

Lydia - Lydia's Blog. First 13 days. St Lucia to Santa Marta.

14 January 2016

The crew of Lydia comprises of Donald Begg, the skipper and owner from Lymington; Matthew Fyfe, an old school friend of Donald's from Emsworth, Andrew Richards from Wales, Dr Steve Jones from Ipswich and Nigel Lang from Lymington. All the crew are ex Royal Navy who have served together at some time. Nigel is the only Pongo aboard who was a last minute replacement for another good Gunner friend from Lymington.

We all flew out from a cold, wet and miserable Gatwick on Sunday 3 January. By sheer good luck Steve and Nigel were seated together and between 3 films, (Bridge of Spies, The Martian and The Intern) got to know each other and quickly learnt we shared the same sense of humour. After the 9 hour flight we landed just after 5pm in St Lucia and immediately were bathed in the warm, fragrant Caribbean breezes. What a contrast with England! We were collected by Floyd, a driver Donald knew well who took us to Marigot Bay where Lydia was moored after being refitted in Granada the previous month. After stowing our kit aboard we celebrated our arrival with a delicious Caribbean meal and several rum punches at a little local waterside restaurant. Andrew, who had sensibly flown out with his wife and was staying for the week before we set sail, went on to their hotel.

Next morning after an invigorating swim we set sail for Rodney Bay marina about a couple of hours up the coast where we joined the other 31 yachts congregating there to take part in the 2016-17 World ARC. Needless to say the marina is surrounded by a number of attractive, friendly and inexpensive restaurants with WiFi. I am slightly ashamed to say that we did not cook aboard during our entire stay in St Lucia but took full advantage of what was on offer. That evening the World Cruising Club gave a welcome drinks party with copious rum punches and local nibbles for all the crews taking part in this World ARC. We all began to introduce ourselves and get to know each other. There were crews from Finland, Germany, Canada, the US, France, Italy, Spain, Switzerland, South Africa, Austria, Australia, Czech Republic, Norway, Sweden, Belgium and the UK. Several crews were just two handed, at least three of the yachts had children of 4-6 years on board going round the world. All were very friendly and with many interesting stories to tell. About a third of the crews are stopping off at various places along the route and planning to rejoin the ARC next year. The majority however are to do the entire circumnavigation.

It rained that night, had showers on Tuesday morning and intermittently throughout our stay in St Lucia. The locals complained that for some reason (El Nino?) the rainy season was late this year but had not provided the water

expected. There were a few admin jobs on the yacht but Nigel was given leave to go on a "Tree Top Canopy Adventure Tour" through the local rain forests on Zip Wires. He joined some other World ARC crew members and a number of US honeymooning couples from Sandals. We were driven to the site on the other side of the island while our St Lucian tour leader made us all introduce ourselves and cracked jokes making personal comments, Ugh! The Zip wires were great fun consisting of 12 quite hairy rides from 250ft at 20mph to 670ft at 30mph at heights of 50-100 feet. The views were breathtaking and the whole outing was a new experience for almost everyone and well worthwhile. That afternoon Matthew as 1st Lt instructed the two midshipmen Steve and Nigel on the engines, the generator, the electrical systems, the water systems and the all important watermaker. Alas Matthew who knows the yacht backwards will be leaving us at Panama so if the skipper is not be disturbed it is up to us to fly solo to Tahiti.

On the Wednesday morning, Steve and Nigel, who were made responsible for provisioning, ordered quantities of frozen vacuum packed meat before joining the rest of the World ARC crews for detailed briefings by our ever helpful and knowledgeable World ARC staff. They covering the Rally in general, weather and Down Wind sailing. That evening the crews were given yet another Welcome Party by the manager of Rodney Bay marina, Paul Ash late Colonel RCT with whom Nigel had once served with many years before.

The following day Steve and Nigel went by taxi to a large supermarket to provision Lydia with everything save meat and vege/fruit. Steve is excellent at this sort of thing but Nigel has far to go! Among other things we were requested to buy 200 litre of water since these would be our emergency supply if the water maker on board failed as we sailed across the Pacific for a month. We filled the taxi with our provisions and water and then had the challenging task of stowing it all aboard Lydia. Nigel managed to escape part of this by attending practical instruction by Chris Tibbs of the World ARC team on taking sextant sights and an interesting presentation on Emergencies at Sea. That night we met up with Andrew and his wife for yet another good dinner at the Spinnaker Restaurant, a favourite of Donald's.

On the Friday morning Steve, Andrew, his wife Hilary and Nigel took a taxi to the Vege Market in the capital Castries. It was a large open-air market where Nigel got firmly put in place for having the temerity to try to bargain! We returned at lunch time with the mission accomplished. That afternoon the skipper trained new crew members in the art of rigging the twin forestay and the two spinnaker booms on either side from which the yankee (large high cut genoa permanently rigged) and the hankey, a similar sized foresail but hanked on. These would be used with the wind astern for classic downwind sailing. The rig sometimes call a "Dolly Parton" rig for obvious reasons when you see the sails billowing forth, give a far larger sail area than the average spinnaker and are far easier and safer to control especially as you do not need a

mainsail with the possibility of a broach or an accidental gybe. That evening we had the last of three Welcome/Farewell parties for ARC crews given by the St Lucian Tourist board. We had originally planned to go on after this, after yet more Rum Punches, to the weekly "Jump Up" open air street party for locals downtown. However, by the time we had finished dinner it was after 10.30pm and were advised that as tourists it might not be a good idea to attend the Jump Up at that time of night. Pity, as it could have been fun to join in a real Caribbean evening.

Saturday and the start of the race....sorry I mean cruise in company with prizes for line honours based on handicap at Santa Marta our next stop in Columbia . Whereas you can use your engine, however if you do so you have to declare it and accept the penalty points involved. The wind at the start was fickle but we turned off our engine at the 5 minute gun and do not intend to start it until we cross the line. Not so the vast majority of the fleet who on turned on their Iron Spinnakers and during the first night and much of the following day we were left trailing last.

However by Sunday morning the wind increased to 10 knots from the East, dead astern and with our very efficient Dolly Parton rig we slowly but surely began to catch up and to over take the stragglers of the fleet who had used their engines. We have been gaining ground on the leaders far ahead ever since. The only downside of this trade wind sailing with two foresails is that the yacht rolls from side to side continuously so at times sleeping and particularly cooking can be challenging. Nigel for one has several large bruises on his backside as he has crashed into a particularly annoying hook at bum level in the galley. The star cooks are Matthew who rustles up the most delicious lunches and suppers without receipes or apparent effort. Steve is equally good but more methodical and makes wholesome bread on board. Steve is also the yacht's fisherman and as a result of the morning's Thursday 14 January catch we are having Tuna steaks tonight. He has had several massive fish finally escape his line at the last minute including one rude fish who took not only his lure and trace but also most of his line as well. We are buying stronger equipment in Colombia.

We operate a 3 hour Watch system of 9pm to midnight. midnight to 3am, 3am to 6am and 6am to 9am. Once the wind reached 10 knots we have been using the newly acquired Wind Vane self steering bought at the Southampton Boat Show. Keeping a course sailing directly down wind is challenging at the best of times but for a wind vane to do it so effectively is remarkable. Our daily routine is after breakfast the net controller (one of the World ARC yachts which changes daily) contacts all yacht to ask for their position and local wind speed and direction. After that its running the generator to top of the batteries for up to 8 hours and start the water maker to replenish our fresh water tanks which takes most of the day. The good thing about this is that we have the luxury of a short shower each day. Our clothes washing is done in a bucket of

fresh water on the after deck adjacent to the deck shower hose from which we can replenish buckets.

The weather since we set off has been unbelievably good and consistent. Blue skies with occasional puffy white clouds, warm winds of 10-15 knots dead astern sending us on our way and gentle seas. Frankly what more could a sailor want apart from his beloved beside him. In the evenings as we sail direct into the sunset and the sun goes down with the colours of the clouds lighting up the whole wide uncluttered horizon changing from white, to reddish to finally a brilliant crimson which lasts for some time as the sun finally disappears below and the inky black darkness begins to descend. Then the moon rises and again we are sailing directly along its silvery path bringing back memories of the song "Moon River" With no street lighting from towns and cities to pollute the beauty of the night the stars and planets come out like tiny diamonds set in the vast velvet canopy above. We are just so lucky to experience all this.

With all good wishes to those who may read this from the crew of Lydia.
Nigel

Lydia - Lydia's blog 14 -22 January 2016. Santa Marta and passage to San Blas Islands.

23 January 2016

Thursday 16 Jan began as the previous 5 days with us forging ahead under twin headsails with a 10-12 knot wind astern. Later that forenoon we began to see the loom of the Colombian Sierra Nevadas and calculated that we could be alongside in to the new marina at Santa Marta by early the next morning. As the day progressed the impressive mountains took shape, (the highest 19,000 feet) and the wind and waves began to rise. From yachts ahead of us came messages that in the last 20 miles before entering Santa Marta harbour they were experiencing winds of up to 40 knots (Gale 8 +) and high seas. Shortly before sundown we took down the port foresail and stowed its spinnaker boom in anticipation of things to come. The wind was already rising 25 knots and knowing what was to come, at 8pm under spreader lights we stowed the starboard spinnaker pole and took some rolls in the starboard foresail. By 10pm we too were experiencing gusts of 40 knots and huge seas which towered over our stern lifting Lydia as they rushed by with the roaring hiss of an express train and phosphorescence dancing everywhere. There was no possibility of sleep for those off watch so all 5 of us crammed into the cockpit to enjoy this exhilarating experience. We could see the headland in the distance on our port bow and the stern lights of those just ahead of us as we crested the waves. Lydia is so solid and soundly built that we all have total confidence that she can manage any sea thrown at her. Suddenly we notice a green light that had been slightly astern of us abruptly changing course and at

one point coming straight for us. Fortunately the yacht passed clear astern before again appearing to violently alter course. Shortly after midnight we reached the headland and turned in towards the lights of Santa Marta which suddenly came into view. Once we were in the lee of the headland the seas calmed and the wind dramatically dropped to 5-10knots and we crossed the Finishing Line at 1.34hrs having never used our engine once, unlike the vast majority of other yachts. Eventually we were to learn we came 4th in the monohull class of 19. Once we had secured alongside in the marina Matthew, (who is good at these things, apart from others!) made the strongest rum punches all of us had tasted, 80% neat rum and fruit mixture just for flavour and colour. We invited over the yacht who had steered at us earlier in the evening just to show no hard feelings. In fact the retired German couple sailing her had experienced gear problems in those winds and seas and we all became great friends with the party finishing at 4am.

The World ARC organisation had been optimistic regarding the time of arrival of the majority of yachts so had held a Welcome Party and escort of coastguard vessels prior to our arrival and many others on the Thursday. However, once we had sorted ourselves out after a late start that morning, all crews were taken on a bus tour of Santa Marta beginning with the city museum. Here we learnt that the Spanish had first arrived in 1501 and the city was formally founded in 1509. The three unfortunate indigenous tribes which had separate, interesting and sophisticated cultures were almost all wiped out by the diseases, smallpox, etc that the Spanish brought with them. It was explained that Colombia has a population of some 60 million and the main exports are coffee, gold, oil and that Colombia is the largest emerald exporter in the world. We also learnt about Simon Bolivar who is highly revered in South America.

Those uninterested in history please skip to the next paragraph. Bolivar was born of rich Spanish colonists in Caracas, Venezuela in the late 1700s. He was orphaned by 9 and brought up by a close and influential friend of the family. We were told that he did not work at his studies, was a bit of a rebel and was far more interested in soldiering. As a young man he travelled extensively in Europe and was particularly influenced by Napoleon and the French Revolution. He also visited the recently independent USA and met Washington. When he returned to South America he was fired with revolutionary zeal and set about his mission to rid South America of its Spanish rulers. He began his liberation crusade in Columbia of which Panama was then a part. His first battles were in 1809 and by 1819 he and his rebel national forces had thrown out the Spanish rulers from Colombia. In subsequent years he led successful liberation crusades in Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru and finally what is now Bolivia.

During the rest of the afternoon we visited the beautiful Roman Catholic cathedral of Santa Marta where Simon Bolivar is buried and finally went out to

visit the hacienda/museum on the outskirts of the city where Bolivar spent his last months before dying prematurely of tuberculosis aged 47.

On the Saturday all World ARC crews were invited to a beach BBQ at a beautiful, exclusive, beach accessed down unmade roads through rain forests. The setting was perfect with tables under shady trees on the water's edge where crews intermingled, played cricket, (cheating uproariously) and children happily splashing in the clear blue sea with their parents. Waiters brought us seemingly unending trays of different drinks and later an excellent meal all supported by "Manuel" who owns a large part of Santa Marta including the new marina. We got back on board early to host a drinks and nibbles party for the English crew of Carango, ex cavalry officers and their wives and then on to a dinner ashore.

Sunday 17 Jan we were all up early to catch the tour bus to see the old coffee plantation at Minca high up in the Sierra Nevada. Parts of the road were newly made with strong fencing as the drops down into the valleys were precipitous. In due course we arrived at the main plantation factory which had been started by an adventurous English couple in 1892 and who had brought out all the specialised plant machinery made by Gordon Ironworks of London and which is still working today. A German couple bought the plantation in 1950 and their family still run it, not as a commercial venture but as an interesting tourist attraction. We were told that Colombian coffee is possibly the best in the world and that the Santa Marta produces the best of that.

After our visit we explored some local waterfalls, but alas being a Sunday the world and his wife and children were happily filling every available pool and cascade. Steve and I being adventurers at heart continued to scramble up the rocks lining the river and waterfalls until we ran out of people and any method of going further up stream, much to the concern of our guide who thought we might have drowned.

Monday 18 Jan we were again up early (8am) to join another coach trip to the famous Taymora National Park created in 1964 by removing the cattle farmers there since the land contained many fauna and flora of national importance that needed to be saved. The park is to the north of Santa Marta and has a coastal area. Soldiers guard its entrances, which are strictly controlled. In spite of correct paperwork it still took us half an hour before the teenage soldiers allowed us in. With our guide we walked along trails surrounded often by seemingly impenetrable rain forests with the guide pointing out flora and fascinating brightly coloured little birds, humming birds in particular. We came across the tracks of ocelot and jaguar and saw long flights of pelicans wending their way this way and that. Near the mangroves we were warned to be careful of the cayman alligators, however we were reassuringly told that they normally only eat people in the nesting season of April to June so all was well. After an excellent lunch of locally caught fish in a hotel built to resemble

an indigenous Indian's home, we all went for a swim on another of the beautiful deserted beaches in a tiny little area 50m x 50m. Apparently over 200 visitors have died in the last few years at these beaches because of the vicious undertows and currents. Now swimming is banned throughout the National Park apart from our tiny area by the hotel.

On our return to our marina, we met up with the crew from "Belafonte", Tim a computer systems engineer and Magda a specialist nurse both from Canada who only bought their yacht a year ago but are highly competitive racing day boat sailors on the Great Lakes. They are taking a year off to sail round the world and meet new people. Their other two crew members are Steve and Belinda from Margaret River south of Perth in Australia, Steve is in oil exploration among other qualifications while his wife is a Flight Lt in the Australian Air Force and a top flying instructor about to help bring in the new small version of the Hercules transport plane into the RAAF. Needless to say she had some stories to tell of the male chauvinism and harassment women like her have experienced in following traditionally male careers in Australia. One of the great benefits of this World ARC(which I had not fully appreciated when I first signed up,) is the fascinating people you meet doing this sort of thing; all have interesting stories to tell if you do a little digging.

Tuesday 19 Jan the day before we are due to set off for the San Blas Islands and then on to Shelter Bay near the Panama Canal entrance. Steve and I do a complete inventory of what food we have got on the yacht already and where it is stowed. This will prove invaluable. Steve, Andrew and I then set off to a smart supermarket we had recced the previous day. One, or should I say me, tended to think of Colombia as 3rd World totally down at heel and forever fighting FARC rebels. However as I understand, a lasting peace with FARC is about to be signed and certainly we have seen little evidence of either the Army or Police behaviour normally seen in live terrorist situations. There is undoubtedly a significant gap between rich and poor with many Chelsea tractors in evidence and shops selling everything you can imagine yet shanty districts on the outskirts. All the people we saw appeared very friendly and happy. and everything appeared very inexpensive in comparison to Europe. A smart new luxury 2 bedroom flats overlooking the marina are priced at £120K and seemed an outstanding investment in a country which is stable by South American standards. The supermarket we went for our provisions could have been mistaken for a large Tesco in England or possibly even a Waitrose. Suffice to say we bought all the provisions we felt were needed and to a taxi back to Lydia where we then had a challenge stowing it all! That evening we invited our next door yacht, an American Lagoon 400 catamaran owned by Dan and Paula who are sailing round the world with the 14 year old daughter Ariana and young son Ryan. Dan was ex US Navy, Annapolis then flying but after 12 years decided to study medicine sponsored by the USN specialising in radiography. His charming wife Paula has a PhD in Social Psychology and

advises law firms. After our drinks we all went on to a formal Farewell Dinner and Prize Giving arranged by World ARC and again supported by Mr "Manuel" at the Marina Hotel. A good time was had by all. We later learnt that Lydia had come 4th in our monohull division out of 19 yachts, which was not at all bad. We retired early as we expected to be on the Start Line just outside the harbour by 8am the following morning.

