

A couple, a catamaran and the Caribbean...
Definitely the equation for happiness!



The Caribbean aboard a cat:

An exceptional playground

No one said it was going to be easy. But nobody told us it was going to be so much fun! My husband Bob and myself, and our 5 year old Aussie mix dog Mollie, have been living aboard our Antares 44-foot sailing catamaran *Leap of Faith* in the eastern Caribbean for the past two years.



Aboard this Antares 44, Lynne and Bob roamed the West Indian islands, from the USA.

In October of 2007 we decided we were ready to head for the tropics. The passage from Annapolis, Maryland to Ft. Lauderdale, Florida was relatively uneventful. We'd sail the Atlantic when weather permitted, and motor down the Intracoastal Waterway (ICW) when the weather turned foul. Our goal for the season was to sail our boat to the Caribbean by way of the "Thorny Path" using Bruce van Sant's invaluable guide to help us. We would make our crossing from Ft. Lauderdale over to the port of West End

on Grand Bahamas Island. After watching the weather closely for weeks, we crossed the notoriously treacherous Gulf Stream in the early hours on December 5th and sailed across under full sail, accompanied by a bright full moon, with 10 knots on the beam and calm seas.

THE BAHAMAS ISLANDS

We arrived in the beautiful Bahamas a mere 10 hours later. The elation we felt in finally hitting the tropics was thus far unparalleled! We were like kids in the proverb-

bial candy store; running on the perfect white sand beaches, snorkeling for hours in the crystal clear waters, napping under gently swaying palm trees, and enjoying fresh fish and lobster that Bob's spear-fishing prowess produced from the ocean. It was the paradise we had always imagined!

Six months earlier, Bob and I retired from building custom homes in the beautiful but cold and snowy tundra of Sandpoint, Idaho. We sold the home, the cars, and the toys, to set out on the adventure of a lifetime. We love the mountains of Northern Idaho, but knew the time had come for a change to a gentler climate. Finding the right boat for us was a labor of love. During the Miami 2004 boat show we finally stepped onto the Antares 44 and knew instantly that we'd found what we had been looking for. The layout was the first thing that connected for me. The cockpit can be wide open, or fully enclosed when the strata-glass panels are attached, and the spacious helm station makes it comfortable for long passages. Additionally, with the "galley down" in the port hull, it allows for an unusually large and well-appointed galley, as well as making the saloon feel more like a typical living room. The fit and finish was especially crucial for us

having been custom home-builders. The level of detail that is built in to our boat makes us feel as if we still live in a custom home, but at sea!

We slowly worked our way through the Bahamas, enjoying those magnificent and completely unspoiled islands. We made it to Georgetown, also known as chicken harbor because so many cruisers with intentions of sailing to the Caribbean "chicken out" once they hit Georgetown. It's the last stop before the real passage-making work begins, but we pressed on. We soon discover how aptly named the Thorny Path is, as it was a very grueling four months of motor-sailing, beating to wind in heavy easterly winds and seas. Many night passages were required because the wind would be more

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likely to moderate during that period. Admittedly, we had purchased a sailing vessel... we wanted to sail and grew somewhat discouraged by the amount of motoring that was required. We beat from



For nearly three years now: a happy couple in a brilliant playground...

The Bahamas to the Turks & Caicos, down to the Dominican Republic, along the North shore of the DR, crossed the Mona Passage to Puerto Rico, and then made our way along the south side

tastic sailing as the easterly trades are ever present, while the majority of easterly swells and wind driven chop are blocked by Virgin Gorda Island. The real bonus is that there are a plethora of islands close enough together that day sailing from one to another is almost always available, regardless of conditions.

