

The Virgin Islands proved to be one of the highlights of the Caribbean, comprising a multitude of islands of reasonable elevation, with numerous bays for anchoring, good coral, fish, and visibility. It was hard to say what else could be added to try to achieve a more perfect setting. One highlight there, "The Baths", consisted of huge granite boulders the size of houses scattered along the shoreline in very clear water. It was a delight to swim between them and through the tunnels and crevices they formed, in crystal clear water teeming with fish. Sailing in the Virgins took place in relatively protected waters and one could sail for a couple of hours, anchor for a swim or lunch, then off to another island for the evening.

With the large number of charter vessels there, we would often be hailed with "I say, are you live aboards?" Invariably these charterers would have supplies left over at the end of their week's charter, and would often pass a small fortune in supplies over to us. Perhaps we looked needy!

We picked up a 3/4 Siamese kitten from the animal refuge just before leaving the British Virgin Islands, and named her (for some obscure reason) "Cucumber". She adapted to life afloat very easily and gave us a lot of fun. The US Virgins were just as nice as the British, and we particularly enjoyed our sailing, swimming and walks during this time. All too soon we were on our way again; now up to the Bahamas. It was an 8 day trip with good winds for the first few days, then much calmer. We put a 3 foot rip in the mainsail early one morning when shaking out a reef with one of the reefing ties still tied up. It was our first sail damage in 35000 miles, so we can't complain about that.

The Bahamas were very flat coral islands, with a greatest elevation of 140 ft. They had a lot of nice

clear water, colourful coral, and many fish. We saw some big barracuda there, and we always found them a bit freaky to be with in the water. There were a lot of afternoon thunderstorms, some of them very spectacular, and also for the first time, we saw the emerald green reflection of lagoon waters on the underside of a cloud.

Just before we were due to leave the Bahamas, we were offered a job as captain and cook for a week on a 41 ft charter yacht. After much deliberation (we didn't want to stay too long and get caught up in the cyclone season) we took the job and enjoyed it immensely, visiting a lot of places that we hadn't got to in our own boat. With the proceeds of the week's work we purchased a second-hand satellite navigation unit, and installed it for our trip to the USA.

The day we were due to leave the Bahamas, we ran aground while trying to anchor close in to say goodbye to friends. A 10 mm layer of sand lay above flat sheets of limestone rock on the sea bed, and our normally reliable anchor refused to set in such difficult conditions. All was not lost however, as we enjoyed the afternoon ashore eating pecan icecream and milkshakes before leaving in the evening.

The Devil's Triangle through which we sailed from the Bahamas to the USA was very calm. We had to drop all sail on some occasions as there was insufficient wind to prevent them slatting back and forth with the swells, and we felt that this could do a lot of sail damage. Of all our ocean passages, the Devil's Triangle was our calmest, and the glassy sea was a wonderful window to the fish, sargasso weed, and dolphins that we saw. The trip was completed with our arrival in Beaufort at midnight, followed by 3 hours of confusion due to a dark rainy night, dredge works, missing buoys and a strong tide in the harbour entrance. Our brains may have been

a bit foggy too, but we sailed back and forth between 2 buoys while we got our bearings and determined where the shoals and channels were before dropping our hook at 3 am. Night entries are always fun!

Next day we had a very painless entry into the US by the local Custom's Officer, and we then did some sightseeing in this historic area before heading north up the intra coastal waterway (a system of man made canals linking lakes, rivers, and estuaries, that stretches from Mexico to Canada).

The waterway was delightful, flanked with reeds and cypress trees, with abundant birdlife and ospreys nesting on the piles. We teamed up with another yacht to go through the opening bridges together, and gradually motored and sailed our way up north to Annapolis on the Chesapeake Bay. We found a relatively cheap marina to stop at and phoned friends now living in the Washington area to come and meet us. It was great to have good friends in a new country, and Don and Jill were wonderful in showing us around, feeding us, taking us to concerts and so forth. We decided to spend a full year in the States in order to do all that we wanted to.

EXPEDITUS was taken out of the water and chocked up on the hard; a common practice in Britain and the colder parts of the USA, etc. We felt much safer leaving her on solid ground rather than in the water while we cruised around the USA in a campervan.

To be continued.....

MIKE & GAY LEWIS

When SYLPH has gone to someone else,
And all the seas gang dry,
I'll take a cup of bitterness,
And try hard not to cry.

For SYLPH has been my own true love,
And she was all to me.
She sailed me o'er the bounding main,
And saved me from the sea.

Now SYLPH must go to someone else,
Who'll love her like I do.
I wonder if he'll treat her right,
And whether it be you.

For SYLPH must go to someone else,
Or if the seas go dry,
She'll lose her free and winning way,
And sail the boatie sky.

Vale SYLPH! my own true love.
Goodbye to our fine day.
We've put a lot of miles between,
Now someone else must pay.

MURRAY SWANN