

Sunny Spray's travels, episode 17

Carriacou, Grenada, December 29, 2016

Dear all,

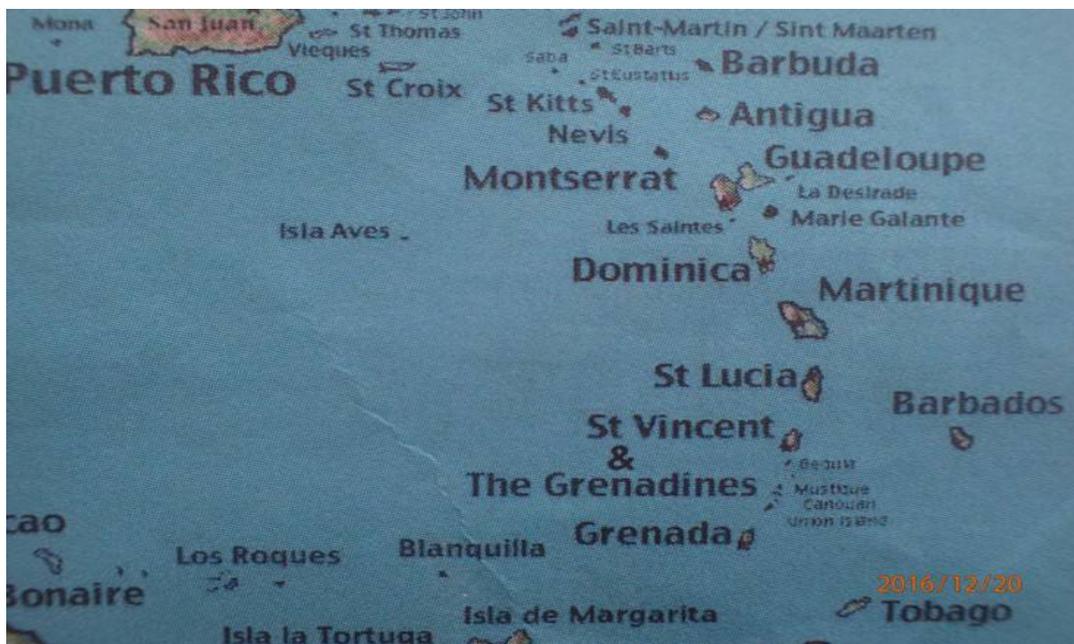
There are only two days left to go in the year 2016, so let me occupy myself these last two days with writing episode 17 of Sunny Spray's adventures. We are now in Carriacou, a small island belonging to Grenada. Also still belonging to Grenada are Petit Martinique and Petit Saint Vincent, but we will not visit these islands. There is an abundance of smaller islands here, and if you would like to visit them all you had better add an extra year. So, we stick to the larger islands, although, larger?.....

Below is a map showing the Windward Islands, to which Grenada and Carriacou belong. Basically they stretch from Grenada to Martinique. If you look carefully, you see they make a curve, towards the North-East, which is exactly the same as the direction from which the winter winds come. In other words: all islands up to Martinique can only be reached against the prevailing wind, and this wind can be quite strong. In addition, this creates high seas, with unfortunately short periods. If all that is not enough, there are very strong currents, after all, the ocean water is being squeezed through narrow gaps between the islands. Wind against, waves against, current against, could it be any worse? Welcome to the Caribbean, when traveling from South to North in the winter months.

For us this is a rather unpleasant surprise which we had not expected. We have been in this area before, in 1983, also travelling from South to North, with our previous boat, Fint. We then had ideal sailing conditions, half wind from the East, not a day lost because of adverse weather. But that was in the months of April-May-June.