Having thus far spent the majority of our time beating to wind, we really hadn't had much opportunity to sail downwind. The BVI's provided this opportunity. The layout of the islands allowed us ample opportunity to sail on many points of sail. This was the first time we'd had a chance to finally hoist our custom made spinnaker while sailing both to and from Anegada Island. Unquestionably, the spinnaker made a spectacular sight, and we love to hoist it and hear it snap open. However, rigging it took between 20 - 30 minutes, and the effort would be for naught if we failed to have accurate weather forecasting to determine its suitability for the day's conditions. Eventually, we discovered that the 635 sq. ft. screecher on a roller furling (standard sail included with our boat) made just as good of a downwind sail as our spinnaker. Best of all, it was always rigged and ready right there on our bowsprit. There was no need to blanket the sail

of Puerto Rico. Then we crossed the Vieques Passage to the Spanish Virgins, on to the US Virgins, and finally into the British Virgin Islands.

VIRGIN ISLANDS

The research we had done before embarking on the "thorny path" leg of the adventure had not prepared us for the reality of the level of determination that was required to push our way southeast to the Caribbean. However, once we made landfall in the Virgin Islands, we knew all the hard work had been well worth it. Returning to the British Virgin Islands was like coming home again. We'd forgotten how beautiful and clear the waters were. While the islands predominantly lie East to West, the North to South orientation of them relative to the Sir Francis Drake Channel allows for fan-

A deserted anchorage, just what "Leap of Faith" likes...





Lynne and Mollie, the dog... Life's good, isn't it?

with the main sail in order to douse it safely, no one is required to go forward to the bow, we had no worries about a squall sneaking up behind us while daydreaming

hook in a quiet anchorage, appreciating another beautiful sunset with a cool drink. The real allure of the Virgin Islands for us is the fine and easy sailing, fantastic snorkel-

are among our top rated with their incredible patisseries, delectable assortment of imported cheeses, and excellent fashion shopping. The locals have proven to be quite gracious by maintaining a friendly and helpful demeanor in spite of us inadver-

fuel. Not speaking a word of French, we found ourselves standing in front of the pumps and looking for gasoline. We had a choice between gazole (diesel) and essence (gasoline). After several moments of head scratching, guess which one we chose... yep, gazole. Sounds more like gasoline than essence doesn't it? We can tell you for a fact that diesel does not care to be run in Honda gasoline outboards! We made it just far enough to get ourselves to the middle of the anchorage before our dinghy let out a great belch of black smoke and quit. Luckily, our friends saw us and towed us in for cocktail hour. Why get towed back to the boat when we knew we'd have hours of work (and much cursing) ahead of us to get that diesel fuel out of our gasoline engine! Now, we carry a fantastic guide entitled "French for Cruisers" by Kathy Parsons, and are learning the lovely but difficult French language.

One of our favorite aspects of cruising is the gift of seeing ocean life in its splendor. Recently, while sailing in the BVI's just north of Jost Van Dyke, a pod of whales were breaching off our port side. Another great brush with sea life occurred as we were departing Trinidad for the lovely isle of Tobago. We left the anchorage at 2am to ensure we'd reach Tobago with plenty of sunlight in our

I'm certain that when Bob got his certification he never imagined he'd use it to revive a wild goat.

at the helm, (as happened to us one day while sailing from Guadeloupe to Montserrat), you can simply roll up the screecher, and you're done! We've discovered that with 12-15 knots of apparent wind we could average 7-8 knots of boat speed. No need to even set the main sail. Not bad in our book!

Both the USVI's and BVI's, offer the easy lifestyle. In the BVI's you can easily sail into Road Harbor, Tortola, walk from the anchorage to a selection of markets, provision your boat, and be back on the boat within an hour. Set sail and another hour later, you're dangling on the

ling, abundant scuba diving, great kayaking, and hiking on the many trails ashore. This last year we were able to spend enough time there to discover out-of-the way anchorages that felt as if time had simply forgotten about. We'd share these locations with you, but then, they'd lose their undiscovered charm!

