

Dakota in Lockdown *By Jeanne Harrison*



Jeanne with Colin wearing Squadron bow tie

AFTER a very lumpy five-day sail from beautiful Bonaire Island in the Caribbean, we began looking at alternative anchorages for the next day, 17 March 2020. The debate continued as we approached the lush, hilly Panama coast and noticed that we were picking up WiFi. A quick check of our emails sent us into decision mode. Friends in Columbia messaged us that as of the previous day due to COVID-19 the San Blas Islands were closed to visiting yachts, and all Panamanian ports required a 14-day quarantine period at anchor for those arriving from other countries. Our decision was clear. We would go straight to Colon and begin our quarantine at anchor on *Dakota* outside of Shelter Bay Marina, inside of the Atlantic breakwater of the Panama Canal.

Fortunately for us the marina manager was dedicated to maintaining a sterile compound and had an excellent understanding of the needs of quarantined anchored yachts. For our first 15 days in Panama we remained at the quarantine anchorage as COVID-19 cases in Panama grew from 73 (17 March) to 1,200 (1 April) and while Panama increased closures and curfews including: closures of the airport to commercial traffic, schools, non-essential businesses and traffic, restaurants, all alcohol outlets, public gatherings, churches, beaches, public transportation, Canal transits for yachts less than 65 ft and a 1700-0500 hrs curfew.

Meanwhile we could order fresh food online, including lovely fresh papayas, pineapples, tomatoes, bread, and rotisserie chickens which were delivered by volunteers to our tethered dinghy astern. Fresh drinking water was brought to us in a large bladder and pumped into our tanks when needed. Daily updates were provided on a morning VHF cruisers net. Trivia Quizzes were run weekly on the VHF radio. Social/Anti-Social events were planned for everyone to participate in without leaving their own yacht, such as Formal Dinner Party Night, when Col sported a Squadron bow tie. Fortunately we could cool off from the 30° heat with a swim



Dakota in Shelter Bay Marina

in the harbour, as long as you had a good lookout for crocs first. Meanwhile rubbish accumulated as nothing could be landed. After 15 days of total isolation the Heath Department cleared *Dakota* to enter the marina. Curfews continued to tighten in Panama to virtually a 24-hour curfew for all. Gender specific shopping days were instituted – women on Monday, Wednesday and Friday; men on Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday – but only for two hours, based on passport last numbers. Within the marina we had a bit more freedom to use the air-conditioned loo, remove rubbish, do laundry, get diesel/propane, go to the cruisers’ lounge, and walk around the marina area a bit. Sadly the swimming pool and air-conditioned restaurant/bar were closed.

Meanwhile Galapagos and French Polynesia closed all ports to arriving vessels, except Tahiti (only open for fuel/water/food). An email to us from Yacht Services Nuku Hiva (French Polynesia) strongly recommended we stay in Panama.

On 10 April the first raft of three yachts was permitted to transit the Canal since quarantine was initiated. We lacked sufficient line-handlers (four line-handlers plus helmsperson usually required for each boat), 125 ft of 7/8” lines x 4, and extra-large fenders x 4, which the three yachts had. We were also concerned about possible virus transfer by either the Panamanian Advisor required to be aboard, or any local line-handlers. Twenty Canal employees had reportedly tested positive to COVID-19. By Easter COVID-19 cases exceeded 2,800 in Panama.

At the present, we are continuing to work on Canal transit logistics with the Australian Consulate, the marina, and about 18 New Zealand and Australian yachts on both sides of the Canal. Several solutions have been proposed and are under consideration by the Panama Canal authorities.

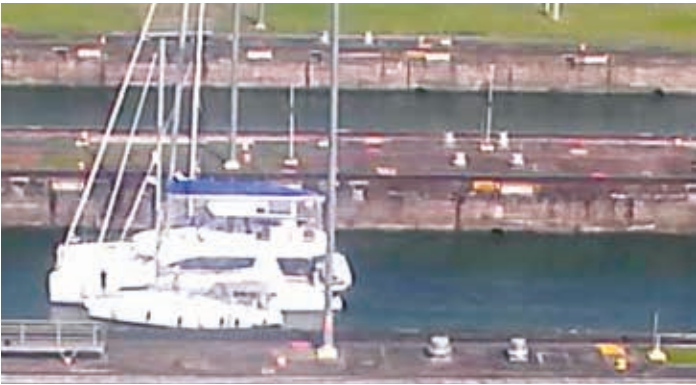
Once we are on the Pacific side of the Canal we will hope that the 35-plus days sailing to Nuku Hiva will give the world a chance to settle back towards normal while we are safely isolated at sea on *Dakota*.

Jeanne and Colin Harrison
Yacht Dakota
Shelter Bay Marina, Colon, Panama
14 April 2020



FOOTNOTE:

Jeanne and Colin transited the Panama Canal on 23 April, with *Dakota* and another yacht rafted up to a 58 ft catamaran. The number of coronavirus cases in Panama had increased to 4,800 by 22 April and they intended to remain in a secure anchorage off the coast to make sure they had no symptoms before they set off for the long passage to Nuku Hiva.



Transiting the Panama Canal – *Dakota* is nearest the camera



Barbecue breakfast supplied by Scouts SA

ON 15 March, the Squadron had the honour of recognising our Country Fire Service (CFS) volunteers with a day dedicated to their efforts over an unprecedented summer. The Squadron embraced the initiative promoted by the Boating Industry of Australia (BIA) and created by Above and Beyond Boating, Sydney, with the aim of giving back to those who had sacrificed so much to help our community.

An invitation was issued by the BIA to all volunteer fire services around Australia to attend their city’s sailing ‘hub’ for a day of both on and off water activities for the volunteers and their families. The Squadron was pleased to be nominated as a ‘hub’ by the BIA’s General Manager of Policy & Advocacy, Neil Patchett.



Summer Breeze returning and STV Tingira heading out



On land activities by Scouts SA

By Adam South, Boating Activities Coordinator



CFS volunteers and families on the Quarterdeck

The Squadron’s Boating Activities Coordinator, Adam South, and Neil have been friends for many years which helped the Squadron secure involvement in such an important community event.

The Squadron’s boat owners rallied and provided 15 boats to support the 100 plus guests, who enjoyed a day on the waters of the Port River and the Gulf. Thank you to all the Squadron members who provided lunch, their time and their boats to support the CFS guests. Your help on the day made it a Squadron event to remember for all those involved.

At the conclusion of the boating activities, each guest was presented with a certificate as a reminder of the day on behalf of the Management Committee. After some complimentary drinks provided by the Squadron and Coopers, Commodore

Ken Case made a heartfelt speech to the collected guests thanking them for their service. Ken also gave special thanks to the CFS volunteers’ families for being supportive of the time spent away fighting fires. In return, a CFS SA patch was presented to Ken to accept on behalf of the Squadron. This will be displayed alongside a commemorative flag for the event in the Clubhouse.

Special thanks must go to Ian Varney and the Scouts SA team for supporting the Squadron on this special day. Scouts SA assisted by providing breakfast and activities for those who wished to remain ashore. This included a climbing wall, a parade, and an awards ceremony at the conclusion of the day’s activities for the Scout groups in attendance, officiated by the Squadron Commodore.



Scouts SA vessels make ready to sail



Awards ceremony for the Scouts