However when Wednesday 20 Jan dawned we had a message over the radio that the start had been postponed until further notice as the Port Captain had closed the port so nothing could go in or out. His reason apparently was that the winds outside were 40knots + and the seas mountainous and he had a duty of care for us while we were in his port. While this was frustrating, it was entirely understandable. It took all day of delicate negotiations to finally persuade him that the crews were all highly experienced sailors with safe yachts well able to cope with gale force winds and high seas. By evening he agreed to let us sally forth the following morning.

On Thursday 21 Jan we actually did make the Start Line at 8am and, just as predicted, once we had rounded the point we were hit by 40knot winds and huge seas, all of which we could cope with but made sleeping, when you got the chance, well nigh impossible. Lydia never seems to stop rolling. Steve, our doctor, says this is very good for us since we are using our core muscles all the time to keep balance and to do the simplest of things. A bit like Charles Atlas's muscle building by dynamic tension. Meantime I fear that our lunches and dinners are becoming the high points of each day so I am not now quite so sure I shall be coming home noticeably slimmer than when I embarked! With the winds as they were we reverted to just a full yankee as even a little main made her unbalanced. We also have a minor problem with the mainsail's reefing system which we will sort out when we are safely anchored in the San Blas islands.

Friday 22 Jan, The winds and waves are at last easing and have dropped to 10-15 knots with waves bumpy rather than huge seas. Mid morning Steve our keen fisherman caught a very respectable Dorado or Mahi Mahi. It was a beautiful fish and he played it well. However, we do not have a gaff so when we started to pull up out of the water to land him, the angry Mahi Mahi somehow jumped just as we were hauling him on board and then, like Tarzan "with one bound he was free!" much to the consternation of us all gathered on the afterdeck. However Andrew saved the day and caught a lunch sized tuna shortly after which Matthew duly cooked excellently and we all ate with gusto. We have continued to sail very stably and peacefully with just the yankee foresail making a steady 4-5 knots and expecting to reach our destination of the San Blas Islands by midday tomorrow. Whereas we could put on more sail, it would mean arriving in the dark which is dangerous as all the islands are unlit and the unlit passage into them is only 200 yards wide.

I fear this blog may be too much detailed so next time I will just put in the highlights and amusing bits.

With best wishes from all the crew of Lydia,
Nigel

Lydia - Lydia's Blog 23 - 26 Jan 16. The San Blas Islands

26 January 2016

Saturday 23 January.

At first light the nearest atolls of the San Blas islands came into view. This actually is the best time to do one's dhobi before the heat of the sun strikes and in this case while the yacht is fairly stable. Its a matter of taking a bucket and fresh water from the shower from a aft locker, doing one scrub of all clothes in a washing detergent and three fresh water rinses. Luckily we have an excellent water maker so fresh water is in relatively unlimited supply. The San Blas islands, although they belong to Panama have a certain autonomy granted to their local indigenous Kuna Indians who administer the islands, collect taxes and cruising fees from passing yachts. As we sailed nearer, the breakers over the reefs surrounding the atoll of Cayos Holandes to which we were heading could be seen as also could the masts of yachts already safely anchored inside the main lagoon. By 9am we had furled the yankee and were negotiating the south west passage into the island archipelago under engine. Pilotage here needs careful concentration as the charts are not always accurate so sharp eyed members of the crew with polaroid sun glasses mustered on the foredeck to watch out for coral heads and uncharted rocks. The scene unfolding before us was just as films portray classic south sea islands with waving palm trees, lush almost impenetrable vegetation down to the strip of brilliant white sandy beach with the occasional log washed up on the shore. In fact where we anchored we met up with about ten other World ARC yachts who has decided to stay there for their first day in the islands.

There were three little islands surrounding the lagoon all inside the reef where we were. One was inhabited by a couple of families of local Kuna Indians who were small, dark and with wide smiles. The huts they lived in were very basically constructed with dried palm fronds for the roofs and sides and occasional bits of plastic sheeting. Some of the young boys came out in a dug out canoe to offer us squid, lobster and fish. We did not buy any but they were very happy with a beer each. In the afternoon all the crew less Matthew

climbed into the dinghy and set off to explore one of the islands. Although the lagoon appeared clear on the surface, just below, as we were to discover later, were unforgiving coral heads which could easily puncture the normal inflatable dinghy. Fortunately for us Donald had bought a semi inflatable dinghy with a strong plastic sub hull like a RIB. The first little island we explored was the inhabited one.

I was a little concerned we might be intruding but the inhabitants appeared not to mind us doing a short exploration of their little island home. We noticed three generations living there and were surprised to find one of the little children wearing a disposable nappy.....not so unsophisticated as we had imagined! We went on to the next uninhabited little island and met up with the crew of another World ARC yacht already partying, which comprised father (owner/skipper), mother, son and two daughters with their respective boyfriends from Lowestoft. They warned us to beware of the land crabs if we ventured into the seemingly impenetrable vegetation beyond the immediate shore line. The crabs' bodies are as large as a small dustbin lid with one very large claw capable of holding anything and the small claw for helping it feed. We saw some of the holes in which they lived but decide not call upon them uninvited that afternoon. On returning to Lydia with Steve fearlessly at the helm we were going so fast we could not see clearly ahead of what appeared as open water until we came to a grinding halt on coral heads. We immediately stopped the outboard and gingerly pushed ourselves off with our oars before retracing our steps to clear open water and returned to Lydia rather more cautiously. A couple of yachts anchored up from us an ARC catamaran was holding a splendid party to which everyone seemed to be going. We learnt later that we too had had an invitation but we were exploring at the time. That night Donald cooked us all supper of an excellent chili con carne with rice to perfection followed by pineapple. As I have written before our meals are starting to become highlights of our days which can't be good! We had a full moon that night so the whole lagoon was lit up in this beautiful silvery light punctuated with the dark shadows of sleeping yachts with their masthead anchor light watching over their slumbers.

Sunday 24 January.

After a restful night we weighed anchor shortly after breakfast and set course for another picturesque and popular atoll called Chichime Cays where ARC yachts were gathering for a Bring Your Own Beach BBQ. We could not help noticing on the way in to this fairly crowded anchorage a forlorn yacht with no mast and just the deck and hull on its side on the reef protecting this particular island atoll. Without the San Blas Islands have been the graveyard of many yachts who have either lost their way or been driven onto the treacherous lee shores protecting these islands. This island had several well constructed huts, some with corrugated iron roofs. Our BBQ previously planned by World ARC was in two fairly large huts with roofs but no sides. As it happened we had several squalls during the afternoon which would have drenched us had we not been inside the huts. Between the rain the local

inhabitants put on several dancing displays with the men in blue shirts and hats playing wooden pan pipes and the women in colourful dresses with coloured beads wound round their legs. All the dances began in a circle with the sexes alternately spaced doing a kind of "dozi do", one step forward one to the side. In due course the dances became more complicated with formations not unlike some Scottish reels. I had a feeling that these dances were not a regular feature of their lives but put on for our benefit so there was occasional confusion causing lots of giggles among those involved. While at the party we heard that sadly one of the yachts we had come to know well in Santa Marta had lost her anchor in our last anchorage of Cayos Holandes. We later heard that divers had been sent down to see if it could be retrieved but as yet no word. If we meet up Donald is keen to offer them our kedge anchor pro tem. I am duty cook tonight, something I dread. At 5pm after we returned from the BBQ I peeled the potatoes and carrots and defroze the bangers. At 6pm as I had begun to cook everything we had a call from Corango anchored close by whose crew we had entertained for drinks and nibbles in Santa Marta. They wished to reciprocate at 6.30. Our crew drop everything, shower and change and Matthew rowed by Andrew with Steve in the bow started to row across. Unfortunately we had already unshipped the outboard. Half way across one of the rowlocks broke making it very difficult to make headway against wind and current. Carango's skipper seeing the problem gallantly having welcomed our 3 eventually on board came over with his dinghy and outboard and collected Donald and me. Carango is a beautiful centre cockpit particularly well designed French yacht Amel 54. Peter and Viki Forbes whose yacht it is and their friends Richard and Tricia Morris could not have been more charming hosts providing small eats of a professional standard and delicious G&Ts. Peter and Richard had served together in 4/7 Dragoon Guards and by sheer chance Richard and I remembered each other when the Royal College of Defence Studies came out to Latvia and Lithuania when I was the DA there in 1997. Peter kindly took us all back to Lydia towing our dinghy behind. Fortunately all were in such a happy mood that with the help of another of Matthew's notorious rum punches my very basic meal of bangers, mash and vege was eaten with gusto. It was very hot 32 degrees C and windy that night with gusts of 35 knots.

Monday 25 January.

Up early as normal and Donald off for his constitutional swim and then Disaster! Our dinghy, which Donald had made fast to a cleat on our stern was gone, only the painter trailing in the water was left. Fortunately at least the outboard had been previously taken off the dinghy the afternoon before. Either a light fingered person had stolen it or the knot securing the painter to the dinghy which Donald had only bought in St Lucia had somehow come undone in the blow. We could see no sign of it. In the meantime we weighed anchor and motored the 4 miles to Port Vnir where we had to formally book in to Panama. Fortunately Lydia has another dinghy, an old but perfectly serviceable Avon with plastic oars so once anchored at Port Vnir Donald was

able to complete the Ship's Papers and passport formalities. Once completed we again weighed anchor and motored about 5 miles to Lemon Cays which is another delightful little atoll with a good protected lagoon for anchoring and even a largish red corrugated iron waterside restaurant. We noticed as we entered the lagoon a large commercial yacht with mast broken stranded on a reef of the next door island. Apparently it was a yacht which carried 30 passengers on regular voyages from Panama to Cartegena and back but one day its engine failed on a lee shore and it was wrecked but fortunately all on board were saved.

Donald went ashore to recce the restaurant and to his great surprise found his lost dinghy pulled up on the shore on rollers. Apparently it had been picked up by a local fisherman early that morning having drifted from Chichime the night before. Donald ordered a fish and chip meal for all of us that evening and then collected Matthew to help him negotiate the return of his dinghy now in possession of "Mr Big" of the island who owned the Ugabi Restaurant. \$US 200 and beers all round clinched the deal and the dinghy was ours again. That evening after more of Matthew's rum punches we our overloaded dinghy meandered across the water to the restaurant where we had a good fish meal with Vino Collapso from Argentina and the large TV showing the US marines in bloody conflict with the Japanese in a very old WW2 movie all in Spanish but enthralling the younger population of the island.

Tuesday 26 January.

Another day in Paradise! (albeit in Panama rather than the Kenya Highland a hundred years ago.) After breakfast the midshipmen mustered on the foredeck and under the supervision of the 1st Lt craned the new dinghy aboard (which unlike the Avon is very heavy) to be stowed forward of the mast. Later we swam over to book a table for lunch at the Ugabi Restaurant of fish and rice and salad which was very good. The restaurant had tiny sea swimming pool we had not noticed before into which local fishermen at intervals while we lunched dropped in a number of lobsters. Fortunately hopefully the lobsters did not know what was in store. This evening our skipper plans to weigh anchor and set sail for Shelter Bay a the start of the Panama Canal with the plan to arrive tomorrow in the forenoon.

With best wishes from all aboard Lydia,
Nigel

**Lydia - Lydia's Blog. Shelter Bay Panama Canal zone.
27-29 Jan 16**

04 February 2016<

Wednesday 27 Jan 16.

At 6pm the previous evening we weighed anchor from Lemon Cays in the San Blas Islands and motor-sailed out of the San Blas Islands then followed the Panamanian shore some miles off using the detailed electronic charts which proved most effective. The wind at 15 knots was on our quarter which gave Lydia a somewhat corkscrewing motion at times and thus difficult to sleep. We could see the harbour lights of small ports along the coast and rather wished we had had the time to go into Porto Bello, one of the main ports used by the Spanish from which to export their treasure from Peru in the 16th and 17th centuries using the famous Camino Real road from Panama. As the grey dawn came up we found ourselves about 10 miles off the entrance to the Panama Canal. Some score or so of large ghostly tankers and container ships waiting for their turn to enter the Canal slowly materialised. We could hear them on the radio calling in to Canal Control that they had arrived at the 8 mile point and would anchor and wait to be called forward.

The entrance to the start of the Panama Canal is marked by a long artificial breakwater of rocks with an entrance of about a quarter of a mile wide. To the left we could make out the busy port city of Colon with its large container port. Apparently some container ships off load their containers at Colon which are then taken about 50 mile by rail across the isthmus to Panama where they are then loaded on waiting container ships on the other side and vice versa. Once we had cleared the breakwater we turned hard to starboard inside the breakwater where we could see the forest of yachts marking the marina of Shelter Bay. In fact the marina is part of the now disused large American Army base which was originally built in 1908 to guard the entrance to the Canal which the US were then building. It was then called Fort Sherman and with the large barrack blocks, airstrip and many married quarters now abandoned but once housed 1000 or more military personnel. In WW2 and during the Viet Nam war it was one of the primary US Jungle Warfare schools and on further acquaintance we could see why. On arrival we secured alongside a fuel barge to refuel before finally moving onto our finger berth and for most of us falling thankfully to sleep for a couple of hours. The facilities were good with very good washing facilities, and a restaurant that we managed to eat all the way through their menu in the 5 days we were there. In the evening I contacted the crew of Belafonte whose skipper Tim was an expert on the internet since we could not get ours to work on the marina's WiFi. It turned out the marina's WiFi was too weak and overloaded with all our ARC yachts so the only thing to do was to wait until most had gone to bed. In the meantime we had several rounds of shangria drinks with them which appear innocuous fruit drinks but have quite a kick afterwards! Matthew moved off Lydia that evening to a smart hotel room in the marina as he was returning to England for his son's wedding before we went into the Canal proper on 31 Jan.

Thursday 28 Jan,

After a relaxed morning we caught a bus have a tour the Gatun Locks, the three vast locks which lift ships up from the Caribbean into the Gatun Lake.

Bit of history here so skip it if it is not of interest.

In 1513 Balboa discovered (as far as Europeans are concerned) the Southern Sea of Pacific. In 1527 two Spanish sailors found that the Chagres River was navigable for up to 50 miles inland from its mouth near what is now the start of the Panama Canal. The far sighted Charles V of Spain in 1534 decreed that exploration should take place to discover a quicker route across the isthmus so the gold from Peru could be brought to Spain as rapidly as possible. At the navigable end of the Chagres River the town of Cruces was founded and 30 kms of paved road known as the Camino de Cruces was laid by the Spanish from there to Panama. The alternative longer land route across the isthmus was the Camino Real from Panama to Porto Bello. Fast forwarding to the 19th century, following de Lesseps' success with the Suez Canal, the French in 1878 signed a treaty with Colombia of which Panama was then a province, to build a canal across the isthmus. Work began in 1880 and in 1884 17,000 Jamaicans were recruited to do the huge labour involved. The French plan was a straight canal with no locks. However, beyond the navigable part of the Chagres River they had to cut this huge canal straight through mountainous jungle primarily at what became known as the Culebra Cut.

Malaria, yellow fever and torrential rains, which could destroy months of digging in a day brought the project to a standstill by 1890. A new French company was formed by 1894 but by then there had been 22,000 deaths resulting from the hard labour involved. 60 million meters of earth had been removed to form the Culebra Cut, many bridges, railways and navigation channels had been dug but by the turn of the century the French had all but given up. Four factors caused the French failure, first, very difficult terrain, second, a bad plan, third, disease and finally corruption.

At this stage in 1903 Panama gained its independence from Colombia supported by the US who a fortnight later signed a treaty giving the US a stretch of territory five miles either side of the proposed canal which Theodore Roosevelt guaranteed to build open to all ships of all nations. The American plan was much more practical. They dammed the Chagres River thereby creating the largest artificial lake (the Gatun Lake) in the world prior to the Aswan Dam.

