



Postcards from the Caribbean #10
S/V Polyphonic
Jeff Grossman / Jean Levine
and the cats Sarge & Shadow
Dateline: British Virgin Islands (BVI)

We left off our last postcard on the west side of Antigua. From here we sail around to Antigua's East Coast anchoring off Green Island in Nonsuch Bay. On the way, it is so clear that we could see Guadeloupe, Montserrat, Rodonda, Nevis and St. Kitts at the same time! Montserrat provided a nice show of [blowing ash and steam thousands of feet](#) into the air. We were glad to be well to windward.

Green Island is a wonderfully secluded anchorage with very few boats. It is an excellent place to have some ZD days (Zero Dollar, i.e. we didn't spend anything, good for the budget). The anchorage is tucked up behind a large barrier reef that leaves an open view to the Atlantic. Naturally, the snorkeling behind the reef is excellent with some fish, recovering coral, and lots of conch. It's fun being anchored in smooth water watching boats only a mile to windward sailing in 8-10' seas. These seas break on the outer parts of the reef and along the islands that border it making for dramatic geysers of water. The constant pounding of the waves have sculpted the island's rocks into a wild variety of shapes, arches and bridges. The most impressive is the Devils Bridge. Here the [water recedes before a wave so you are looking down at over 30' of rock face](#), then the [wave crashes in filling the basin and spraying high up behind the bridge](#). Another boat in the anchorage, Peregrine, noted Green Island is their favorite anchorage in the Caribbean, and that they like to stay there "until the garlic runs out"!

We next sail back to Falmouth Harbor to watch some of the largest yachts in the world come in for the Nicholson Charter boat show. The little \$1,000,000 boats are kicked out of the marina to make room for about 50 SuperYachts that demonstrate that sometimes [all that glitters is gold!](#) They average ~150' long with the [largest MotorYacht about 300'](#). To say that these craft are floating palaces is an understatement. One measure of the size and power of a sailing yacht is the height of its mast, and one way of gauging this is the number of spreaders (cross arms perpendicular to the mast spaced at even intervals). Ketches are two masted with the rear mast usually being less than 2/3 the height of the main mast. Polyphonic is a 51' ketch with 2 spreaders on the main and one on the mizzen and our main mast clears about 70' off the water. Here at the show there are two Sailing Yachts that have [6 spreaders on their main mast](#) and 5 on their mizzen. These two are sister ships made by [Prini Navi and are over 170' long](#). Another measure of status in a sailing Superyacht is that your mast is so tall (somewhere over 120') that it has to be lit to meet FAA aircraft collision rules with a red light on top (instead of the usual white). Four of the Prini Navis not only have them on their mains but also have red lights on their mizzens! There were a total of 19 masts in the harbor with red lights!



While we were hanging out in Falmouth we did a hike up about 1000' to the top of Shirley Heights. These Heights command [dramatic views of Falmouth and English Harbor](#), and therefore a fort had been built here. Now it is the sight of weekend parties with steel bands, a large BBQ, and tons of people. It was really fun 'people watching' with the mix being, "cruise ship" tourists, superyacht crews, small boat cruisers (us) and locals. But all mixed well and enjoyed the drinking and dancing. Though it was a delightful hike up ... we took a taxi back down!

We have really enjoyed Antigua, but it is time for us to move on. We sail back around the west side of Antigua to Jolly Harbor / Deep Bay to wait for a weather window to sail to Barbuda. Barbuda is the NE most island of the Eastern Caribbean and the other half of the country of Antigua/Barbuda. It is literally the corner, in that from here there are islands to the south, the southwest and to the west (St. Bart's & St. Martin) but nothing North or East except open Atlantic. It is a low island with surrounding reefs, much more like those in the Bahamas than its sisters in the Caribbean. Though almost as big as Antigua, it has one village and only about 1600 inhabitants. A unique feature is an [11 mile pink sand beach](#) that has a lagoon on the backside of it. The beach is only about 100 yards wide, and when the surf is really up it breaks across the whole beach into the lagoon. We head in with our little dinghy (Coda) and ride the surf, miss our timing and almost flip, but we grab the dink and run her up on the beach with Jean just saving the digital camera from a swim. Later we portage the dink over into the lagoon and run around checking it out. For a while we are only ones on the whole eleven miles of beach and the only other "footprints" are those of the wild horses and donkeys on the beach. This beach is one of the most scenic places we have been this year.