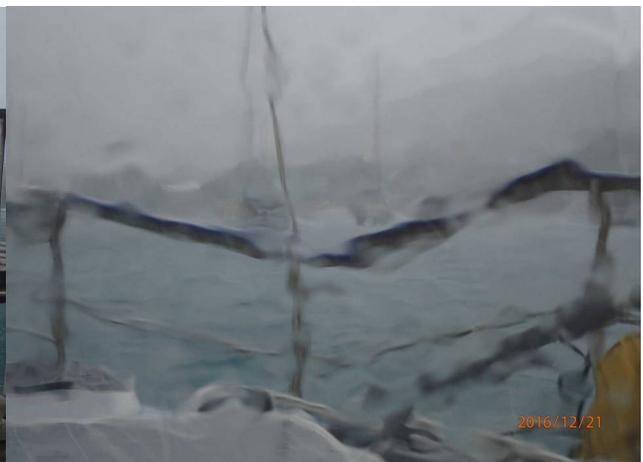
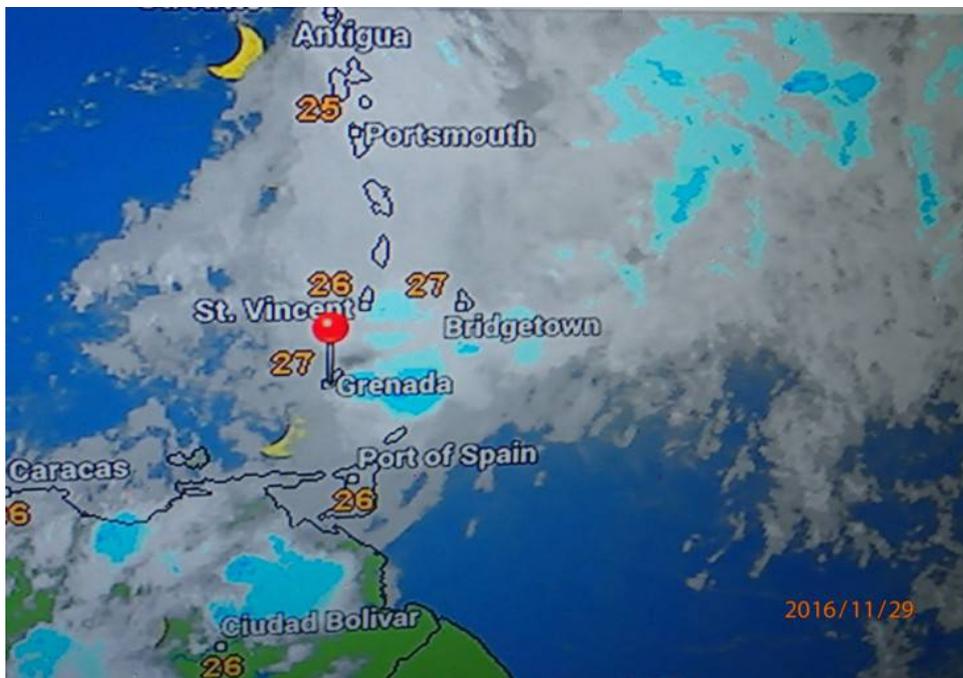
Now it is November-December-January. The prevailing wind is North-East, if you are lucky you have some days with an Easterly wind. Our Lithuanian friend Rasa described the difference as follows: "I read a lot of blogs from other sailors. When they describe a passage between the islands, the first thing I do is look at the date. If they made the passage in the spring or in the summer months, I immediately click away the account of beautiful sailing weather. If they describe a trip between December and February, I'll continue reading".

Another observation from Rasa: "Once you have crossed the Atlantic Ocean, you think you have the worst behind you. Nothing is farther from the truth. If you are travelling in the winter months, Northwards in the Windward Islands, it is like tightrope walking, and you sometimes wonder if you'll ever arrive in the Northern isles".



All this more or less describes our current situation. We are now in Carriacou, a small island North of Grenada. We had looked forward to half wind sailing, hopping from island to island, then here, then there, just as the fancy took us. Instead, we closely watch the weather forecasts, and the moment the wind becomes a bit more easterly we prepare for setting sail. First we still have to pass the Grenadines, a series of islands that are grouped close together, not more than 5-10 miles apart. Then comes a more challenging crossing to Bequia, followed by the dreaded passage to Saint Lucia. Dreaded, because in the winter months the winds can easily reach 30 knots or more, and an adverse current of 3 knots adds to the fun. Just like at the Canary Islands the wind funnels between the islands, creating a venturi effect, which results in acceleration zones where the wind blows extra strongly. Also the last miles to Martinique will be against the wind. Important mail is waiting for us there, but the way it looks now, we might miss the mail, it will probably be returned before we arrive there.