They built three locks (the Gatun Locks) to bring up the ships from the Caribbean to the Lake now many metres above sea level. The ships then crossed this vast lake following carefully dredged channels to the famous Culebra Cut where the French had expended so much labour in carving a way through the mountainous jungle. After the narrow Cut ships moved to the first of the 3 locks to lower them down to the Pacific. The first was the Pedro Miguel lock which opens onto the small artificially created Miraflores Lake and then down through the two Miraflores Locks and out under the Bridge of the Americas to the Pacific. Sluice gates on the Gatun Lake allowed the water lost in locking down ships to the Caribbean or Pacific to be made up by the water

still flowing into the Lake from the Chagres River.

So much for the Plan. The other major problem of disease was tackled by US Drs Walter Reed and William Gorgas who had great experience in combatting malaria and yellow fever in Cuba set about eradicating the problems in the Canal Zone by such things as paving all the streets to stop pools of water where mosquitos could breed and by spraying oil on any pools of stagnant water. The canal nearly 80km long was finally completed and the first ship the Ancon transited the Canal on 15 August 1914. End of history lesson!

At the Gatun Locks we saw vast container ships entering the locks under their own power but controlled by 4 electric "mules" on tracks on the sides of the locks whose purpose was partly to control the ship's way forward but equally to keep the ship dead in the centre of the lock and thus to ensure the ship never hit the sides of the locks. A Panamax ship has only 60cm on either side of the lock for clearance. Two mules (or sometimes 4) with wire hawsers are attached to the ship bow and stern to keep her straight and totally under control. The pilot on the bridge is in constant contact with the mule drivers. It takes the average ship about an hour and a half to negotiate all three locks going up to the Gatun Lake. The current locks are 330m long by 33.5m wide. About 40 ships a day make the transit East to West or West to East using the Gatun Lake to anchor while waiting to be called forward to go East or West. The average transit time from ocean to ocean is 24 hours. The Canal is a 24/7 operation 365 days a year. Currently Panama is building larger locks alongside the Gatun and Miraflores Locks which possibly may open by 2017. They are designed to take Super Panamax ships currently expected to be 10 a day. These new locks which save 60% of the water used measure 427m long and 55m wide. It was truly fascinating watching the whole operation.

Friday 29 Jan 16.

Steve, Andrew and I had a conflag on provisioning. None of us are experts on provisioning a yacht for a passage of 70 days and only wish our wives were here to provide ever sensible and practical advice! None of us are fluent Spanish speakers and surprisingly most of the supermarket staff appeared to have no English.

There is one thing about it that concentrates our minds, we shall be eating (or not eating) our mistakes in the days and weeks to come. We took a taxi to the vast supermarket in Colon. It took us two and half hours to fill 5 shopping trolleys. The 2 check out packers could not believe it and fell about laughing. They were very good and managed to get us a taxi who then rang a friend with his taxi as we needed two to get us and our vast amount of stores back to our marina. Our new crew member Alvaro had arrived while we were at the supermarket and oh how we wished we had his expertise. Alvaro is the 22yr old son of a Spanish friend from Madrid of skipper Donald. He has just finished university and is planning to study furniture design in Denmark after

our voyage.

Of course once the provisions were on the jetty the next intriguing challenge was to find spaces on Lydia for everything. It took ages to stow but we had a deadline as we had somewhat rashly invited the crew of Belafonte for "Rom Ponches" at 6.30. Fortunately they we also having challenges stowing but when they all arrived we drank copious quantities of Matthew's specially prepared "Rom Ponches". Matthew is a dangerous man.

You might think his rum punches consist of a third of rum and two thirds fruit punch. However it is the other way round so we have been continually buying more rum than punch! A good time was had by all which pushed the experience of provisioning into blissful oblivion and so to bed.

With best wishes from all on Lydia, Nigel

Lydia - Lydia's Blog 30 Jan 16. Visit to Emberra Indian village on Chargres River.

06 February 2016

Saturday 30 January 2016.

Called all hands at 6am as at 7am all ARC crews to board buses to visit a village of indigenous Emberra Indians in the upper reaches of the Chargres River. The bus trip took about an hour and half at the end of which we are deposited on the banks of the Chargres river. Here some 10, long dugout canoes with outboard motors were drawn up on the bank with Emberra Indians heavily tattooed and wearing only a small brightly coloured loin cloths were awaiting us. We were given life jackets and took our places one behind the other on little wooden benches in the canoes. The trick as I learnt to my cost was not to be right at the front where I happened to end up being the last to board the canoe. We started off up the river. which started fairly sheltered with an Indian on the outboard and also one at the bow with a long pole to fend us off rocks as we were to learn later. The river opened out into a sizeable lake which with the wind against us produced small waves causing those seated at the front of the canoes to get steadily drenched! No matter as it was hot and we would eventually dry out. Once we crossed the lake the river narrowed and wound its way upstream becoming shallower and shallower with many small rapids. Inevitably some canoes grounded causing the front Indian to use his pole to try and get us off but for some it required getting out to lighten the load and helping to shove the dugout through the mini rapids against the current.

This was all very authentic stuff with thick rain forest jungle on either side and creepers now and again hanging down from above bathing the scene in a surreal greenish light. It was only the sound of the outboards which reminded

one that we were in the 21st century rather than exploring the upper reaches of the darkest Amazon with Captain Forsythe in the early 1900s. After about an hour or more round a corner appeared the tops of huts of a little village.

As the canoes drew up on this isolated bank in the middle of the jungle, we were greeted by the equivalent of the village band with wooden drums and flute type instruments. Leaving our canoes we climbed the bank to come into the central square of the little village. On one side was a large covered open sided communal gathering place where clearly we were to be entertained and in which were displayed all kinds of carvings and handcrafts ostensibly made by the inhabitants of the village and benches for us to sit on. Adjacent was a large two storied covered open sided structure used as a communal eating place. The other two sides were bounded by family two storied huts. The square inevitably had two very worn goal posts on which a group of Indian children were enthusiastically playing football. To a man and woman all the Indian community were heavily tattooed and dressed in small loincloths for the men and wraparound skirts for the women and girls who were all bare breasted. We were ushered to our benches in the large covered gathering place and formally greeted by the Chief of the village. He explained, via our guide who translated, that Emberra Indians originated in the Darien area of Colombia further south. However, with drug cartel activity in the area this community had decided to move to the safety of Panamanian protection in the jungle further north. The Chief then went on to explain and to demonstrate how the community labouriously made and dyed the many woven baskets of all shapes and sizes and carved wooden animals from the local bushes and trees in the jungle which all families had on display in their individual stores at the far side of the gathering place. The community then put on several traditional dances, first the men then the women and finally a group of delightfully enthusiastic young children. At the end the dancers picked out some of the ARC spectators to join in with them dancing round and round the hall.

We were then offered lunch which consisted of locally caught fish in batter in individual coconut wrappers, delicious watermelons and bananas. Our guide brought us our water. We were then invited to explore the little village perched on the hillside at the top of which was an infant school currently on holiday. 2 teachers are provided by the State. Inside we could see decorations left over from Christmas celebrations and not only Spanish phrases on the blackboard but also English ones. The views from the top of the hill showed below the river winding its way further upstream while in the middle and far distance the jungle rolled on over mountain and valley as far as the eye could see.

Eventually it was time to take our leave from this very friendly little community who we gathered made a living by entertaining visitors such as ourselves about twice a week and from selling their carvings and colourful baskets. I bought one from the woman who made it who assured me it took her a month to do so. Well??! Anyway it will be a conversation piece with some provenance

when entertaining back home!

The return voyage in our canoes with the river and the wind with us was very pleasant and no problems this time negotiating the rapids. On our return to Lydia we entertained our charming Norwegian friend Eivind from Spirit V with whom we had shared expeditions in Santa Marta. After a couple of Matthew's famous (or infamous!) "Rom Ponches" Eivind had to leave his half finished for which he apologized profusely as his crew were calling him for dinner. We too rolled our way up to the marina restaurant and were just finishing when Eivind arrived with 6 "Rom Ponches" as an apology for having to leave us earlier at such short notice.Bed and pillow spin!

With all good wishes from the crew of Lydia, Nigel

Lydia - Lydia's Blog 31 Jan - 1 Feb. Transit of Panama Canal.

<div style="float:right">06 February 2016</div>

Sunday 31 January 2016.

Steve and I were up early to join experienced bird watchers David and Sally Batten and Anthony and Venitia from another ARC yacht. We see a number of wood peckers, many yellow breasted fly catchers, some euphonia, hawks and the ever present vultures circling high above. On our walk we also came across a three toed sloth and her baby clinging to her. Also in the trees we saw small black spider monkeys, some with young. Lastly we first heard this very loud and rather eerie howling and finally saw a small group of Howler monkeys before returning for breakfast.

Since we did not need to be back on Lydia before midday as in any case like all yachts going through the canal that day we were to be fumigated and we had to be off the yachts when that took place, I decided to explore what remained of Fort Sherman that once guarded the canal entrance and was also a Jungle Warfare school. I went off in the direction of the five large barrack blocks lining the Canal which we had seen when we first entered the marina.

Immediately behind the line of barrack block which seemed in good condition ran the small airstrip with a block house at the end of the runway nearest the entrance to the marina entitled Kilpatrick Battery. I explored but could not discover where the guns had been placed presumably to guard the Canal entrance and the airstrip. I wandered over to the line of barrack blocks to see in what condition they were when a young Panamanian soldier ambled out of

one of the huts near the water and by his gesticulations I inferred the place was still used by the military and since I was too old for pressed service I should return from whence I came. This I did.

The ARC had decided to split the fleet into two waves, (a Lock's worth each) with the first wave of which Lydia was part would start their transit of the Canal that evening while the second wave of yachts would transit two days later. At 2.30 our group left the marina for Area F, a location on the other side of the Canal main channel to the west of the busy port of Colon and about a couple of miles from the entrance to the first of the three Gatun Locks. We anchored as a group to await the arrival of each yacht's pilot who would guide us throughout our transit of the canal. In order to fit all 17 yachts into one lock it had been decided we should raft up in threes apart from the last two yachts who rafted together and each raft would enter the lock following the raft in front.

At about 5pm two launches appeared with our pilots who duly boarded. We expected that they would only speak Spanish but in our case we were lucky since Alvaro was Spanish and Donald was fluent in the language. As it happened our pilot spoke American as well as Spanish so we had not problems. At a given signal we all weighed anchor and started for the lock seeking out yachts in our raft and rafting up with them. In Lydia's case she was the ham in the sandwich between a large Swiss catamaran and small catamaran from Jersey with three very boisterous young boys on board. We duly met up and tied on as a three yacht raft and approached the entrance to the first lock. The two outside yachts had already been loaned two large fenders each and two strong long warps which in due course would be put on bollards on the sides of the lock to secure the raft bow and stern. Once we entered the lock the Canal warp handlers on the sides threw down heaving lines to which the outside yachts attached their strong controlling warps. The Canal warp handlers walked along the sides of the lock in pace with the raft as it gently motored up the middle.

In due course our raft arrived at its selected place in the lock and Canal handlers took up their heaving lines and then put our strong warps attached on the designated bollards. By now it was almost dark so our progress was floodlit. The next stage was more complicated than it first appeared. As the great lock gates closed behind us and water began to well up into the lock to raise us to the next level, the warp handlers on either side on the outer yachts were meant to ensure that the raft remained central and pointing forward by pulling in their lines or holding them as the water rose. They were meant to be helped by the skippers on the outer yachts using their engines either in reverse or forward to stop the whole raft skewing round and hitting the lock sides.

Alas there was a certain lack of co-ordination by the pilots and skippers.

Unfortunately our raft skewed and it took much effort in preventing the smaller starboard catamaran from hitting the side as we rose in the turbulent water. In due course however the lock was filled and the great gates in front of us majestically opened to allow us all to proceed into the second lock. It was now some time after 7pm and Steve had cooked a good dinner of seafood and rice. Unfortunately it turned out that our pilot did not like seafood so Steve gallantly cooked another dinner for him of corned beef, beans, mash and tomatoes.

The second lock with more experience was less of a trial and although we did skew a bit it was not so serious. There was a web cam on the second lock to which people could gain access via the internet so many families had been warned in advance so much waving took place. When the gates opened for us all to enter the final lock ahead of us we saw towering over us a large tanker patiently waiting to take our place the moment we were out. In the meantime the Canal handlers followed us up with our lines and put them on bollards at our selected place. The final rushing in of the waters did not cause the same difficulties as previously as we rose up to the level of the Gatun Lake. Once the lock gates opened for the final time we unrafted and went out in single file since it was a tight fit to squeeze in between the waiting tanker and the lock entrance wall. Once we were out into the Gatun Lake we saw a number of big ships at anchor awaiting their turns to go down the locks to the Caribbean. In our case since there was no question of yachts continuing the transit at night, we moved over to two large buoys about a mile from the entrance on which all the first wave ARC yachts rafted up together. Once done two launches came out to take off our pilots so they could go home for the night. Ours said he would be driving back to his home in Panama a journey he said would take him half an hour at that time of night approaching 9pm.

Monday 1 February 2016.

We were up early to watch dawn come up over this amazing lake. Next to the locks we had come out of the previous evening we saw the dam and sluice gates which originally created the Gatun Lake a century before. At 7am two launches appeared and we took our pilot again on board. We offered our pilot a full English breakfast but fortunately he only wanted some cereal and fruit. We un-rafted from the friendly catamaran Two Fish and under our pilot's direction set out to "buoy hop" along the edge of the main dredged Canal channel across the vast Gatun Lake. We passed the Banana Channel which is apparently normally used by yachts and small craft which is narrow but ends up shortly before the famous Culebra Cut where it re-joins the main Canal channel. The aim was to keep small craft out of the way of the huge ocean going container ships. In our case the pilots felt that with 17 yachts in line it would be better to follow the main channel across the lake albeit on the very edge. The Gatun Lake covers a vast area and is as stated previously continuously fed by the Chagres River. The pilot explained that although the lake looked most inviting to explore and to view the little bays and islands, all

uninhabited, it was quite dangerous to venture outside the marked dredged channels owing to tree tops just under the water and other solid submerged objects. In fact as we passed little inlets we could see the tops of dead trees. He explained that no pleasure or private craft were allowed on the Lake unless they were doing the full transit. That said we did see a couple of small motorboats by a distant shore which our pilot thought were probably bird watchers with special permission. The dredged channel across the lake was marked by buoys on either side and at the end of each stretch where a slight change of course was required there were leading lights and shapes to help ships line up on the correct new course. The pilot said that when the Americans owned and ran the Canal the enterprise was not aimed at making vast profits but to cover all its running costs.

Preventative maintenance was key so things and issues were addressed before they broke down or became a problem. The pilots were well paid. Since Panama took over Canal operations in 1999, he said successive governments were out to make as much profit from the Canal as possible so only 50% of the revenue was devoted to new work such as the new locks for Super Panamaxs and maintenance was only carried out when something actually broke. Pilots now got barely adequate pay. We had previously been told that the cost of the new locks and the widening and deepening of the Culebra Cut was costing the equivalent of the GDP for a whole for Panama. This is a gamble since with the world trade and oil prices currently in the doldrums it may take some time for sufficient Super Panamaxs to bring in the revenue bonanza for which Panama is hoping.

By midday we had reached the beginning of the famous Culebra Cut which had proved such a challenge to both the engineers and resources of the French and later the Americans later. It was awe inspiring to see how the Canal had literally been cut through small mountains covered with jungle. It was narrow and had steep sides. We had already seen ships approaching us across the Gatun Lake having come up from the Pacific now we were to see similar ships approaching us but all this time with a large tug attached to their sterns. The pilot explained that this was needed as the tugs helped to steer the large ships through this narrow Cut where the wind and small alterations of course could so easily cause them to hit the sides. Eventually we reached the end of the Cut and were confronted by the double fan of the Centennial Bridge built in 2003. In the distance we could see the start of the single Pedro Miguel lock and its associated dam and sluice gates to the side. To the right of this lock we could see the work going on to create the parallel much larger locks for the Super Panamax ships of the future.