We are meeting friends in the BVIs in a couple weeks and we wish to be there a few days before, so we need to keep moving and must leave Barbuda after two days. From here it is a full day but pleasant down wind sail to St. Barts, then an easy half day sail around to Marigot Bay in St. Martin. In St. Martin we are able to visit our friends on Elan that we met on the way down, and do major provisioning and boat supply. Between St. Martin and the BVIs is the Anegada Passage. This is usually fairly rough and had lived up to its cruiser nickname of the "Ohmygodda" on our upwind crossing earlier this year. But this time we have great weather, and of course, it is much easier going downwind.

About half way across the 70nm passage we get to provide an assist to Capt. Ron! Well, that is what we called him after we helped. It started when we heard a hail to the Coast Guard of a vessel requiring assistance looking for a tow for the 40nm to St. Martin (laugh). Seems his Nav instruments had failed, he didn't know where he was, and he had a very sick crew. He gave his last known position, which was 1.5 hrs old, and this, plus the strength of his signal, indicated we were near him. The Coast Guard never figured out how to ask the right questions, but we raised him on the radio, learned the heading and speed he had been doing since his last position fix and realized that he was probably only 9 miles away and still to leeward of us. We let the Coast Guard, and Virgin Islands Radio, know that we are going to investigate and assist if possible.



We plotted an estimated position circle for him and set a course to the windward edge of it (no way we wanted to go back upwind in the Anegada). Sure enough about 1.5 hours later there he was off our leeward bow doing circles. Turns out it was a Charter captain (Rasta style) trying to deliver a Sunsail boat to St. Martin and his crew was sea sick. We came along side and tried to toss him a bag with some seasick pills and our position in it, but it bounced around in his cockpit and went overboard before he could grab it. Capt Ron looked really dejected at this.

Meanwhile, Jean had observed that the island of Saba was just visible straight ahead of him. Since Saba is close to St. Martin, if you steer for it, you will see St. Martin as you get close and can sail for it with the “mark one eyeball”. Jean points out Saba to Capt Ron and he gets joyful, throttles up and is off! You know, sometimes ya’ just gotta wonder! We hail the Coast Guard and Virgin Islands Radio and let them know the vessel was fine and they could cancel the Pan-Pan (vessel needs assistance alert).

Sailing in these waters can get serious though. While we were in the BVIs this time around we listened on the radio as at least three vessels went up on reefs. Including a 56’ trawler that we had seen cruising in the Bahamas, and a charter boat that broke loose from a mooring at the Baths and sunk after being smashed on the rocks. To our knowledge no one was hurt in any of these incidents.

However, for us the BVIs are as wonderful as always. We make our landfall at [Gorda Sound](#) and find friends on two boats we had met in Luperon D.R., Seanote and Wally World. I get to enjoy my birthday drinking rum drinks with new sailing friends at the Beach Bar of Prickly Pear Island at the northeast end of Gorda Sound. Worked for me! After sailing with the other two boats for a couple days around the islands we sail into Trellis Bay on the East side of Tortola. The dinghy dock at this anchorage is a short walk from the airport, so it is perfect for picking up our friends from Florida, Maryanne and Petra.

In the middle of Trellis Bay is a large rock, just big enough to have a restaurant and bar called the [Last Resort](#). As soon as the girls have stowed their gear and changed we dinghy over to the Last Resort and join the nightly parties that are held there. This place is a blast and the entertainer is a great singer/guitarist. We have a fun time and are slow to get up the next morning.

Normally this time of year the “Christmas Winds” Trades are blowing a steady 20 to 25 or more. However, this has been a strange year and the Trades haven’t kicked. We’re not complaining as we are granted some glorious weather for sailing around the top of Tortola to Jost Van Dyke for the obligatory Foxies visit, than back across the top of Tortola for another visit to Gorda Sound. We pick up a mooring at the [Bitter End Yacht club](#) and take our friends on a hike up to the top of the hill for a look at the [beautiful views](#).

After some entertainment trying to get out of Gorda Sound against a vicious North wind, we have a fast power reach to Roadtown, the capital of the BVIs. For the sailors reading this we



were hitting 10 knots with only a reefed mizzen and 1/2 jib! In Roadtown, after 6 months of anchoring out, we tie up at a marina for a couple nights. Our friend Annie has flown in to join us, and she will be staying to help us on the weeklong sail to Florida. Jean, Annie and I call it an early night but Petra and Maryanne find a bar called the Bat Cave and ... well ... I'll be polite and let them tell their own stories about it. Lets just say late hours and tattoos were involved.

On that note, we'll leave off for the next postcard which will cover the rest of our cruising around the BVIs, New Years at Skinny Legs, snorkeling at the Indians and in the Spanish Virgin Islands, the sail to Puerto Rico, and our preparations for our sail to Key West.