We hauled Leap of Faith out in Trinidad for the hurricane season but when we returned in early November, we were able to spend a great deal of time lazily exploring the Leeward's, Windward's, and Grenadines, and are often asked which island is our favorite. The Caribbean Islands offer such a variety of experiences it is impossible to choose for they all have their own allure. But we must admit that the French Islands

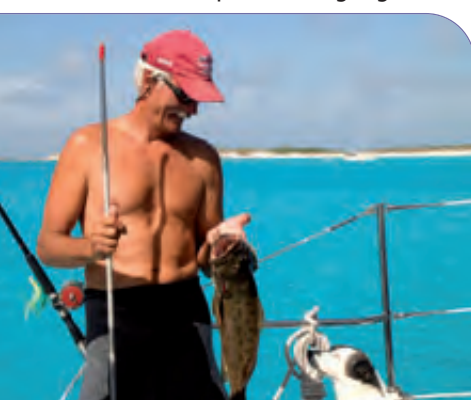
tently butchering their beautiful language!

A prime example is our first visit to Isle des Saintes. We were on our way to meet friends ashore for cocktails, when we noticed that we were running low on dinghy

There is still nowhere better than the Caribbean to spend a couple of years cruising in the Tropics...



Fishing is one of the favourite activities aboard.





Life aboard a boat: real happiness...

favor. I was sitting in the starboard bow seat with the searchlight, keeping a lookout for unmarked obstructions, when we acquired a delightful escort... a pod of about 20 large dolphins. They were "bow surfing" as they're known to do. Suddenly, I heard several loud, rhythmic "thumps" just below me, and felt the boat vibrate with each thump. Shining the light down onto the dolphins, I was able to see a particularly large one swimming alongside, whacking our hull with his powerful tail. This went on for several minutes until Bob frantically called to me to come take the helm while he checked the engines. Apparently the sound and vibration created by the hull-thumping dolphin was so extreme, it made Bob fear some engine catastrophe had just occurred!

THE RESCUE...

Before departing our very structured and admittedly mundane lives back in Idaho, we agreed that safety at sea was essential, knowing it would primarily be just Bob and I aboard our Antares, we both got our CPR certifications. Recently Bob had cause to use his when our dog Mollie, while making a routine beach landing, inadvertently herded a wild goat straight into the ocean. Realizing too late what had occurred; we immediately called her back to allow the goat to swim back to shore. However, the goat proceeded to swim further out to sea! Bob, fearing the goat was too panicked to find its way back ran to the dinghy, fired it up, and chased down the goat to herd it back to the safety of the beach. All was looking very successful, when just two feet from shore the

goat went under. Bob jumped from the dinghy and hauled the goat back onto the rocky shore. It was not breathing so Bob began CPR by pumping his chest and slapping his face (no, Bob recounts, mouth-to-mouth was NOT an option!). Immediately the goat coughed up salt water, but then passed out again. Bob continued his CPR efforts until finally the goat let out a little "baaayyy", and we both felt tremendous relief. We continued to soothe and stroke him until he finally was able to regain his wobbly legs. He stood, turned to us, and let out a tremendous "BBBBAAAYYY" as if to scold us for our inattentiveness, and teetered off into the bushes. He was right to berate us, and Mollie will never again be allowed to roam the beaches off-leash when wild-life is present.

The following morning we took a hike to find the goat and assure ourselves that he was o.k. We found him not far from the location of the

dastardly deed, where he approached us quite readily, and appeared very healthy. Luckily, we were able to sail on knowing he was safe and sound. I'm certain that when Bob got his certification he never imagined he'd use it to revive a wild goat.

I must admit that living aboard a boat is unlike anything I ever expected. It has its difficulties to be sure, but the rewards of being able to explore the many beautiful islands are unparalleled. Each day offers a new look into their rich histories, and the chance to meet the friendly local people. I've learned to identify and shop for the exotic fruits and vegetables, and also learned to prepare the local Caribbean dishes (except breadfruit... that's a toughie). We never tire of swimming in clean clear turquoise waters. But best of all, we've developed friendships with fellow cruisers that will hopefully last a lifetime. These gifts are far greater than we ever expected, and it's all here for the taking, if one only has the temerity to take their own Leap of Faith.

... All you have to do is leave!