We duly arrived outside the lock and began to raft up again. However since the previous evening's incidents the pilots had got together and agreed that Lydia would become the outer port side yacht with the big Swiss catamaran in the middle. The pilot on the centre Swiss catamaran would take over all

charge requesting the three skippers to alter course, forward or reverse their engines in order to help the bow and stern line handlers on the outer yachts. Having rafted up in the new order we moved confidently into the Pedro Miguel Lock with the Canal line handlers putting our warps on the appropriate bollard. When the water ran out of the lock and we did not have the same problems of skewing and all went well. When the gates opened at the far end in due course we could see the Miraflores second set of locks ahead of us. We duly entered these and with better co-ordination and team work had no problems moving down these last two locks and with much waving from spectators on the special spectators building overlooking the locks. When the lock gates opened for the final time we un-rafted and motored on our way into the Pacific at last. To one side we came across the huge Titan crane which had lifted a lock gate out of its place for routine maintenance to take place. Ahead of us there appeared the vast span of the famous Bridge of the Americas built by the US in 1962. Once we were under it we were nearing the end of the Panama Canal channel and into the Pacific properly. To our left we began to see the amazing sight of the Panama City skyline which was possibly more awe inspiring than New York. Most of the sky scrappers we were later told over 20 stories and now up to 100 had been built since 1990.

We followed a causeway on our port side parallel to the Canal main channel which had been built from the rocks and earth removed while creating the Culebra Cut. The marina, La Playita where we were to spend the next few days came into view at the end of the causeway where it connected to an island.

We duly anchored outside the marina that evening as we were not due to go onto a finger pontoon in the marina proper until the following day. We had completed the transit of the Panama Canal which so many people have dreamed of doing and we had just done. It called for celebratory drinks all round finished off by an excellent vegetable omelette with salad supper cooked expertly by Andrew. It had been a most memorable couple of days and we all went to bed early and a deep sleep.

With all good wishes from the crew of Lydia, Nigel

Lydia - Lydia's Blog. 2-5 Feb 16. Panama and passage to the Las Perlas Islands.

Tuesday 2 February 2016.

Up early and into the dinghy to the marina where we joined other ARC crews to go on a tour of the City of Panama. Our guide began by explaining that the town/city had first been founded by the Spanish in 1519 as a port to receive the treasures of Peru and then dispatch them across the isthmus via the

Camino Real to Porto Bello or the Camino de Cruces to Cruces then down the Chagres River to Spanish fortified port of San Lorenzo founded in 1596 at the mouth of the Chagres. From these ports great fleets took the treasure back to Spain.

A century and half later the notorious pirate of the Caribbean Captain Morgan in 1668 seized and sacked the port of Porto Bello gaining vast quantities of Spanish treasure. In 1671 he captured the port of San Lorenzo and in 8 days he and 1000 of his men navigated their way up the Chagres River to Cruces and then force marched along the Camino de Cruces to attack the town of Panama. However the Spanish had got wind of his coming and had managed to reload most of the treasure waiting there in the town back on ships which they sent to Peru for safety. The population meanwhile fled into the jungle with their treasures and possessions chased by the pirates. After a fruitless month in Panama Captain Morgan in his frustration set about destroying the town and setting fire to before returning with his men from whence they came. Three years later in 1673 the Spanish rebuilt and fortified the town with a large wall around it a couple of miles or so to the north around a bay. They used as much materials as they could from the ruins of the former town. Today the area is known as "Old Town" with its narrow streets laid out in a grid pattern and its picturesque 18th century buildings which the Panamanian government are now restoring to their former glory.

A significant part of what is Panama City was in the US owned and controlled Canal Zone. A secure border fence delineated what was American soil and what was Panamanian. The Americans built a number of military bases with supporting infrastructure to defend the Canal Zone. The largest of these was Fort Clayton housing some 10,000 military personnel and families on the northern outskirts of the city. The USAF had a base close by called Albrook which has since become Panama City airport. During President Kennedy's term our guide stated that Kennedy had promised that the Panamanian flag might be flown over a school just inside the American sector which was shared by both communities. Hostility against the perceived American "colonialists" had been growing for some time and came to a head in 1964. Protesting students with Panamanian flags tried to scale the border fence to hoist their flag over the school. Molotov cocktails were thrown and the American military became involved. 23 deaths resulted in this incident and was the trigger for the Panamanian government to begin a diplomatic campaign starting among other South American countries and later the world with the aim of taking back the Canal Zone from the "colonialist" Americans. By 1977, such worldwide support for Panama had been gained that President Jimmy Carter was forced to sign an agreement that provided for a 20 year phased handover period from America to Panama of the Canal Zone beginning in 1979. Thus by the end of 1999 all American personnel had withdrawn from the Canal Zone leaving behind them the vast infrastructure they had built and leaving the ownership and administration of the Canal

entirely in the hands of Panama.

Places like the huge Fort Clayton have now become The City of Knowledge in which many private and religious schools and university faculties operate.

The many abandoned married quarters and administrative buildings throughout the Canal Zone have now been acquired and lived in by wealthy Panamanians and expats. We were told the government warmly encourages expats to make their homes in Panama where the income tax rate is only 10% and sales tax 3%.

Shortly after boarding our bus we arrived at what was clearly an exclusive area on a hillside overlooking the city. We were invited to climb to the top of this hill from where the city was spread out below us. We could see below us the City Airport close by and the original Canal Administration Building which is still used today. Beyond these to the north we could see the vast area covered by the old Fort Clayton. To the south west we could make out the Old Town and new bridge taking traffic from the Bridge of the Americas, (now called a Panamanian name,) skirting the Old Town in a wide arch to bring traffic directly into modern downtown Panama. Our guide said that the funding of this bridge which cost \$750M had partly caused the jailing of a Supreme Court judge and four ministers associated with the bridge's funding.

We were told that the government had appointed several internationally respected architects to review the funding of the bridge who came to the conclusion it should only have cost \$250M. Finally while at this vantage point our guide pointed out a 20 storey building which in 1990 was the highest in Panama. It is now totally dwarfed by literally scores of skyscraper with up to 80 stories or more.

We toured round downtown Panama along the waterfront of which much was built on recently reclaimed land. There seemed to be very modern skyscrapers everywhere in the downtown area with several still building. The place gave a feeling of very considerable affluence for some but almost inevitably in other areas of the city we drove round we came across tenement buildings where the poor lived but not in squalor as in some of the large cities in India. At one point in slow moving traffic we were passed slowly by an open truck with music blaring and people pretending to partying like it was going out of fashion in the forward part of the back of the truck and some people dressed as the "Grim Reaper" with skeleton masks in the back. The truck was followed by a number of police cars with lights going but no sirens who were again followed by ambulances also with lights flashing but no sirens. Our guide explained that it was a City initiative to warn all against drink driving just before The Festival of the Sea due to take place shortly.

We saw what remained of the ruins of the original town sacked by Captain

Morgan and then the modern houses and infrastructure left by the Americans. Our tour finished with us being shown around the Old Town of 1673. We all agreed that we should have liked to spend much longer there but the Tour bus had a schedule to keep. It dropped off Steve, Alvaro and I and others at the Albrook Mall, the largest and most modern shopping centre apparently in South America. Donald and Andrew stayed on the bus which returned to the marina from where they took our dinghy back to Lydia in order to bring her in from her anchorage onto a finger pontoon we had managed to book for 24 hrs so we would be alongside for bringing on our last major provisioning before Tahiti.

I won't bore you with our trails in the Albrook Mall and the supermarket we found. Suffice to say we bought among other rations 480 cans of beer since we had almost run out on board and had worked out that we would drink two cans a day for the next 60 days of the voyage. Eventually we thankfully finished and as in Colon the bag packers kindly found a taxi pickup into which we deposited our 5 trolleys' worth of shopping and returned to the marina to face again the conundrum of where everything could be stored. In the evening 2 taxis took the 5 of us to the Fish market and surrounding open air non touristy restaurants to celebrate Andrew's last night before he returned to England and left the 4 of us to sail on to Tahiti. The taxi ride home was a death defying ride by what we analysed later was a teenage cowboy who tried to overcharge us. There appear to be no safety belts in the back of these yellow Toyota taxis and we were seriously hanging on for dear life to the handles above the windows and wondering whether we would get out of the crash which seemed inevitable.

Wednesday 3 February.

This was a quiet day alongside where we filled up with water, handed in our laundry and gas bottle for refill to be returned the next day. Steve, Alvaro and I take a taxi to find a local barber since we were both in need of serious haircuts and then on to the Fruit Market to buy our last perishable fruit before the Galapagos Islands. Our taxi knew exactly where to go for a haircut. Steve and I found ourselves in chairs literally on the street with the clippers, scissors and razors making short work of our locks. I felt rather like a sheep being shorn. Fortunately Alvaro was on hand to translate something of what we were each hoping for. Steve had his beard completely shaved off and looked like a skinhead. I managed to retain some of my hair on top but the back and sides were like a GI's!

Our delightful elderly taxi driver accompanied us round the fruit market which reminded me very much like the ones I had experienced in India. We bought our veg and fruit provisions and returned to Lydia in time to help refuel her and then back to our anchorage outside. Sadly at this stage Andrew departed for the UK so we are now down to the four of us who will sail to Tahiti. The Skipper lead us ashore for a dinner to a good restaurant in walking distance

from the marina.

Thursday 4 February.

This proved a very relaxed day. We went ashore for lunch and had excellent Ceviche (South American speciality of marinated fish in lemon juice). That evening we had all booked along with almost all of the other ARC crews to go on a one and half hour ride on a "Party Bus" arranged by the ARC organisers. Few of any of us had been on a "Party Bus" before but "Nothing venture Nothing gain". At 8.30pm that evening having had a "blotting paper" supper on board we all assembled at the marina to see what was in store for us. In due course two typical old fashioned US mid West school coaches arrived painted black inside and outside with red and blue lights all over on the outside. Inside was all black with all the glass taken out of the windows and fixed on the window ledges were holes in to which to put your polystyrene cup brimming full of rum, coke and ice. A cushioned bench to flop down after John Travolta type dancing was arranged down the length of the coach on either side leaving the centre for dancing. Straps from one side of the coach to the other were arranged across the coach for dancers to hang on to as the bus did a tour of the City. Finally two very large loud speakers were arranged at each end of the bus with the entrance by the driver remaining open to bring in a bit of a draft as we went on our merry way. The bus swayed to and fro with the dancing as we progressed around downtown Panama with the loudest music possible. I am still partially deaf in one ear as a result. The drink flowed and the dancing became more and more uninhibited.

Passing cars who had clearly seen it all before hooted and gave us thumbs up signs as we hung out of the windows with our rum and coke. There is no way "Elph & Safety" would have had a heart attack in the UK but South America is clearly deliciously different. In due course we were on the return journey again marvelling at the sights of the all skyscrapers lit up. Inevitably we got stuck in a traffic jam but as these appeared so common street sellers with food and beer plied their trade in the middle of the traffic going slowly by. Since the rum and coke had run out by this time we went on to Panama beers and anything else they could sell. It was an experience I don't think any us will forget but may be, (unless you are young) may not wish to repeat! The younger crew members of which there must be about 20 decided the party was not over yet so persuaded one of the buses to take them on to the Old Town to continue the party. Steve and Alvaro were our representative in this group and regaled us with most interesting tales the following morning.

Friday 5 February.

We decided not to go to the formally arranged ARC Crew Dinner that night but instead weighed anchor and were sailing off the Las Perlas (The Pearl Islands) with a good wind on our beam creaming along in beautiful weather.

Steve our fisherman caught 4ft Pacific Sierra which is like a mackerel and very

good for eating. Alas we misidentified it as a small barracuda which are not good to eat. We only learnt our mistake when we went for dinner that night. We anchored at the most well known island Contador which apparently is where Panamanian millionaires have their weekend retreats and South American Heads of State meet there since it is easily secured. Unfortunately there were a number of large motor cruisers there playing their own music very loudly. We went ashore and had an excellent dinner at the one hotel where the ARC fleet will rendez vous next Thursday for a beach BBQ before setting off for the Galapagos the next day.

Saturday 6 February.

Unfortunately in hoisting the mainsail the day before a tear developed in the luff. Most of the day was therefore spent at anchor while, Steve who learnt sail repair on the Atlantic ARC, got to work with Alvaro to laboriously stitch it. We are indeed fortunate to have Steve aboard and also with his fishing skills. We decided to stay where we were that night but went ashore for a swim and a beer.

Sunday 7 February.

We weighed anchor after breakfast and sailed down south through the Las Perlas where navigation is decidedly interesting. There are so many inviting islands with lovely white deserted beaches to explore. It is a perfect cruising ground. This afternoon off we have anchored off a lovely little beach on the south of Isla Ampon. There are numerous pelicans flying and diving and also the beautiful frigate birds that look partly like Stukas and partly like Pterodactyls from whence they may well have been descended. There is one small motor cruiser with a French couple living in Panama in our little bay. He came over as he could not get his outboard to start but neither could we. Another perfect sunset in a perfect setting.

Lydia - Lydia's blog 8-17 Feb 2016. Passage from the Las Perlas Islands to the Galapagos Islands.

Monday 8 Feb 2016.

There is no doubt that the Pearl Islands, (Las Perlas, where in former times pearls were gathered from the oyster beds in the area,) is a perfect place for relaxed and interesting cruising with hardly anyone else about. There are many different islands covered with trees, shrubs, undergrowth and often with sandy beaches, often completely uninhabited. Mid morning "Chilli Bee" from Austria arrived and anchored half a mile astern of us. Although we were in a beautiful location, the charts, both paper and digital, were not at all detailed and when we swam we found we only had 6 inches under our keel albeit on a sandy bottom. As a result we weighed anchor mid morning and set off for Playa Brava on the Islas Viverios, a cove which had a tricky entrance between a number of outlying rocks. This island

had a radio mast but like so many islands in this archipelago the Pilot claimed it was uninhabited. However after a swim ashore where I got stung by a jellyfish in almost zero visibility, we discovered a road leading one way to the radio mast but the other way we decided to leave to explore on the morrow. We invited "Alcedo" to join us but she had already anchored previously where we now were and instead went to join "Chilli Bee" at Islas Ampon.

Tuesday 9 Feb 2016.

I did my washing on the after deck first thing before the sun got too hot. Donald decided that we should stay where we are for the rest of the day. Now at low tide we saw the rocks which made this such a tricky entrance. Steve, Alvaro and I went ashore to explore. However before we went inland we were fascinated by the behaviour of a numerous pelicans and cormorants which are all massed together circling and diving almost to the shore having a feeding frenzy, presumably trapping and catching a quantity of plankton or krill.

Steve took a good video of this. We then left the beach and struck left along the road. After about half a mile the road forked left but we took the right fork to see if it led to the sea on the other side of the island. It was very hot and humid. In due course we came across a grass landing strip on our left and on our right what looked like a one story factory building with large rectangular fibre boards stacked up in rows outside. Beyond were three small wooden single story buildings which looked as though they could have been accommodation blocks. After travelling a little further north we came across a shack with a little lean to outside and a container behind which was clearly someone's dwelling. A few minutes later we caught a glimpse of the sea on the north side of the island. Rounding a bend we came across a little community with a covered open sided meeting place which appeared to have a bar inside and three or four people chatting inside who took no notice of us. The accommodation appeared to consist of containers with windows cut in which must have been very hot inside. There were two large tanks for fuel and an elderly fuel bowser with writing indicating it belonged to the State Security Dept. We concluded that the little community was there to service the all important radio mast possibly so Heads of State on Conditora island to the north could communicate with their embassies in Panama. We could see the island to the west of us separated by a channel with many rocks. There was no obvious landing stage here so again we concluded that the road that had forked left earlier on might lead to a landing point from where the community got their stores. We decided to retrace our steps and return aboard.

In the afternoon we were joined by the Finnish yacht Mearra Nieida with 7 aboard. They were planning to anchor alongside us until Donald warned them of the rocks close by which were then covered. Clearly their charts were even worse than ours. It was at this point the bow thruster suddenly came on for no

reason for a few seconds. On further investigation we found that the forward automatic bilge pump was not working and the bilge had flooded to the stowage beneath the sail locker where the bow thruster was located and had short circuited the bow thruster. We emptied the sail locker of the spare dinghy, hankee and cruising shute to get at the bilge. We pumped out the bilge by hand and did our best to dry out the bow thruster putting WD40 in all places possible. Nigel on cooking for the evening meal and we had spaghetti carbonara but alas no creme fraise.

Wednesday 10 Feb 2016.

Having allowed the bowthruster to dry out overnight, we re-stowed the spare dinghy and sails back in the sail locker and at 9am weighed anchor and set course to return to Conditora which was the RV for the ARC fleet prior to setting off for the Galapagos. On arriving at Conditora and anchoring roughly where we were before, the ARC organisers arranged a drinks and nibbles get together for the fleet that evening on shore, (2 beers but the nibbles never materialised.)