In addition, the weather is far from stable and quiet. We are still in the aftermath of the rainy season, and apart from daily squalls with rain, it also brings unsettled weather, with heavy wind gusts. Below is a typical weather forecast for this area. Rain, wind, occasional clearing. But during daytime temperatures can still rise above 30 degrees Celsius, while the night temperatures are pleasantly cool, between 24-26C .



When the rain has stopped and the skies clear a bit, it feels like paradise. Just like the movies: a beautiful white sandy beach, palm trees, mangrove trees, and boats everywhere. Not surprisingly, the real Paradise Beach, fewer than 2 kilometers away, was used as a filming location in numerous movies set in the Caribbean. Mustique, the private island of the rich and famous (princess Margaret, Mick Jagger, David Bowie) is only a two hour sail away.

Everyone likes to visit here. Accordingly, the good anchorages are filled with hundreds of boats. In St. David's Bay, in the South of Grenada, there were only about 10 boats at anchor, or on a mooring. In Prickly Bay, a sailor's favourite in the south of Grenada, there must have been nearly 300 boats. Here in Carriacou I first thought there were maybe 50 boats, but when I started to really count them, I came to more than a hundred, with many boats arriving and leaving daily. About 1/3 are charter boats, mostly catamarans; the others are private yachts. Of the yachts, nearly half have, at present, no liveboards. It could be that many owners have left for the season and are visiting friends or family at home. Some boats look as if they have been abandoned permanently. Sometimes the owners have just upped and left; sometimes the owners have run out of money. Or the owners are working on other boats, helping in the charter business or sailing other people's boats across. There is always a lot going on at anchorages.



Tyrell Bay in Carriacou is a sailor's favourite in the Grenadines. There is a tiny marina with facilities, an immigration and customs office for clearance procedures, a bar-restaurant. Alongside the shore of the bay is a white sandy beach and a road. Either at the beach, or at the road, you'll find several establishments such as a pizzeria, a diving station, a bar, a supermarket. Often, a cluster of small shops and bars has its own pier, recognisable by the many dinghies that are attached to it with heavy padlocks. Prices are very high.

Nevertheless we are enjoying this place tremendously, mainly because of the small-scale and lack of infrastructure. There are some main roads, and many smaller, non-paved ones. Of course, that last category is our domain: we can make beautiful walks around here, the mountains (say, hills) are not too steep, and there is hardly any traffic on the smaller or unpaved roads. In two weeks' time we crossed the entire island walking, from North to South and from West to East. We do not encounter many other walkers: if you do walk, many cars will stop by your side, offering you a ride. Our physical condition is improving greatly.

But it is not the place to be if you are looking for culture. There seem to be some ruins of an old plantation on the Eastern coast, but we have not found the place yet due to lack of signs and roads. We crossed the island by bus because we wanted to visit an old shipyard in the Northeast where traditional wooden boats are being built without the use of power tools. Indeed, there was the carcass of a wooden boat, but no evidence of any recent activity.



While in Grenada I visited the island's only museum in St. George, the capital,. Three rooms, many artefacts, and an interesting but very amateurish exhibition about the short period in which Grenada was a communist state, led by Maurice Bishop. They were supported actively by Fidel Castro's Cuba. Even now you can find many elderly people who hear nothing but praise on the Cubans. Rightly so, because in only a few years the Cubans succeeded in setting up a really good health care system; in addition, they reduced the percentage of analphabets from 80% to 0%, offering reading courses for people aged 5 to 95. In 1984 Maurice Bishop lost the leadership and his life, and the Americans invaded the country. Obviously, the Americans were not too pleased with a pro-communistic state in their backyard. In that year we had just crossed the Atlantic on our previous ship, *Fint*; learning about the threat of war we changed course and skipped a visit to Grenada. Things seem not to have changed that much in the world, there are still areas which you had better avoid because of piracy or war threats.

But let me return to the chronology of our trip over the past six weeks.

