

The Ultimate North Atlantic Cruise

Bruce and Bonnie Marriot *Freedom Now*

The Marriots tell of some exciting New England cruising before they sent their boat to the Squadron. In this story, the first of a 3 part series in SQ, the Marriots have a brush with the American navy and tackle the famous Gulf Stream. Reference: www.bbmarriott.blogspot.com.

We bought our latest boat *Freedom Now*, a 1985 Oyster 435, in Annapolis Maryland, USA in September 2006, stored her for the winter and returned to her in April 2007 to sail to Bermuda, Canada and down the east coast of the USA. Here are a few highlights.

We cruised down the Chesapeake Bay from Annapolis to Norfolk Virginia stopping in at some beautiful anchorages on the way and then set our sights on Bermuda, a passage of approximately 640 nautical miles. The hurricane season had started early so we had to sit tight while tropical storm Barry roared up the coast. We left as soon as he had passed but our first night out we experienced rain squalls, winds of about 30 knots with one 20 minute burst of 45 knots, and disturbed seas. By midnight we were sailing under reduced sail and I had just gone off watch when Bonnie called me. "Bruce I think a US warship is calling us. Can you check our exact position?" I raced to the nav station just in time to hear "Vessel in position (our exact coordinates) this is US warship 75"

"US warship 75, this is sailing vessel *Freedom Now*."

"We are conducting flight and retrieval operations and are limited in our ability to manoeuvre can you please alter course to give us a three mile clearance."

This was not what we needed. We made a quick visual check but in the rain and spray we could see nothing.

I mumbled something like, "It may be difficult because we are under reduced sail and sailing short handed. Which direction would you like us to head?" "Could you head further north?" "Freedom Now will change course further north short of jibing, and hope that will give enough clearance." The roar of a jet taking off and the clapping of a huge helicopter circling us overhead, combined with thunder, lightning and rain drowned out the last of the conversation.

We altered course and turned on our radar. Warship 75 was only 2 and a half miles away and we knew they would not be happy. The radio crackled again "Sailing vessel *Freedom Now* this is US warship 75. We have temporarily suspended flight operations and will steam away." We thanked the commander profusely and watched her disappear off the radar screen.

We now know that US warship 75 is the *Harry S Truman*, a Nimitz class nuclear powered aircraft carrier of 101,000 tons and 1100 feet long. She has a crew of 5600, carries 90 aircraft and enough missiles to blow us out of the water



Bonnie and Bruce Marriott on the peak of Pemetic Mountain, Acadia National Park, Mt Desert Island, Maine

a thousand times. She is one of the mightiest war machines in the naval world and she had given way to two geriatric sailors on a small sail boat whose mast wouldn't even reach her flight deck.

The weather improved once we crossed the Gulf Stream and we arrived in St Georges Harbour, Bermuda in just over 4 days. After three glorious weeks in Bermuda we were ready for the much longer haul due north to Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada.

Finding a 7 day weather window to travel 740 miles due north was not easy. The northern latitudes seemed to have constant gales. We used the services of Herb Hilgenberg who provides a routing and weather service broadcast over HF radio from near Toronto, Canada. On his advice we left Bermuda and headed towards Cape Cod to avoid the worst of a cold front that extended from Florida in a big arc all the way through the north Atlantic to England. It meant sailing a long way off our rhumb line but we followed his advice. We hit the front on our third day out with winds gusting to 35 knots, and numerous rain squalls. Then we had to cross the Gulf Stream before heading for Halifax.

The Gulf Stream can be a nightmare if you don't get it right. After nearly a day of being buffeted by it we thought we were through and headed directly towards Halifax. We were doing 6 knots through the water but only 3 knots over the ground. We were obviously caught in an eddy. We tacked to get out of it and found we were doing 9 knots over the ground on the other tack. It was several hours before we could return to our direct course. Our weather guru Herb, urged us to make haste as a new low pressure system over Ontario was forecast to bring gale conditions to Nova Scotia on Thursday. We arrived in Halifax Harbour at 2am Thursday morning and the gale hit with a vengeance late Thursday afternoon.

Bruce continues in the next issue of SQ.