Thursday 11 Feb 16.

We were up early to join in a HASH arranged for the ARC fleet involving a type of hare and hounds with false trails etc around the local area. Donald and Alvaro ran it whereas Steve and I and many of the other ARC crews had an entertaining walk. I got to know Venitia Hurbert from "Alcedo". It turned out she had done the AZAB (Azores and back) single handed in Robertson's Golly, the same yacht that Clare Francis did the OSTAR (Observer Single Handed Trans Atlantic Race) which she and I had taken part in 1976. Venitia knew Clare and also my fellow Royal Marine competitor also in a Contessa 26, Richard Clifford. Small world. Later that afternoon we had a "Skippers' Briefing" giving us details of the Start the next day for the race to the Galapagos, what to expect in the Galapagos and weather briefings etc. At 7pm that evening the ARC arranged a BBQ on the beach for all crews and Prize Giving for the last race from Santa Marta to the San Blas islands. To our great surprise, (because we only sailed with the yankee and delayed our arrival at San Blas to be sure we were in daylight,) Lydia gained a 3rd place prize in class. Who knows what we might do if we really try!

Friday 12 Feb 2016.

Again up early to take rubbish ashore and return forms to the ARC. Secure dinghy and outboard and set yankee for start at 1100. Several yachts decide to leave early in order to get good anchorages at San Cristobal. The wind is on our beam so to begin with for the first few miles to get round the top of the Las Perlas islands before heading south with the wind astern to the Galapagos we sailed on the yankee alone with no main. As a result we were almost last until we "turned the corner", hoisted the hankee thus sailing with twin headsails with the wind of 20knots on our stern.

Having now a much larger combined sail area than a spinnaker and main together, Lydia picked up her skirts and flew. It was most satisfying to see during that afternoon and evening how we caught up and overhauled several yachts which had earlier been several miles ahead. Before midnight we had crossed the busy shipping separation lanes heading for the Panama Canal without mishap.

Saturday 13 Feb 2016.

Whereas the majority of the ARC fleet followed the guidance in the Panama Pilot advising to gain best wind in the doldrums to sail south crossing the equator at 84 degrees West then head south west for the Galapagos, Corango skippered by Peter Forbes and Alcedo followed Peter's Special Advisor's advice and followed the rhumb line. We continued to make excellent progress bowling along at 8-10 knots with the wind often reaching 25knots. In spite of our slow start we made 190 miles in our first 24 hrs. Just before midnight we saw the Malpelos Rocks light about 4 miles to port. Corango meanwhile reported a lack of wind and was motoring.

Sunday 14 Feb 2016.

As Net Contoller for the day Donald wished the ARC fleet a very happy Valentine's Day. Our crew had previously made arrangement for flowers to be sent to our nearest and dearest. Another rollicking day's sail with the wind increasing to 25-30 knots at times so we were surfing down the large waves but never in danger of being pooped. We did 205 miles in 24hrs making it a record day's sail for Lydia. Late in the afternoon we received a warning from Mearra Nieida a few miles ahead, of logs in the water, some of which were just below the surface. Later we identified some fairly close as seagulls were standing on them. Not good things to hit especially at night doing 8-10 knots! Memories of the film "All is lost" starring Robert Redfern.

Monday 15 Feb 2016.

In the early hours of the morning the wind dropped considerably down to 10 knots or less. Donald decided to furl the yankee and take down the hankee.

04.30 All hands on deck under spreader lights to take down both spinnaker poles. We then motor sailing 240 degrees for San Cristobal. By 7.30 the wind had picked up sufficiently sail with full main, staysail and yankee. Since most of our washing had had to be taken in off the guard rails where they were drying when we dropped the spinnaker poles in darkness, Donald suggested stringing line across the backstays as a better place to complete the drying of the washing which worked very well. Mid morning the all important generator stopped owing to overheating. We tracked down the problem to a broken impeller which fortunately we were able to replace with a spare and all was then well again. The wind and sea continued to calm down during the afternoon and evening so as the moon came out we are sailing at about 7 knots on gentle undulating seas in perfect champagne sailing conditions. In

the previous 24hrs we logged only 150 miles but still making good progress.

Tuesday 16 Feb 2016.

At about 3am I heard the yankee and staysail being furled and the engine started as we had no wind and the sea was glassy without a ripple. At about 5am still dark Steve on watch spotted the lights of a group of fishing vessels to port which were not on AIS. It just underlined that it is still vital to keep a good visual lookout and not rely on AIS to identify other vessels. At 10.15 we crossed the Equator and celebrated with glasses of cold Cava all round. Steve and I then set about rationalising and making a upto date list of all the food we have aboard so we are ready for the big provisioning before we start on the "Big Hop".

Wednesday 17 Feb 2016.

As dawn breaks we see looming out of the mist the dramatic north west coast of San Cristobal island in the Galapagos. The landscape unfolding before us looks something our of HG Well's novel "The Lost World" in Brazil. There are number of extinct volcanos rearing up to the sky and the land is covered by green vegetation. Along the shore as we skirt the coast we can see many dangerous reefs with great rollers breaking over them. Landing on such a coast looked well nye impossible. Ahead of us to starboard we saw the impressive volcanic plug of the Lion (or Kicker) Rock as a small steep sided island of rock rearing out straight out of the sea on its own. On the AIS we now saw a procession of ARC yachts all converging down the coast to the Finish Line off the port of Baquerizo Morena. ARC yachts Corengo and Into the Blue who started before the race are already anchored in the harbour. Spirit V who is the fastest yacht in the fleet and Aliena are the first yachts in the race to finish. We cross the Finish Line at 12.05 and continued motoring into the harbour where we had to anchor carefully among other yachts and put out a stern kedge anchor as well. This operation required hailing a water taxi to take out our kedge and drop it when required. However the water taxi driver placed it a little too close to a large mooring buoy to which a fishing boat was moored which was to have consequences when we weighed anchor for Isabella a few days later.

Formal entry into the Galapagos is not simple, particularly for yachts.

Fortunately the ARC organisation helped greatly. As a yacht you may only visit three islands including San Cristobal which has to be your port of entry and Santa Cruz which has to be your port of departure. Each crew member has to pay US\$120 as an entry fee and cruising permit. Before the crew can go ashore the yacht has to be cleared by a small army of officials.

The first hoop was to have official divers down to check Lydia was clean in every respect of barnacles etc. That morning seeing some weed on the rudder which had not been antifouled, Donald had dived over the side and scrubbed off the offending weed. We had taken the procaution as advised to have Lydia hauled out in Shelter Bay at the beginning of the Panama Canal in order that

she could be professionally scrubbed clean. As a result we received a good chit from the divers. However one of our yachts who had simply hired a diver in Shelter Bay to clean their bottom was found to still have several barnacles on. As a result they were sent out 50 miles from the Galapagos with an official diver on board to ensure their yacht was squeaky clean before it was allowed to return to harbour. Having passed our divers' test we were boarded by about 7 officials in various uniforms who took all the entry forms we had completed, checked our passports again, then checked our medical bag for any out of date medicines, then checked our food lockers as we were not allowed to bring in such things as fresh oranges, opened meat of any kind or fresh milk and our tinned food was checked to ensure it was in date. We had to have official notices, (fortunately provided by the ARC) deliniating which were our recycle waste bags and which were organic etc etc. Fortunately although most this first inspection team had a smattering or more of English, Donald and naturally Alvaro spoke fluent Spanish which helped greatly. Alvaro who is young fit and handsome charmed the three lady officials who insisted in having their photos taken with them. Officially we still needed an inspection from a second team to check our yacht's equipment before we were allowed clearance to go ashore. Although the officials were working overtime it became clear that this second team could not visit us and give us final clearance until the following morning. However the first Customs Clearance team leader, very unofficially said we could go ashore that evening but not to divulge this to anyone. We hailed a watertaxi (US\$1 each way) and had a good dinner ashore.

With all good wishes from the crew of Lydia, Nigel

Lydia - Lydia's Blog. 26 Feb - 3 Mar 2016. Santa Cruz to Start Leg 4.

<div style="float:right">04 March 2016</div>

Friday 26 Feb 2016.

We arrived the evening before at Puerto Ayora, the main town on Santa Cruz and capital of the Galapagos and anchored with the rest of the World ARC yachts stern to the little harbour with bow and stern anchors. The water taxis were plentiful and we could see immediately it was a much larger town with a population of 5,000 than the main ports of San Cristobal and Isabela and clearly much going on.

We sallied forth to the town with Alvaro and Nigel charged with restocking our

provisions for the month or so crossing of the Pacific to the Marquesas. If you have little experience in provisioning for this type of passage you only know if you have stocked sufficient if the crew do not go hungry with weeks to a landfall and then start eying you up for the pot. To avoid this situation we bought 36 tins mainly of veg and fruit and hope all will be well. Interestingly the meat, chicken etc that we first bought deep frozen in St Lucia is lasting remarkably well and the restocking of these items we did in Panama means that our freezer is still pretty full and might last us to Tahiti.

In the meantime we booked an excursion to the Highlands of Santa Cruz for Saturday and Nigel book two dives for himself for the Sunday but required a medical. Alas no one else on the crew had done sub-aqua to join him. That evening we sampled the culinary delights of Santa Cruz going to a back street behind the main esplanade where there are many restaurants. Consequently the street has been closed to traffic and all the tables and chairs are arranged to suit customers in the middle of the street opposite the restaurant the customer chose. It was a very friendly atmosphere where we met up with many other crews from the World ARC and joined tables.

Saturday 27 Feb 2016.

We went ashore early in order to go to the Saturday Fruit and Veg market in town which opens at 4am and sells everything in season. Alas oranges and mangos were not in season which makes one realise how spoilt we are with Waitrose. On returning to Lydia we found Ben from Wishanger 2, who is an electronic genius, helping Donald to repair the Bow Thruster which had inadvertently been previously soaked in sea water. This had worried Donald for many days but Ben found the answer which was a relief and pleased Donald greatly.

That afternoon Donald, Steve and Nigel took a tour with a guide to the interior of the island. Alvaro had met up with an old school friend from Spain, Jaime, so they went elsewhere. Our first stop was to view the small but impressive volcano craters in the centre of the island. Our guide explained that there were many like these all over the island. It was possible to walk round the edges which had sheer drops of about 300 feet. Birds were everywhere to be seen including Galapagos doves, at least 4 species of Galapagos finches of which there are about 13 species still extant on the islands. Santa Cruz island has the largest number of different species of finch each with its specially adapted beak for the particular food they eat. The forests surrounding the craters had sceleosis trees indigenous to the Galapagos. They grow from 5 to 15 meters

tall and have lichen like growths hanging from their branches. The trees gave the impression of being part of a primeval forest of the dinosaur age. Unfortunately these trees are now in danger of being lost to the islands owing to a very invasive bramble which bears no fruit which has been inadvertently imported. Great efforts are being made to eradicate this pest but it is proving an uphill struggle. From there we drove through an isolated village down a dirt track until we eventually arrived at the giant tortoise sanctuary. The tortoises here were not enclosed but free to wander although fed when required. We saw several giant tortoises including the shells of two enormous tortoises. Our guide explained that the government was doing what it can to curb the predators of tortoises such as wild dogs, goats, pigs, donkeys and rats. In several islands wild dogs, goats and pigs have been destroyed to heighten tortoise survival. At present it is estimated Santa Cruz has about 1,200 tortoises in the wild and Isabela and San Cristobal about 800 each. Our last stop on the tour was a lava tunnel about 400 metres long with one point so narrow that you had to crawl through either on hands and knees or on your stomach. Our guide said that in the north of the island there were lava tunnels which went on for 3 miles but for health and safety reasons they were not open to the public. Needless to say unlike our limestone caves these tunnels had not stalactites or stalagmites.

On our way back our guide passed on his understanding, (later corroborated by another previous guide), that the Ecuadorian government is planning to increase the tourist tax on landing in the Galapagos Islands from US\$120.00 per person to US\$2,000 possibly as early as June this year. Currently we came across many backpackers and others staying in inexpensive accommodation all of whom may not be able to afford this swinging new tax if indeed it is introduced.

The rationale is that the Ecuadorian government is facing economic difficulties with the price of oil so low and wishes to increase its revenue from tourists but still restricting tourist numbers. In future it is thus possible if all this comes to pass that visiting the Galapagos will be only for the very wealthy and at the same time may kill off many small businesses here.

Sunday 28 Feb 2016.

While Steve and Alvaro went off to Tortuga Beach, probably the finest stretch of white sandy beach on the island and I went diving, our skipper Donald, leading from the front, stayed aboard and cleaned Lydia from top to bottom. His idle crew felt duly chastened.

Nigel's diving excursion to the island of Floreana just to the south of Santa Cruz, took about an hour and half to arrive at by high speed launch with eight other divers on board. At the first dive site we all jumped into the water split between 4 and one instructor including me and 5 experienced divers and the other instructor. At 16 meters we saw rays, even a manta ray, angel fish, damsel fish a stone fish and even a white tipped shark but no hammerheads. There were countless other interesting, colourful fish and starfish all of which our instructor took photos and video footage. When we surfaced someone noticed that Nigel was bleeding from his right ear which had been painful while trying to equalise pressure. Our second dive which was a drift dive along a sheer volcanic rock wall, Nigel elected to snorkel and follow the divers below in crystal clear water. We saw many of the same fish but also a very large lobster and sealions who wanted to play. At one point one of the divers stopped and lay down with another diver beside her with both passing written messages on an underwater marker board. The whole dive stopped and gathered round. I became concerned especially when the two divers took out their demand valves and I thought were about to perform mouth to mouth resuscitation.

Nigel feared something serious might had gone wrong and was about to summon the dive boat. However, the two divers kissed, there was much back slapping and the dive continued. When we all surfaced and got back to the dive boat we learnt that the middle aged Canadian couple whom I had met earlier, were not married and what we all witnessed was the man's pre planned marriage proposal to her of which she knew nothing previously, and her joyous acceptance!

That evening when Steve, Alvaro and Nigel rejoined Donald on Lydia, we invited the crew of Wishanger 2 to join us for a Rum Punch on board (a la Matthew!) and an excellent time was had by all. Afterwards we then all trooped ashore to join forces with others in the "Restaurant Street" for supper.

Monday 29 Feb 2016.

Alvaro kindly accompanied me to the local doctor and explained about my ear problem. I learnt that the ear drum was not perforated but infected so antibiotics were prescribed.

Alvaro and Steve went off to Tortuga Beach. I went off to meet Steve Feast and Belinda Beatty for lunch who we had first met when they were crewing on

Belafonte. The owners of Belafonte had decided they wished to sail the Pacific as a couple on their own so Steve and Belinda were flying to Marquesas and hoped to meet up with us in due course.

At 5pm I accompanied Donald to the Skippers' Briefing for Leg 4 of the Rally from the Galapagos to the Marquesas, a journey of a minimum of 4 weeks. We were given instructions about the Start on Wednesday midday, advice about the winds and weather to expect plus radio broadcasting. We then went on to join Steve and Alvaro at the restaurant where Rally Control had their base to be given a drink and then presentation of prizes for Leg 3 from Las Perlas to San Cristobal. Alas because we ran out of wind and had to motor the last 36 hours our penalty points were such that we had no chance of winning a prize. After this event all World ARC crews went off to attend an World ARC sponsored full sit down dinner. We split up as much as we could since half the fun of such events is getting to know other crew members on the rally. We teamed up with Sally and Jane from "Alcedo" and Kathryn from "Into the Blue". All three ladies were excellent company and had all led such interesting lives. The evening was most enjoyable in every way and was one of the social highlights of our visit to the Galapagos Islands.

Tuesday 1 March 2016.

Steve and I go off last minute fruit and vege shopping. I checked in with the doctor again who said things were going to plan and the antibiotics were working. After this I went off to visit the Charles Darwin Centre (CDC) on the outskirts of Puerto Ayora. Unfortunately the main exhibition centre was being redeveloped but I saw the rare Red land iguanas, learnt about the considerable international research that is being undertaken to conserve as many of the indigenous plants and animals as possible.

The finches are being attacked by a particular kind of fly that lays eggs in fledgling nests causing the young birds to be deformed and often die. I also saw another tortoise and turtle conservation/breeding centre. When the renovation work is done the CDC will be well worth visiting but at present it was underwhelming. Afterwards I went off to meet Steve Feast and Belinda Beatty for lunch who we had first met when they were crewing on Belafonte. The owners of Belafonte had decided they wished to sail the Pacific as a couple on their own so Steve and Belinda were flying to Marquesas and hoped to meet up with us in due course.