On November 15 we left Tobago with a favourable Eastern wind, and sailed in approximately 24 hours to Grenada, arriving in St. David's Bay. The Southern Grenadian coast is indented with quite a number of deep, fjord-like bays. These bays are favourite sailor destinations, despite the fact that their shores are heavily reefed.

We chose St. David's Bay because of the presence of Grenada Marina, an outfit with many facilities. We needed help for various chores, chief among them changing the oil in the carter. Normally this is a simple job, but the carter's drainage plug (a special bolt) was stuck, and the bolt's head was worn down, so that tools could not get a good grip. Already, many friends and mechanics had had a try at the bolt, but no luck. The marina sent some junior mechanics, who were not successful either. Finally they sent an enormous guy, with impressive muscles and a sizable girth. He had a hard time passing through narrow openings to reach the engine, but once alongside the engine, he gave a mighty heave and the bolt came free. Hurray for superman! We were so pleased with his dexterity and skills that we also let him change all the oil and air filters on the engine, and let him weld a new head on the bolt.

Another job that needed to be tackled by a professional was the making of a new mast ring for the main mast (remember,

we were still sailing with the emergency repairs made at sea and in Kourou, French Guyana). The “specialists” managed to make a mess of the ring not once but twice. Finally they understood what was needed, and the third attempt was acceptable. Until now, Bob is happy with the new mast ring. We asked the same guys to weld a tiny support on the aft railing, so that we can mount a small electronic autopilot to assist Olivia when she is having a hard time.



We stayed for 3 weeks in St. David's Bay and at the Grenada Marine. It was nice and quiet, with good transport to St. George, the island's capital city. And one day after our arrival we were re-united with our friends Rasa and Egoi of the Grain de Sable, super!

Public transport in Grenada and Carriacou is very well organized. There are official bus routes, and the bus service uses 14 or 18 person vans. Every route is frequented by many of these vans, which are easily recognizable by a big number on their window. Officially the vans stop only at concrete bus stops, but in practice they stop whenever they see someone alongside the road, in a side street or waving them down. Because of the high frequency, you rarely have to wait more than a few minutes, they come and go continuously. And the system is cheap: a ride from St. David's Bay to St. George, a good 15 kilometers, takes three quarters of an hour (it is very hilly terrain) and costs only 3 EC\$, about one Euro. The drivers really hit the pedal, sometimes you fear for your life, but there are many handgrips on the inside and so far I have only been in buses with good brakes.



Traveling with these buses is a daily source of entertainment. This comes primarily because of the hustler, who serves as a conductor. Mostly these are young guys with a sharp mind and even sharper eyes: their task is to spot potential customers, lure them onto their bus (and not into the competitor's one), receive the payments, give change, instruct the driver about unscheduled stops, and in general ensure that every stop takes as short as possible. Those young men are worth their weight in gold and are real multi-taskers. On top of all their tasks they also keep track of where their passengers want to get off, and they make the necessary arrangements to seat everyone in the most favourable spots. If you want to get off, scheduled stop or not, you tap on the roof, and the bus swerves to the side. If you were sitting in say the one but last row, then about three people in front and next to you will have to get up and out, because the small aisles where you entered will have disappeared under folding seats and will be occupied. So, you get up, climb out, pay the conductor, and the others quickly get back in. Or the conductor will navigate someone to a seat closer to the door, knowing that that person's stop will come soon. And he also keeps track of short stops to deliver a package or something to someone standing by the roadside. Occasionally he will quickly hop out to buy some juice for himself, or for the thirsty driver. It is amazing.

Besides, full really means full. Normally there are more people in the bus than there are seats, it simply means squeezing passengers in. The maximum we counted was 26 (in an 18 person bus), but that count included four children, who were seated without asking on the lap of some strangers. On average we travelled in buses with 22 passengers.

