

## Letter from Presto! #3

Georgetown, Great Exuma, April 24<sup>th</sup> 2014

Regatta Time in Georgetown, the bands are playing (really loudly) conchy conch fritters frying and a party atmosphere all throughout town.

It has been quite a while since we last sent a letter, as Rodger still has computer problems and we have been at more remote places where WiFi is scarce.

We sailed from Cape Eleuthera past a huge ugly cruise ship anchored off the south end of the island, ferrying guests from the ship to the beach and back. If one wanted to stay on board there was a huge movie screen on the top deck and you could lounge in the sun and watch a movie. A nice way to spend time in the beautiful Bahamas. We sailed on past Little San Salvador, where another cruise ship, vying for the ugly boat award, was anchored off that beach. The water there was a spectacular colour of royal blue.



We were on our way to Cat Island, a narrow, 40 mile long island, Sidney Poitier was from here, although he was born in Miami. The first anchorage was just south of Alligator Point, in white sand.



We spent a quiet night, gently moving to a small swell. After a walk and swim in the morning, we sailed down the coast investigating the shallow bays, caves in the rocks and sandy beaches. There was a lot of hurricane damage with downed trees and the main highway running north to south was also partly washed away and major work was being done to repair it.

Our next stop was Fernandez Bay, a perfect half moon shaped sandy bay, where we met up with friends from Newport, Steve and Barbara. They spend months in the Bahamas tagging turtles and documenting size, weight, marks on the shell, or flippers, where found and whether or not they have been tagged before. All this data goes to the Archie Carr Center for Sea Turtle Restoration in Florida <http://accstr.ufl.edu/>



Steve has been doing this for many years and we were lucky enough to get invited to go on a "Turtle Frolic" as I call it. We would take the small motor boat and go up the creeks and look for turtles, one day we had 22 to

document, many had been tagged before. They are caught either by a net, or someone goes in the water and waits above them until they come up for air, or they are "jumped" and



caught that way. Steve and Barbara make sure that they interest the local kids and have them go out on the boat with them. In the last several years there are noticeably more turtles around everywhere. There was just *Presto!* and *Foxy Lady* in Fernandez Bay, both Rhode Island boats, until we saw a familiar-looking boat sail in. It was the Aerodyne 47 *Ariel*, also registered in Rhode Island so Patty joked that statistically 2 out of 3 boats in Cat Island are designed by RMDesign! We had happy days with the crews of the three boats.



In Cat Island there is a Hermitage built by Father Jerome, a catholic priest, who built this amazing replica of a European Hermitage in miniature on the tallest hill in the Bahamas. (208 ft) We hitched a ride from Fernandez Bay to New Bight, and then walked up the hill. From afar it looks like a full size building and very far away, but a half mile walk brought us to the bottom of the hill and we walked by the Stations of the

Cross which Father Jerome carved in the rock, and up to this amazing building, with a tiny chapel, a sleeping cell, kitchen and well. After his death, people have been maintaining the building, some by painting, some by repairing the stone work, roofs, etc. Of course the view is an amazing 360 degrees. We then got a lift back from some Americans who spend the winter in Cat Island, the driver was from Texas and she said that the other day she gave a Bahamian a lift and then laughed, "Here I was alone in my car and giving a lift to a black man with a machete; where else would you do this?" The Bahamas is certainly a special place with very special people.

We spent a week at Cat Island and our next stop was Georgetown as that was the direction the wind was blowing! We were also meeting up with Rodger's brother, his sister-in-law, niece and nephew in Emerald Bay. Peter Martin, the nephew runs *Ariosa*, a 130' Westport and had his parents and sister for a 10 day visit. We wanted to meet them in *Presto!* but the seas were big and it was windy so we decided to stay in Georgetown in a sheltered harbour and rented a scooter for the day and drove up. It must have been quite a sight, two old people on one scooter!! We had a great time with the family, albeit too short. Rodger had not seen his brother for 7 years so it was a real treat, incredible to meet in the Bahamas of all places.



After that, we stocked up for a cruise to the Jumentos Cays, which are south of Exuma, mostly uninhabited remote islands, not on the usual cruisers agenda, but Rodger had wanted to go there since we sailed by in 1980 on our trip to the San Blas Islands. 34 years later we went.



First to Flamingo Cay for 2 days, crossing the tropic of Cancer, close to Hog Cay Cut. There was a full moon that night, a big orange globe rising in the East. Here as usual there are beautiful white sand beaches, a cave that you can take your dinghy into with "skylights" in the roof and crystal clear water, magical. We had 3 Remoras shading themselves under *Presto!*, rays swimming around in the shallows and lots of birds singing in the bushes. We were surprised at how green

the islands were, and attributed it to only having local flora which would be drought resistant and a couple of salt ponds behind the beaches.

After Flamingo Cay, we sailed back to Water Cay, a very narrow island, slit in two at high tide. Ospreys, whales, rays and a shark which cruised by in the evening. We only spent a day there as we wanted to get back to Georgetown for the Regatta which was starting in a couple of days.

The sail on the way back was great and we made good time, dolphins came and played around the bow, we caught the high tide through Hog Cay Cut, which only has 3.5 feet over the bar at low tide, in fact there was quite a traffic jam as other boats appeared taking advantage of the tide. *Presto!* sailed all the way through the cut, maybe the first sailboat to sail this tricky cut since the days of the old fishing smacks, and on up the island and into Georgetown. This trip we have been lucky as we have the solar panel to charge the batteries and the wind has been excellent for sailing so we have not used the engine that much.



More about the Regatta; this is raced with 3 – 4 classes of locally built, wooden sloops, only wooden spars, cotton sails and Bahamian sailors. Many of the boats arrived last Easter Monday on a freighter from Nassau, more than 20 were loaded, along with motor bikes, cars, trucks and sundry items and a crane. The boats were launched with the crane over the side and then towed to their anchorage. Quite a chaotic scene, most of the people handling the boats seemed to have no idea of which way they should pull a dock line, fenders were a rare item and consequently there was a bit of shouting here and there. More boats arrived on Tuesday. The races started yesterday with the smaller boats sailing first, then the next class and finally the A class sloops racing in the late afternoon as the start had been delayed for lack of wind. *Tida Wave* from Staniel Cay in the Exuma Chain is the winningest boat; she just took off and left everyone behind. Yesterday we sailed *Presto!* alongside the course, keeping well clear of the racing boats. We watched again today with friends on their SA-built catamaran and the A class racing was spectacular and close under a brooding sky in about 12 kts of breeze. The photo finish between *Running Tide* (Long Island) & *Tida Wave* (Staniel Cay) was the closest our hosts had seen in 15 years of watching this regatta.



In the next day or two we will be leaving here and hot footing it to Fort Lauderdale, the haul out and trek north. The next report will be when we get back to Middletown. Until then .....