Alvaro had spent the day visiting 3 islands for snorkelling with his friend Jaime. He said they saw hammerhead sharks, white tip sharks, penguins, manta rays etc. The Galapagos is undoubtedly a perfect place for anyone interested in aquatic tropical wild life as well as the indigenous giant tortoises, bird life and iguanas.

That evening Lydia's crew joined up with the crew of Into the Blue for a final night ashore before the great "Off" on the morrow. One of the plus points of the World ARC is the interesting and very pleasant people you meet participating with you.

Wednesday 2 March.

All crews on the World ARC are required to gain clearance from the Galapagos Immigration authorities so we all walk up to their office near the main market from 7am onwards. On the way back we bought some last minute provisions before weighing anchor at 11.30 and setting off from the Start Line just outside the harbour at midday.

To begin with there was a reasonable land breeze so we tramped along sailing at 7 knots South West with full main, yankee and staysail. Alas by 4pm in company with Into the Blue the wind had dropped and we both called it a day and took down the Cruising Chute we had hoisted in the early afternoon.

However there was some compensation. We suddenly saw close to a large whale surface lazily about 100 yards off our starboard bow. Shortly after we saw one or more horned rays breaking the surface. Probably the same whale surfaced some minutes later well astern of us spouting before plunging to the deep again. For the rest of that evening and night the whole World ARC fleet spread out over 20 miles were all motoring South West to try and find the South Easterly trade winds round about 5 degrees south of the equator.

Thursday 3 March 2016.

A pleasant but uneventful day steadily motoring at 5 knots South West but by then with only two or three other yachts in sight. In our first 24hrs we did 136 mile.

Friday 4 March 2016.

We had some rain in the early hours of the morning and learnt that those few yachts ahead of us had found a little wind from the South East and were

beginning to sail. In our second 24 hours against a head wind at time only made 111 miles.

Lydia - Lydia's Blog. 4-14 March 2016. Half way to Marquasas.

Friday 4 March 2016.

3rd day at sea and still in Doldrums. Managed to sail for 2 hours but rest motor sailing SW at 6 knots in company with most of the fleet. 1200. Lat 04d 10'S Long 092d 35'W. What little wind from SW! Beautiful starlit night.

Saturday 5 March 2016.

Lots of phosphorescence in water, Moon rises 4am 1/3 waning. 0600 a little wind from SE 6 knots so engine off and sail until 0915. Engine on again to keep momentum. 1100 tried chute but not comfortable. Noon Lat 05d 46'S Long 093d 52'W. Leaders of ARC fleet now about 50 miles to north and 80 miles to west. Continue motoring course SW to follow Pilot Guide that advises SE Trades will start at 7-8d South.

Sunday 6 March 2016.

A day of large rain storm all around of which we passed through on edge. 0730 engine off with SE 5 knots of wind which increases to 6-7 knots by 10.30. Noon Lat 06d 55'S Long 95d 38'W. Plan to continue to sail SW in hope that wind and weather stabilise to SE Trades.

Monday 7 March 2016.

Have full main up reefed to first spreader with yankee bowling along doing 6-7 knots in 15 knots wind from SE. Noon. Lat 08.01'S Long 97d 56'W. Spirit V which started 2 days before and is fastest yacht in fleet reported to be over half way with 1100 miles to go. We are still at 98d W with 2450 miles to go! ARC try evening roll call at 2100 because of "Skip Distance". Not a success.

Tuesday 8 March 2016.

Bowling along on a broad reach at 7 knots steering 260d. After breakfast I lashed myself on to do my washing on the after deck balancing a bucket of fresh water between my knees with the lanyard to my lifejacket taut to stop me careering over the side each time Lydia rolled. For 11 items of washing, one in soapy water and 3 rinses took 2 hours but made a very good physical work out! We knew the automatic forward bilge pump was not working so ever since we arrived at the Galapagos I had used the manual pump for the forward bilge located in the forward cabin. Today it took 200 pumps to clear the bilge and then only 5 hours later another 100 pumps. Clearly something was wrong and we worried that may be we had sprung a leak. We emptied the forward sail locker and Donald unscrewed the floor of the locker to get to the

bilge below and check for damage and a leak. To our relief and surprise we discovered that the overflow from the forward port side fresh water tank surprisingly went into the bilge! Noon. Lat 08d 26'S Long 100d 47'W. A good day's run noon to noon of 163 miles.

Wednesday 9 March 2016.

A beautiful cloudless day with wind of 15 knots from SE and full main yankee and staysail. Perfect day's sailing. Noon. Lat 08d 40'S Long 103.22'W. Notice that gas was turning itself off intermittently. Noon to noon 167 miles. Sunset was unforgettable with the entire horizon of 360d becoming a halo of pink. By 1800 the wind and waves began to rise so we reefed the main and furled the staysail for the night.

Thursday 10 March 2016.

Another beautiful day. The wind had died slowly so we increased to full main, yankee and staysail. Problems of the gas continue which makes it challenging for the cooks. Try changing gas bottles and check solinoid in after locker but to no avail. Noon. Lat 08d 58'S Long 106d 15'W. 24hrs sail 173 miles. The high points of these days are lunch with a beer at 1330 and a beer at 1830 followed by dinner at 1900. The cooks, Steve and Alvaro continue to excel themselves and we eat like fighting cocks. My concern is that we are not doing sufficient exercise to warrant the quality and quantity our chefs are producing unless you count the continual need to balance and grab anything to keep stable on yacht which is forever bucking, twisting and pitching.

Friday 11 March 2016.

Wind has dropped sufficiently for us to hoist the cruising chute and we bowl along at 7.5 knots. By the late afternoon the wind has died to 10 knots and has backed slightly so we are on a course of 270d due west. Noon. Lat 09d 31'S Long 108d 53'W. Day's run 160 miles.

Saturday 12 March 2016.

Throughout the early morning the wind has been dying and backing so steering anything from 230-260d to keep wind 60d on our port quarter. 0800 Call all hands to furl yankee, bring down main and rig the two spinnaker poles for Trade Wind sailing with twin foresails. It took us one and half hours to complete the operation. the wind was SE 8 knots and on a course of 289d we made 6 knots. Our intermittent unreliable gas problem persists. Noon. Lat 09d 51'S Long 111d 13'W. Days' run 143 miles. Alvaro cooks very good spag bog using microwave as gas so unreliable.

Sunday 13 March 2016.

Little sleep because of continuous rolling with twin foresails. Wind SE 8-10 knots steering 275-295d. Noon. Lat 9d 44'S Long 113d 24'W. Day's sail 135 miles. Steve cooks excellent chicken curry and rice again mainly using

microwave. Donald changes Ship's Time by going back one hour as we are now in Time Zone 7. This means we shall see the sun rise and set at the more normal times of 0600 and 1830.

Monday 14 March 2016.

On morning watch with wind vane steering between 270-300d. Donald puts us back on self steering and resets the hankey so we are now steering 270d but as wind now at 17-20 knots (just what we need) and backing slightly we steer 275d. The gas still is a major problem and we miss our morning teas. Donald goes down to the gas locker in the stern and bypasses the solenoid which we all think is causing the problems. The gas now works but we will be returning to traditional yacht rules with the gas being turned on and off at the bottle in the stern. Tea at last! Noon. Lat 09d 24'S Long 115d 44'W. Cse 275d. Wind 10-12 knots SE with lumpy sea. Day's run 155 miles.

Lydia - Lydia's Blog. 15-21 March 2016. Nearly across the Pacific.

Tuesday 15 March 2016.

Another beautiful day with twin headsails (yankee and hankee) still driving us forward with a SE 18-20 knots from astern. After breakfast Donald sets the staysail which has the effect of helping to funnel the wind into the yankee and decrease the continuous rolling. Alvaro did his washing on the after deck and amused the rest of the crew by his gyrations trying to keep himself stable and his bucket of washing on a equally gyrating deck! At noon our Lat 08d 59' S Long 119d 02'W with the day's run of 176 miles and 1175 miles to go with our speed 7.5 knots. It has been agreed that the morning ARC radio round up will be brought forward 1 hour to 1100hrs but to retain the 1800hrs roll call. Still a lumpy sea.

Wednesday 16 March 2016.

Yet another beautiful hot day with clear skies. What we would give to have this weather even on an occasional basis in the UK let alone every day. Today we reached a milestone of having completed 2000 miles of this 3000 mile leg. At noon our Lat was 08d 59'S Long 121d 54' W with the day's run of 175 miles and we are now on the Marquesas's chart. In the evening we celebrated with several strong rum punches all round. We continue to make good progress averaging 7-7.5 knots. On the evening radio call we hear that one of the catamarans with a husband and wife and 3 small boys (10-6) plus a teenage nephew had lost their main steering and were having to use an emergency tiller. They are at least 100 miles behind us so we are unable to help.

Thursday 17 March 2016.

From midnight the wind and the seas rose to 25-30 knots which while pushing

us on our way very well gave us all the most uncomfortable and sleepless night to date. We had to furl in the yankee as we were over canvassed and doing over 8 knots (the yacht's maximum designed speed) on a course of 270d pointing at the Marquesas. At 1.30am Alvaro spotted a large fishing boat ahead all lit up but not on our AIS. As he was possibly fishing Donald spoke to him in Spanish having failed to get a reply in English to ensure our current course passing under 2 miles from him was not going to interfere with his nets. This is the first ship we have seen since leaving the Galapagos. For that matter we have not seen any aircraft even high in the sky at night. The sea was sufficiently angry that unusually a wave broke along the deck running all the way aft and entered Donald's cabin window completely soaking him and his bunk and heads which were awash. On watch myself later that night I saw much lightning from storm clouds ahead of us but fortunately to our leeward. At noon our Lat 09d 09'S Long 124d 55'W day's run 179 miles. Mid morning the independent generator overheated so was shut down and Donald started the main engine to power the batteries.

Friday 18 March 2016.

Beautiful sunrise with stars before very bright and lightning coming from the NW. The wind had dropped to 10-15 knots with so thank goodness we were rolling less. Unlike most yachts who prudently take down their spinnakers at sunset, Lydia with her twin headsails beamed out on spinnaker poles either side can keep them drawing day and night so have an advantage over many other yachts. Our course is 272d which is straight for the Marquesas. Did my washing on the after deck in the morning which acted as a very good physical work out. At noon our Lat 09d 26'S Long 127d 57'W with the day's noon to noon run at a predictable 176 miles. During the morning, Donald in seeking the cause of the generator's failure discovers that a small fuse has blown. Today is the Skipper's 27th Wedding Anniversary marked by an exchange of emails. Alvaro finishes Dr Zivago and I am wading through Pepy's diaries which if you are interested in history are fascinating. Steve is reading a History of Modern France.

Saturday 19 March 2016.

Unusually we had a bit of rain first thing in the morning but was followed by another beautiful day of downwind Trade Wind sailing. The wind had risen to 20 knots with consequently increasingly large following seas but with the sun beating down almost directly overhead at midday. At noon our Lat 09d 33'S Long 130d 40'W with our day's run 169 miles and wind ESE 17 knots. Today Lydia is the ARC radio net controller for the last time since we shall not be taking part on the next major leg from Tahiti to Tonga and Fiji. Donald directed that our ship's clocks and our watches to be turned back 1 hour. We now have 505 miles to go.

Sunday 20 March 2016.

During the night/morning watches the moon was waxing so only the brightest

stars could be seen. This was helpful as with a starscope and star map it was easier to identify the constellations that could be seen and their principal stars with such romantic names as Sirius, Rigel, Bellatrix and Procyon. Another beautiful day with fluffy white clouds and the sea a deep blue. Donald solves the generator problem by replacing the dead fuse with a small aluminum strip. At noon we were at Lat 09d 55'S Long 133d 33'W and a day's run of 169 miles. Wind SE 10-15 knots following a course of 270d T. As you can imagine as we have been sailing this course or thereabouts for the last two weeks and thus have been sailing into the westering sun so the sunsets we have witnessed have often been spectacular but alas we have never seen the fabled "Green Flash". As I turn in for the night I note we have 270 miles to run to Hiva Oa so we should be there by Wednesday at the latest or possibly Tuesday midday.

Monday 21 March 2016.

The first day of Spring, the Vernal Equinox with the sun being directly overhead the Equator, and..my 72nd birthday! On my 70th I never dreamt that I might one day have the chance to take part in this amazing voyage. Carpe Diem. According to the fleet's latest position reports at morning roll call we have a slim chance of being 3rd in our Class. We have to beat Ain't Fancy a 38ft yacht sailed by a most charming German couple by about. They came 2nd in Leg 3 from Las Perlas to Galapagos so we very much hope we may be in with a chance. Wind remains steady East 15 knots. At noon we were at Lat 09d 39'S Long 136d 00'W with 166 miles to our destination.

Reading through the blog entries above, I feel somehow that they are a little too factual and anodyne and do not convey what it may feel like as you sail across this very wide ocean day after day. Thus the remainder of this blog is a purely personal perspective on our Pacific crossing which experienced sailors should skip while some others may find interesting.

When I was lucky enough to be selected for this voyage in late November, I had never done Trade Wind sailing. In all my previous sailing experience we had at some stage met gale force winds and high seas, more often than not going into the wind close hauled and on one or two trips, for quite some time. I like many of my non sailing friends were concerned that in 3000 miles of the Pacific, particularly in this "Godzilla" El Nino year we could well meet with high seas and at the very least a gale or two or heaven forbid a Tropical Storm. It was therefore with some trepidation I embarked on this voyage. As it has turned out to date the most winds and high seas we have experienced was finishing Leg 1 just before reaching the sanctuary of Santa Marta in Colombia. Here for a few hours we had winds of up to 40 knots occasionally gusting more and high seas. Similarly leaving Santa Marta we experienced much the same conditions (so much so that the Port Captain refused to allow the ARC fleet to leave port for one day.) However, since we left St Lucia until now the wind and seas have always been astern of us so it had been "down hill"

sailing all the way which is as unusual for most sailors as it is luxurious. The challenge of beating across the Pacific from West to East into 20 knots or more of wind and big seas would be an altogether different experience. OK, so what has this crossing been like? Apart from the first two or three days when we motored on and off to clear the Doldrums we have had the SE Trade winds on our stern all the time. In fact for the last 9 days we have been flying our twin headsails and balancing staysail continuously and as a result have caught up and in many cases overhauled those yachts that had got ahead of us in the first week. In summary our Pacific crossing has been some of the most pleasant and easiest sailing I have ever experienced and contrary to what I was expecting. It explains why at least 3 yachts have children on board, some as young as 4.

What has been a challenge on Lydia is her inevitable continual rolling 30 degrees one way and then the other which makes everything from moving around to cooking to sleeping a challenge. The other thing I had forgotten was how salty and sticky one's body, clothes and the sheets one sleep on become in this very warm salt air even having the luxury of a short shower every day or two. These minor irritants are as nothing compared to spectacular views of the skies at night, sailing along the silvery path of the moon, watching the first pale denizens of dawn come up with changing colours of mauve, pink and gold before the sun in all its glory and heat arises from the eastern ocean. Similarly as we have been continually sailing west, we have been sailing into the golden path of the sun and admired at eventide the unforgettably beautiful sunsets.

Over a period of 3 months in a confined space one might expect personal frictions to develop. However, I have to say on Lydia we are a most harmonious crew albeit all with very different personalities. I have only witnessed one slight loss of temper for which was apologised immediately with no offence taken. Sailing these long distances without sight of land or other ships one slips almost unconsciously into a daily routine and the days seem to go by without realising it. We all stand watches 9-midnight, midnight to 3, 3 to 6 and 6 to 9. Most of those not on watch surface about 8ish, have breakfast and come and sit or read in the cockpit. Donald takes the 10am ARC radio roll call and the next major event is about 1230-1pm with a beer before a healthy salad lunch cooked by either Steve or Alvaro who are both very good cooks and enjoy it. I always do the washing up which believe it or not I also enjoy. Donald stands watch after lunch until 4pm when I relieve him. He takes the 6pm ARC radio roll call after which we all assemble in the cockpit for another beer and watch the sunset. (We bought 470 cans in Panama which may need a replen before Tahiti!) Supper, which often comes with a tinned fruit salad pudding, is taken in the cockpit at about 7.30 after which we prepare to go into formal watch routines.

