymond is the first one to us! He took good care of us, including rowing us up the Indian River to the jungle bar at the end. The Indian River has huge curving roots and hanging vines boarding it and looks like it could easily be part of the Amazon River system. The bar in the jungle at the end is a hoot, with a thatched roof, dirt floor, seats from lopped off trees, and beautiful gardens. This is a must do if you visit Portsmouth, but bring bug repellent! From the other end of Dominica, near the capital city of Roseau, we hired Poncho as our guide. Poncho took us up to Victoria Falls, which is rarely visited by tourists. The falls are a one-hour hike, but for most of the trip there is no path. Poncho grew up in the area and knew the way. We forded the river three times and did lots of scrambling up and over rocks. There was no one within miles so we had the place to ourselves. Victoria Falls were great and this time this Floridian went swimming in the pool. Quite bracing, but refreshing after the hour scramble.

From Roseau we had planned to go to St. Pierre, the Northern most port in Martinique. But a check of Saturday evenings weather faxes showed a Tropical Disturbance had formed, it was predicted to be a Tropical Storm in two days, and its projected path was right into our area. When cruising in these waters during hurricane season, one always has a rabbit hole aka hurricane hole, within a 24 hour (preferably 12hr) sail. In this case, Trois Islet, Martinique was our preselected hole. Early Sunday morning we made straight for Trois Islet, and by Sunday evening were anchored in a perfect spot to ride out a storm. We deployed the big storm anchor and started working down our storm prep list. By 10:00am Monday we had completed our list and were secure enough to ride out a small hurricane.

Meanwhile the storm was now Tropical Depression #6, still predicted to become a strong Tropical Storm, and its path was now aiming straight at our part of Martinique. Every 15 minutes on the VHF radio, the local Coast Guard was issuing a Security announcement warning about the storm. The locals finally woke up and boats started to flood into our anchor area, fortunately, none them getting too close to us. We expected the storm to hit in late afternoon, certainly by early evening. Ready ... Set ... Fizzle! Lo and behold, the thing, for no apparent reason, dissipated and the day went by with no more wind or rain than we had been having on regular days. Somewhere a couple decades ago I had read a quote from some old Admiral that essentially said, “Never, ever, regret the preparations made for a storm that turned out to be unneeded.” I fully subscribe to that philosophy. By Tuesday lunch we had the storm anchor stowed and all the other preps undone.

With our friends, Karen and Gordon from Voladore (Passport 40), we rented a car went touring around Martinique. We visited St. Pierre, which was destroyed in 1902 when Mt. Pelee erupted, but is now a quaint



tourist destination. Next we drove up the side of Mt. Pelee, on a narrow road that was so steep, with a car so underpowered, that when we had to stop for the three lambs lying in the road, we couldn't get going up hill again. We finally did make it up, and on the way back down, managed to just miss the three little pigs! Next stop was the Butterfly Garden with its beautiful flowers, and of course, butterflies. They also had some very unique musical instruments including one out in the middle of the yard made out of bamboo that was over 6' tall and 8' long and 4' deep. Pulling on knobs and releasing them to "hammer" on the bamboo played it. We also said "hi" to 80yr old Caroline, as she wondered by us, but she ignored our greetings. Caroline is a pet Tortoise.

We now leave the French islands. We will miss our daily visits to the patisserie and the chocolate shops, but it's on to St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Grenada for more adventures. Stay tuned for such further excitement as our visit to a village that had just recently been occupied by Pirates of the Caribbean!