With the advent of reliable chart plotters where much of the navigation is done

for you, (no need for sun run sun sextant sights) and a self steering gear where all you have to do is dial in the course you want and simply vary it slightly as the wind dictates while lying back enjoying the sun and sea from the centre cockpit. This is really relaxing and nothing like sailing in blustery conditions in fog around the south coast of England. This has all so far been so much less challenging and more enjoyable than I expected that I am not sure whether to tell the whole truth when friends on our return may be so admiring of our supposed courage and adventurous spirit in facing what at first sight could be a most challenging voyage. I would strongly recommend for deep sea sailors and others not so experienced, going on a World ARC as something to put down on one's "Bucket List".

With best wishes from Donald and his crew on Lydia, Nigel

Lydia - Lydia's Blog. 21-27 March 2016. Isles Marquises. Hiva Oa and Tahuata.

04 April 2016

Monday 21 March 2016.

The previous blog was sent shortly after midday on 21 March so this is just to add what happened that evening and night. At sundown we celebrated Nigel's birthday with small eats and a specially chilled bottle of Moet Chandon champagne. Sailing into the setting sun with the sky and clouds slowly changing from bluish white to gold then pink then crimson while drinking champagne was a perfect way to celebrate our last evening before completing our crossing of the Pacific. Shortly after an excellent curried chicken dinner, (one of my favourites), we suddenly noticed the hankee foresail appeared to have become very loose. Having turned on the spreader lights and hooked on life line to inspect, we discovered that the tack metal fixing holding the spare forestay on which the hankee was hoisted had come apart. We managed to tie down the tack using a spare spinnaker sheet to the bow fitting so it would last jury rigged until we arrived at Hiva Oa the next day.

Tuesday 22 March 2016.

Our last day crossing the Pacific. Shortly after breakfast a yacht appeared on our AIS screen, the first we had seen since we had left the Galapagos Islands. It turned out to be the ARC catamaran Zoom about 9 miles ahead of us. At 10am we first saw the high peaks of Hiva Oa slowly becoming visible on the horizon out of the heat haze. It was our first sight of the Marquesas and a most welcome one. As we drew closer the wind increased and the seas rose. Donald decided as we came abreast of the eastern end of the island to take down the hankee and the two spinnaker poles of our foresails in case we encountered even higher winds coming down from the mountains of Hiva Oa. In relatively calm seas this is a complicated manoeuvre at the best of times

but in winds of Force 5 and lumpy seas it was an altogether more hairy task. On several occasions the self tacking staysail nearly knocked me overboard although I was naturally securely attached by lifeline. In letting down the hankee in these winds I got rope burns purely because I had failed to put on gloves first. Nil points!

By early afternoon under yankee alone we crossed the Finishing Line at Atuona harbour having done the crossing of 3,105 miles in 20 days at an average speed of 6.5 knots. In the little harbour, although crowded with other ARC yachts arriving before us, we nevertheless found an ideal spot, anchored fore and aft and went thankfully ashore to sign in and receive the traditional welcome of very pretty flowered garlands around our necks. After we had cleaned up we went ashore and joined the crew of Alcedo for some happy hour beers and finally to a restaurant whose single pizzas were not only most tasty but also so large we had to ask for a pizza box for all the slices that we simply could not eat.

Wednesday 23 March 2016.

After getting up late we completed our entrance clearance formalities and walked the 40 minutes in the heat into town. We notice flags at half mast and on enquiring the reason were told of recent bombs in Brussels which had killed many and injured many more. We were appalled but realised how totally cut off from the real world we have been for so many weeks. Paul Gaugin died on Hiva Oa in 1903. We visited his grave in the peaceful little cemetery on high ground overlooking the bay and the other islands beyond. We had lunch with the ex cavalry crew from Corango who are all such fun at the Make Make cafe. For dinner that night Donald and I went to a smart hotel with an Infinity Pool where we joined the ARC crews of Ain't Fancy (Dirk and Bettina) and Maeva Maris from Switzerland.

Thursday 24 March 2016.

We discovered that the all important pin holding the boom on to the gooseneck of the mast had managed to work itself free thus rendering the boom and mainsail useless. First thing that morning we tackled the problem. It took 2 hours of great persistence and ingenuity playing with raising the boom, changing its angle etc etc to coax the pin back into its hole, but succeed we finally did. In going ashore in the dinghy we dropped its little stern anchor first so once moored the waves would not batter the dinghy against the rocky landing area. We hired a car (Toyota Hilux) for the day to explore the island. On advice from Alcedo's crew we took the road to the little airport then right at the only round about on the island before heading north to the coast. The road went from tarmac to concrete and eventually to packed shale. Only a really strong 4 wheel drive could have taken these roads or tracks. Once we arrived at the north coast the road wound its way eastwards very steeply up and down with precipitous drops on the north side going straight down to the sea. The views of the rugged cliffs, coast and sea with the waves crashing on rocks far

below were spectacular to say the least and well worth every minute of the one and half hour drive to the final little settlement at the end of the road. Here an enterprising woman ran a small cafe which offered a sufficient but limited menu, no alcohol. After lunch we drove half a mile inland to explore and view one of the best preserved and most ancient Tiki religious sites in Polynesia set at the base of a semi circle of impressively steeply rising mountains. In due course we returned amazed at the battering on those roads/tracks a hire car could take. On returning to Lydia we found we could not raise the little stern anchor which was stuck fast to we had to leave its line attached to the shore.

Good Friday 25 March 2016.

We went ashore to collect our laundry. Since we still had the car until 10am we drove into town to collect some more fresh fruit and cash. On return we still faced the problem of the stern anchor which refused to budge. Rather than cut the rope and lose the anchor, Alvaro gallantly agreed to swim down and see if he could dislodge it. No sooner was he down a few feet when the anchor saw a determined Alvaro coming for it and promptly released itself! Once all aboard Lydia we weighed anchor and set sail for Stephen's Bay on the north west side of Tahuata Island to the south. In due course we entered the beautiful little sheltered bay there with crystal clear waters, a good sandy beach and anchored to join several other ARC yachts among them our old friends Into the Blue, Chilli Bee, Zoom, Wishhanger 2 and Paradise Found. In due course Laura and Kathry from Into the Blue swam over to us looking like gorgeous mermaids and were immediately invited aboard for G&Ts. We invited their parents Andy and Gina from Norfolk for drinks that evening and also the charming Austrian couple Hubert and Margrit with their niece Sylvia. A jolly time was had by all rocking gently in the evening swell under a starlit sky. After this we were all invited to join Mary Beth and her husband Mike + Jose on their huge Lagoon 600 catamaran Paradise Found for a BYO drinks party for all ARC yachts in the bay. I had never seen over so large an ocean going catamaran and was most impressed. Eventually we all poured ourselves off their yacht to return to our own yachts, fortunately with no police breathalysers in sight.

Easter Saturday 26 March 2016.

Another beautiful day in a paradise island anchorage. Steve, Alvaro and I swam over to the rocky shore nearby for snorkelling. The water and air temperature were perfect and it is undoubtedly going to be difficult to get used to sailing in England again. On returning to Lydia the crew got to work cleaning her waterline which had become very green and weedy since leaving St Lucia. It proved excellent physical exercise scrubbing holding onto a line around the yacht with a mask and snorkel as the waves broke over you. Eventually she looked as good as new and we could hold up our heads alongside Into the Blue whose crew were hard at work on the same task. After lunch we weighed anchor to set sail for Resolution Bay a couple of miles down

the coast where there was a small township and a Roman Catholic church which we planned to attend for Easter Sunday communion. On the way we had to discard all the food we had so carefully stored in the freezer because for whatever reason the freezer was only on half freeze and the remainder of the meat, chicken and sausages we had bought in St Lucia and Panama had alas gone off. On anchoring in Resolution Bay we went ashore, another case of dropping a stern dinghy anchor and making hazardous leaps for the little stone steps on the stone landing place. We discovered there were no restaurants in town, although Donald thought he had found one only to discover it was an extended family having an Easter Saturday private BBQ! We did however find the one shop in the place which was remarkably well stocked. All the locals were very relaxed and more welcoming than on Hiva Oa possibly because they did not see so many visitors. We returned and had drinks with Andy and Gina on their Oyster 56 Into the Blue in which they are taking their immediate family around the world plus boy and girlfriends. That night an inter island cargo ship appeared and anchored in the bay.

Easter Sunday 27 March 2016.

In morning we rose early to get ashore in time for the RC church service at 8am. It was raining. However our landing stage was taken up by a large raft with 2 outboards which was ferrying things from the cargo vessel to the village. In the end the dinghies taking those ARC worshippers just had to drop them quickly but could not tie up on the landing stage so in our case Donald who had not planned on going to church himself kindly took our dinghy back to Lydia. Those not interested in churches or church services please skip the next paragraph.

The church must have been fairly newly built was very pretty. The walls roughly in the form of an A with the altar at the apex of the A were made of local lava stones with a beautifully inlaid wooden roof. The east window with modern stained glass had the Madonna and child as a young Polynesian woman with her naked brown skinned son. There was no piano or organ but a large upright drum on which a woman beat time with her hands. There was the traditional cross which Jesus crucified over the simple altar. The altar area had lovely arrangements of local flowers. On the walls around the church were traditional pictures of the four stations of the cross. The three large double doors of the church were made of local wood with beautiful patterned carvings on them. The lectern was fashioned out of local tree again with carvings and polished so it almost shone. Same for the stand that carried the little "house" containing the communion chalices Although our ARC party comprising Gina and Devla from Into the Blue, Mary Beth from Paradise Found and Claudine from Wishanger 2 plus Steve, Alvaro and me, arrived at 7.50 just as the service was beginning. I rather expected it would be in French and we would all have Missals in our pews. However, the spontaneous prayers and singing were all in Polynesian. There must have been about 40 locals, mainly middle aged women and some children all beautiful dressed mainly in white for

Easter Sunday. The priest and his assistants were all dressed in white robes. There were not service sheets or hymn books but all the congregation clearly knew all the words and the songs/hymns. The singing was some of the most beautiful and harmonious I have ever heard. In the meantime the rain outside came down in a complete deluge, so much so that the no one could hear anything the more man reading the lesson (from the Bible in Polynesian) anything he said. During the service the rain quietened slightly. At the communion stage (which almost all took) I think I could make out what was being said by the priest. The communion was only the wafer but interestingly the priest and his staff did not take communion wine. Overall it was a lovely service with unforgettable singing in a little community on a tiny faraway Polynesian Island in the South Pacific and an Easter Sunday service I shall never forget.

On returning to Lydia after buying some more provisions at the little shop we did necessary chores such as cleaning out the fridge and freezer. Rather than remain in Resolution Bay we decided to return to our original anchorage in Stephen's Bay which was altogether prettier and better for swimming. During the afternoon the gallant crew from Carango paid us a visit and had a beer on board. Peter their skipper had noticed on an ARC leaflet that there was a possibility of "Pig Sticking" provided by Stephen who had a shack and owned Stephen's Bay. Being good ex cavalry men the thought of "Pig Sticking" and memories of the Raj was too good an opportunity to miss so they signed up not quite knowing what to expect. We did know there were pigs on the island and we has seen about 50 beautiful wild horses roaming at the top of the island when we first sailed out from Hiva Oa. As Peter learnt having contacted the fabulous Stephen, the actual "Pig Sticking" on offer was not on horse back with lances but sitting in a tree at night and shooting little pigs as they came to eat fruit, guns not provided! As a result Corango bought their food which Stephen cooked on a BBQ on the beach with some of his own fruit and vege. We had an early night as we planned to weigh anchor at 3am the next morning to sail to Ua-Pou an island about 75 miles to the north.

With all good wishes from the crew of Lydia,
Nigel

Ua Pou. 28 – 30 March 2016.

Monday 28 March 16.

3am "Call the Hands" and weigh anchor with least possible noise. We wafted almost silently like a ghost out of the Stephen's Bay, the beautiful little Tahuata anchorage leaving behind the half dozen or so other yachts whose masthead anchor lights looked like so many fireflies dancing across the water

as we drew away setting course for Ua-Pou, the Marquesa island about 75 miles to the north west. With only 5-7 knots of an ESE wind and a gentle sea we set full main and motor-sailed hoping the wind might increase. As luck would have it the wind remained slight so we continued motor-sailing towards our destination. At 7.30am the visibility was so good we sighted the spectacular outline of Ua-Pou at by then 32 miles distant while still being able to see Tahuata from whence we came and Hiva -Oa. We made such good progress that we entered the little harbour in the Baie de Hakahatau at Ua-Pou and anchored

at 12.30pm. The geography of the island turned out to be the most spectacular of all of the three Marquesa islands we visited. In the centre of the island stood a tall jagged peak almost continuously covered in cloud. Just to the east of it was a vast solitary oval shaped rock plug with what appeared to have sheer sides. The slightly lower hills/mountains were equally craggy and precipitous. They made an interesting contrast to the physical geography of the much younger volcanic islands of the Galapagos with their more gently curved high hills.

The main town faced south at the end of the bay. A mole had been built on the west side of the small bay to provide a place for the inter-island cargo ships to moor to. In fact we saw the local inter island combined passenger/cargo ship come in to unload stores for the island while we were anchored. Work was going on to make another jetty for commercial use in due course. We had to be careful how we anchored as there was little room and the yachts arranged themselves in roughly three rows requiring stern anchors to ensure we all faced the southerly entrance to the bay. Compared to Hiva Oa the dinghy dock was much easier to secure to and did not require a stern anchor. We went ashore to explore the facilities which were adequate but meagre. We returned aboard from our recce to witness Carango, an Amiel yacht with 4 friendly ex cavalry officers on board make a hazardous anchorage just ahead of us. Shortly before Donald and Alvaro had gone in our dinghy to help an elderly French couple who appeared unable to furl their foresail and were in danger of being swept onto the rocks on the side of the bay. Alvaro got aboard and helped save the situation. It is not always easy sailing short handed as you can seldom anticipate all the challenges the sea and fate can throw at you.

In the evening we went ashore again and started to walk in the direction of The centre of the little town where we had heard there was a small restaurant. A local couple driving a somewhat battered pick up stopped and offered us a lift in their open back truck to take us to where he said we could get something to eat. As we were being driven along in the inky blackness not quite knowing where we were being taken, it did cross my mind that while we might be going in the direction of dinner there was the question of whether we might be the dinner. However we were dropped off at a simple but adequate little restaurant where we ate pizzas al fresco while some local young men practiced their

Hakas to the rythm of a deep base upright drum and the young women then practiced their dancing for some forthcoming local event. After a most enjoyable evening we returned on board. It was so hot and humid that Steve and I elected to sleep under the stars on the decks by the shrouds to ensure we did not fall over the side while turning over in our sleep.

Tuesday 29 March 16.

After a sleepless night being concerned about my ear and hearing problems as a result of my dive in the Galapagos, I made the very difficult decision to return to England early to see an ENT specialist. Once Donald confirmed that our first stop in the Tuamotus Islands would be Rangiroa I arranged my flight from there. That afternoon we went ashore, bought more provisions, viewed the church built in the 1980s which had the prow of a ship as the pulpit and like the church in Resolution Bay where we worshipped on Easter Sunday, its lectern was in the shape of a tree carved out of local wood. Later that evening we joined the friendly Austrian crew from Chilli Bee and our old friends from Norfolk sailing Into the Blue at the same little restaurant where we had been the night before. We were again were delightfully entertained by the local young people practicing their Hakas and dancing.

Nuku Hiva 30 March – 3 April 2016

Wednesday 30 March 16.

At 8.30 we weighed anchor and had a lively sail north to the main island of Nuku Hiva with winds of 20-25 knots from ENE with a reefed main and partly furled yankee making 7 knots. By 1300 we came to anchor in the lovely large sheltered bay of Taiohae with the main town Vaitu strung out along the shore and going up behind into the foothills of the mountains surrounding the southern bays. Having anchored and preparing lunch we had a pleasant surprise with Sylvia, (who is a radiographer taking time off to join her aunt and uncle on the Austrian yacht Chilli Bee,) swimming over to welcome us to Nuku Hiva. That evening we dined ashore at a pleasant little restaurant on the waterfront where our two ARC Rally Control officials were residing. We were joined by two members from Corango as sadly the skipper was unwell.

Thursday 31 March 16.

First thing, Donald went ashore to collect his laundry and some last minute shopping. We weighed anchor at 9am and motored over to the Fuelling jetty. Here we had the tricky maneuver of dropping the anchor and then motoring astern to within a few feet of the concrete jetty and securing to a single bollard before heaving the heavy fuel line aboard. After successfully fuelling, we weighed anchor and motored round to the larger Baie du Contoleur two bays up to the north. There we met up with a number of other ARC yachts already anchored in the bay. After a swim to the little sandy beach close by on which a friendly little local family were having a BBQ, we

found that the visibility in water was too cloudy for snorkeling. After lunch we took the dinghy to the end of the lake with the plan to walk to see a local Tiki worship place and possibly a waterfall. We had not gone far down the little road to the local village when we met up with the younger members of the crews from Wishanger and Into the Blue with one tired member being led on horseback by a friendly local. They all looked pretty exhausted since as they explained they had started at 10am to view the waterfall but the journey had taken the best part of three hours each way in the heat of the day. They did advise us seeing the Tike site, about an hour away, with its carved idols like the ones we had seen during our expedition in Hiva Oa.

In due course we came to a little village with shacks/houses on either side of the road, many with 4x4s beside them. The Tiki site was well signposted from the road though the track to it zig-zaging up hill was not. The site when we finally arrived was a little smaller than the one on Hiva Oa but laid out in much the same way with very similar stone carved statues. On our way back we came across the village meeting place laid out just like a Maori Pa in New Zealand. It comprised a grassed flat area like a large bowling green with several statues placed about apparently randomly. On three sides were covered shelters with carved Tiki pillars opening on to the green. As we went by we heard drumming and singing so went to pay a visit. It turned out to be a local family of 10 who were just playing and singing and enjoying themselves and made us most welcome. On our way back to the dinghy we disturbed a colony of land crabs playing in the road but who scuttled back to their holes on hearing our approach. They had white shells about 8 inches wide and pincers with blacklegs. We got back to Lydia just as darkness was falling.

Friday 1 April 16.

We were all up at 7am with threatening overcast skies. By 7.50 we had weighed anchor having secured the outboard on board and the dinghy astern. We motored out of Baie du Controleur and as we did so we saw sheets of heavy rain sweeping in which we had just missed. We motor-sailed on past Taiohae bay and on for a couple of miles or so to Baie Tai Oa, (Daniel's Bay.) On our left side mountains rose almost sheer to 2-3000 feet while on the right side was a hill rising to about 1000feet. Ahead we could see the end of the bay where a small river flowed in on the right and the shacks of a small settlement were visible above as steeply sloping rocky beach. Once we were fully in to this inlet there appeared on our right one of the most beautiful bays we had seen, completely sheltered on all sides. To complete the picture there was a sandy beach at the end of this bay with a clear grassed area behind and bungalow up on the hill a couple of hundred yards from the shore. We anchored with only one other yacht in the bay plus a tourist launch. It began to rain and we could see about 15 tourists taking shelter on a path along the rocky north shore. Our plan was to do the two hour hard tramp to view what we were told was the sixth highest waterfall in the world. It is difficult to do

justice to the beauty of this little bay off the main inlet. We had been told that it had once been used as a film set, hence the foreshore being cleared, levelled and grassed.

Once we had our dinghy ashore we ventured up to the bungalow to ask if we might leave our dinghy tied up on his beach. The very large friendly Polynesian man, (Michael) welcomed us but suggested it might be quicker to get to the waterfall if we went by dinghy to be dropped off in the other bay rather than walking round the edge of his bay which the tourists had done. If only we had followed the tourists! There was a brief lull in the rain so we took advantage of this to go round in the dinghy to the little settlement on the other bay. However when we got to the shore it became apparent that the waves were too large to land the dinghy on the rocks, so Steve, Alvaro and I got out of the dinghy getting soaked but with our rucksacks dry we clambering up the rocky beach while Donald returned to Lydia. The rain then came down in earnest. In fact it became a deluge as we tramped soaked to the skin along the rough path through the little settlement which appeared deserted. The path became more and more waterlogged and more difficult to follow as the rain became heavier

and heavier. We could hear the roar of the river to our right. As the path turned left we came to the place which in normal times it was clearly possible to ford. However, the stream had now become a raging torrent and rising all the time. We could see the path on the other side, presumably going on to the famous waterfall but at this point we had no choice but to turn back. As we tramped back with water now well above our ankles on the path, a large water snake suddenly wiggled away a foot from Alvaro. This caused us concern but we had no choice but to carry on until we had reached the shore where Donald had dropped us. We found shelter in what was probably a communal eating place with tables and benches at which point we had lightning and a massive thunder storm any of us had experienced, all very exhilarating as we watched the river rushing by and rising ever closer to the settlement.

We radioed Donald to request he collected us but he suggested instead we return to Lydia's bay by the path the tourists had taken. We explained we could not cross the river so we agreed to wait until the storm had abated. If we were downcast in failing to reach our waterfall, we were now rewarded by seeing no less than ten waterfalls cascading dramatically down the almost vertical mountains surrounding the bay. We ate a memorable lunch as the rain thundered on the tin roof almost drowning out conversation. At one point a local with tattoos all over his face and body and looking just like a Maori of old, came galloping up bareback on a horse leading another. Once he had tethered the horses he came over to chat and explained (in French) that he had planned to take his family to see the famous waterfall but like us had been blocked by the river.

Once the storm had abated Donald gallantly came out in the dinghy to rescue us. We chose a spot on the beach with the least waves and waded out waist high to throw our rucksacks into the dinghy before swimming out to Donald and clambering aboard when he was clear of the waves. Real Adventure Training! After a shower on deck when we returned to Lydia we weighed anchor and motored out of the bay to get back to our original anchorage by the main town. When we first arrived the water in the bay has been the same colour as the sea but brown just where the little river entered the main inlet. Now the water in both our little bay and the whole inlet was a muddy light brown with flotsam and jetsam in the form of coconuts, branches etc all brought down from the numerous cascades feeding the roaring torrent that the original stream had become. Once out of the bay we were hit by an Easterly wind of 25 gusting 35 knots and driving rain such that it was impossible to see more than a quarter of a mile ahead. We were grateful of the Raymarine chart plotter and Navionics charts.

Just after 5pm we finally anchored in our old position in Toiohae Bay and the main town. We felt that we had been truly "had" by All Fools Day but had thoroughly enjoyed every minute. After all the excitement we decided on a quiet dinner on board and bed rather than attend and ARC arranged "Happy Hour" ashore.

Saturday 2 April 16.

The day started showery but by mid morning had turned sunny again with the storms having blown themselves out and gone elsewhere. In the morning we went ashore for provisions for our forthcoming 500 mile voyage to the Tuamotos. The outboard broke down but Donald finally repaired it with the help of the redoubtable Ben from Wishanger. In the afternoon we went ashore again this time to view the ARC arranged exhibitions by the local population of handicraft making, sampling and making of various local foods such as starfruit and breadfruit which was first cooked over a slow fire then pounded with a lava stone pestle with water added to become like dough then served in coconut milk. All the time a little guitar ensemble played and sang Polynesian songs and music. Local wood and stone hand carvings were on display. It was clear that the local community had gone to much trouble to arrange these things for our benefit and we all greatly appreciated their kindness. As we returned to Lydia we saw, "Tenacious" the 3 masted Sail Training ship for the disabled belonging to the Jubilee Trust hove into sight and anchored in the bay. She was joined by another 3 masted schooner probably also for Sail Training.

At 5pm in a large hall by the waterfront Cameron (an Englishman who sailed here 20 years ago and had been sailing in the Marquesas, Tuamotos and Society Islands ever since,) gave all ARC crews a most useful and interesting presentation on the various islands we might visit in the Tuamotos. By 7pm the hall was arranged in tables around a central display area and food bought

in. In the meantime crews were offered coconuts whose tops had been cut off while we watched and given straws to drink the milk inside. In due course we sat down at the tables having bought our own beer/wine with us and selected our meals from the various local foods provided in the buffet. The locals had purposely decided not to name them in case some of us dare not try them! After formal speeches of which few or any of us understood a word owing to the acoustics and poor sound system we were enraptured with displays of various versions of the Haka by virile young men after which we were invited to participate. Then the women folk and girls gave attractive displays of local dances after which ARC ladies were invited to participate. The evening ended with the lights being lowered and the band playing gentle dance music to which ARC couples happily danced to. As we returned to Lydia under a starlit night we saw "Tenacious" out in the bay completely floodlit with golden light. One could see all the rigging as well as the ship's out line and masts bathed in this gold light. She almost looked like a ghost ship from a romantic film. The schooner in contrast had deck lights shining down from her three mast tops and was a more subdued sight.

Sunday 3 April 16.

We rose early to go ashore to get last minute shopping, (fly spray as small fruit flies plague us and any fruit and vege we could still get.) One of Carango's crew attended the Roman Catholic service in the Cathedral, (which alas we had failed to visit) and reported an attendance of over 300. Apparently the one priest on the island was in another valley holding a service so the Host was not consecrated. We returned via Corango who kindly offered their "Charlie's Charts" (detailed guides to many of the islands in the Tuamotos) for us to photograph. Once all back on board Lydia weighed anchor at 12.45pm and with full main, yankee plus half staysail we set course for the Tuamotos. With an Easterly wind of 12 knots we made 6 knots over the ground. We sailed gently all day in calm seas and light, warm winds. At sunset, almost for the first time in our voyage from St Lucia to the Marquesas, we were not sailing into the setting sun but about 35 degrees to the south. The moon was in its last quarter so it rose late and we thus had once again a star studded night with the constellations of Orion, the Southern Cross, Plough and Milky Way all visible as clear as a bell.

With all good wishes from Donald and the crew of Lydia,
Nigel

Lydia - Lydia's Blog. Passage from the Marquesa Islands to the Tuamoto Islands. 4-8 April 2016

Tuesday 4 April 16

Another perfect day with the wind on our beam, gentle seas with a 10 knot

ESE breeze wafting us to our destination on a course of 220 degrees. At 8.30 we furled the yankee and staysail and hoisted the big Cruising Shute which immediately increased our speed by over a knot. In mid morning we were called up by a friendly Chinese cargo ship (S.S. Hangjing Express) who passed some 8 miles astern and was just surprised to see a little yacht so far from home. Later we came across a Tuna boat but did not pass close enough to disturb his fishing. At noon our position was Lat 20'S Long 142d 20'W with a day's run of only 126 miles owing to light winds earlier. Before sunset at 17.30 we took down the Cruising chute and unfurled the yankee and staysail ready for night sailing. Once again we enjoyed a really beautiful sunset while drinking a tin of cold beer. Steve cooked delicious steaks for dinner followed by apricots for pudding. 460 miles to go before Rangiroa.

Wednesday 5 April 16.

The wind had increased slightly during the night so we had 10-15 knots ESE on a lovely beam reach continuing to fly full main and yankee but half staysail. At midday we had reached Lat 12d 02'S Long 144d 05'W with a better day's run of 164 miles and 310 miles to go. The night sky was beautiful with the stars and Milky Way crystal clear. Alvaro cooked a tasty Spag Bog for dinner.

Thursday 6 April 16.

At 5.30am we overtook an Australian yacht bound also for the Tuamotus which slowly disappeared astern. Slightly later I was up to do my last clothes' wash on deck before the sun got too hot. It is a matter of donning a lifejacket and attaching oneself to an after guard rail to stop oneself sliding from one side of the deck to other as Lydia rolls. We use the deck shower attachment to fill a bucket of water held firmly between one's knees with some clothes' washing liquid. It is then scrub a dub dub for each article of clothing followed for two or three more buckets of water to rinse. The most effective way of drying we have learnt is to rig a long line going back and forth between the two main back stays rather than hanging things on the guard rails along the sides. Donald reckons with all our washing hanging there and the wind astern it gives us an extra half knot!

At 8am the wind was gentle enough to furl the yankee and staysail and once again hoist the Cruising Shute. Poor Alvaro was not well and remained a bit delicate for the next day or two. Clearly it cannot have been caused by his cooking the night before since the rest of us remained fine. At midday our position was Lat 13d 40'S Long 144d 45'W with a day's run of 146 miles. At 15.30 we took down the Cruising Shute as the wind had died and we continued motoring with full main at 6 knots. However, by 17.30 we had more wind so off engine and unfurled yankee and staysail. As the sun went down we could see large clouds about some with sheets of rain under them and saw a double rainbow.

Lydia's Blog. The Tuamoto Islands. 7 – 8 April 2016

Friday 7 April 16.

When I came on watch at midnight, I could see dark clouds with rain squalls underneath. Half an hour later the rain came down in sheets, Fortunately, I had quickly changed into my swimming trunks before so all I got was a tepid bath. After the squalls had moved on, the wind completely died so once at 1.30am we again furled the yankee and staysail and motored on with full main to stabilise us. By 09.30 we caught our first sight of Rangiroa Atoll with its 100 mile perimeter making it the second largest atoll in the world. All we could see from 15 miles out was the tops of some palm trees and a radio mast near the main northern pass entrance to the atoll. As we sailed closer the coast and palm trees of the atoll came more and more into view until finally they stretched across our entire horizon. By 11am, (perfect timing by Donald) the tide was almost at slack water through the entrance pass which we could now see clearly together with the two tall, white leading marks taking us through the centre of the entrance. At 11.15 we were surrounded by small standing waves, still with some tide against us so although our engine was pushing us through the water at 6 knots we were only making 1.5 knots over the ground. Finally we passed through the turbulent water and came into the smooth clear waters of the vast lagoon beyond. Going through the entrance we noticed a little restaurant immediately overlooking the pass with its verandah built out over the water. This turned out to be the much recommended French restaurant, "Dauphin Gormand" about which we had been briefed back in Nuku Hiva.

On passing through the entrance we noticed to our left a small port with a coaster alongside, a small settlement with a church and the atoll stretching as far as the eye could see. On the other side there appeared a similar little port also with a small coaster unloading cargo. Beyond in the foreground we saw two ARC catamarans, Kiwi Beanz and Widago anchored outside what was clearly was a very smart resort hotel with individual little huts both on the land and over the water. Donald wished to anchor opposite the hotel Kai Ora which according to the chart we had was situated a couple of miles further down the coast. We thus explored down the coast but could not find anything resembling a smart hotel where the chart marked it should be. However on radioing our ARC friends we discovered that the smart resort opposite which they had anchored was indeed the Kai Ora hotel for which we were looking and our chart was out of date, or possibly the hotel had moved since the chart was printed.

By 1300 we had anchored in clear bright bluey green waters opposite the Kai Ora and celebrated with a salad lunch and cold beer, of which poor Alvaro, still suffering, could only eat a bowl of rice. After this Donald and I went ashore to the report to the local Gendarmerie to register formally Lydia's arrival and my departure from the crew and my onward flight to Tahiti on the Monday. Interestingly the pleasant French Gendarme was dressed with sidearm, handcuffs and night stick as though he were in France rather than on a

faraway atoll the other side of the world from La France. On our return we all went snorkeling in the warm clear waters watching little damsel and sergeant major fish play around the rocks and coral heads closer to shore.

That evening we all went ashore again to the Kai Ora hotel and had pre dinner drinks in the most pleasant and luxurious of surroundings. We met Guy and Ali Moseley off Widago and Gavin Chittenden and Sarah Le Claire from Kiwi Beanz plus their children. They had decided to take some well earned respite from sailing to stay for a few nights in the hotel in order to luxuriate in the air conditioning, jacuzzi baths and stable beds. Our Polynesian waitress on hearing we had not pre booked dinner said that she, with great effort, might still be able to squeeze us in for a meal. When we did sit down the place appeared nearly empty but we appreciated her successful efforts.

Saturday 8 April 16.

There was little breeze during the night which was very hot and airless making it difficult to sleep. Nevertheless we were all up bright and early to take part on an expedition to see how black pearls were made and harvested locally. At 8am we were duly collected on the main road by a taxi who was not allowed to enter the superior grounds of the Kai Ora. He took us a few kilometers to the main manufacturer of black pearls in the Tuamotus. There we learnt that black pearls are only to be found in the Tuamotus and some small islands to the south (Gambier?). We saw the delicate work of introducing a very small round object specially manufactured from American oysters from the Mississippi into a local oyster and then adding some DNA from another sacrificial local oyster. The oyster so operated on was then returned into the sea for at least two years. We saw the whole process including placing the oysters into specially protected bags to be hung at between 3 and 9 meters under the water in closed off areas along the shore.

In due course we returned to have coffee at the Kai Ora followed by a snorkel. Our plan for the rest of the day will be to take a taxi to the local village some 8 kms away to replenish stores and acquire more fuel for the outboard. On advice from the Black Pearl farm we hope to have supper at a small traditional local Polynesian restaurant called LiLi near the entrance of the atoll.

This is the last blog from me so I thank those who have had the stamina and patience to read some of Lydia's Blog of this unforgettable and enjoyable voyage.

With every good wish from Donald and his crew of Lydia,
Nigel