Our first Sunday in Grenada we had planned, together with Rasa and Egoi, a trip inland, high up, to a crater lake and nature resort called Gran Etang. The plan was to do some walking and picnicking. As anticipated, a first bus appeared shortly, but despite our waving, it did not stop. Strange! Ten minutes later we still had not seen any other buses. Stranger still! Now the first bus came back, and fortunately he stopped, only to tell us that there would be no buses on Sundays, nowhere, and he was only driving around picking up family and friends to go to church. When we asked if he could take us as far as he could in the right direction, he accepted after some hesitancy. So we drove into neighbourhoods you normally would not visit, and met some really nice people, all bedecked in their Sunday's best. At the limit of his driving around, we had to get out, got directions and started walking. Uphill.

After about two kilometers a truck with an open deck stopped. If we wanted we could get a ride in the open deck, already housing four men. The way up was by way of the wheel hubs and willing, strong arms (boys, help the lady up!). This way we managed to progress another 10 kilometers in the right direction. Two more rides (a van and a private car) and walks in between we eventually arrived at the nature reserve.

We walked around and had a picnic at the lake, which was impressively beautiful, and started the way back, walking and hitching rides. Imagine our surprise when suddenly a truck stopped next to us, the same one as that morning! In a merry and talkative mood (by now we were friends for life with the four men on the open deck), we enjoyed quite a long ride into the direction of the main road that led to our bay. Halfway the driver made a strategic stop next to a roadside bar, and of course we bought a round of beer for our new friends, the two drivers and the four men. They were happy, we were happy! Unexpectedly our nice outing had become a bit of an adventure!



Sometime later we would make a long bus ride to the North of the island, to walk around Sauter's Point. In the 17th century, the last surviving Caribs jumped to their deaths from that rock, rather than having to live in slavery. That trip also brought us to Grenville, a small town which gave us the feeling that it has rarely been visited by a tourist.



Northern coastline of Grenada, with a view towards Bishop's rock, Ronde island and Carriacou (all the way in the back).



Grenville mainstreet, and its covered market hall.

The jobs that needed to be done on the boat took much longer than anticipated. Unfortunately, the Raymarine specialist could not diagnose what was wrong with our wind meter: one day it would work perfectly, a couple of hours later it would stop working. Connected to his testing device, it worked properly for days on end. We finally decided to buy a new display unit, but it was not available in the capital and we were told it could take weeks, maybe months before a display might arrive. We did not trust the shipments to St. George from abroad for a possible internet purchase. So now we are still without a reliable display for the wind meter; one day it works, the other day not. In the meantime one of our outside displays for the Raymarine depth sensor has ceased functioning as well. We hope to solve these problems once we arrive in Martinique.

While the “specialists” were at their jobs, we had plenty of jobs to do ourselves. One of these concerned the zipper in the mizzen sail cover, which had become unstitched. Since it is quite a job to remove the sail cover (it is attached to the battens), I decided to re-stitch the zipper to the canvas by hand, using the Speedy Stitcher. In the picture you see me hanging in the boatswain’s chair, balancing on the mizzen whilst getting the job done. The things one does for an everyday job!!



On Thursday, December 1, we had to settle an enormous bill at the marina. While, eventually, all the jobs we had contracted had been performed to our satisfaction, we had a really bad feeling about the marina’s management and their billing practices. Bob knows a lot about steel and welding, so he can make pretty accurate estimates what a job should cost. If you are then confronted with a bill that is twice the estimated amount, you really feel conned.

So we left immediately, on our way to Hog Island. There was quite a lot of wind, the sea was disturbed, and no matter how hard we tried and searched, we could not accurately locate the position of the green and red buoys indicating the beginning of the channel between the reefs. In the end we had to abandon the search and decided to continue to Prickly

Bay, which has an entrance that does not require local knowledge. We arrived safe and sound.

I guess Prickly Bay is the most well-known of all anchorages in the South of Grenada. The Bay is very deep, well protected and can accommodate hundreds of boats: it has a dinghy jetty close to the main road into St. Georges, the capital, and is also close to a marina that is geared to please the sailing community. The Bay and its yachts is a community in itself, with many yachts with (semi)permanent liveaboards. There even is a sailor run Cruising Net, a radio net broadcasting every morning at 07.30 h on the radio and on VHF (channel 66). The broadcast is well organised, and features such regular items as 'navigational hazards', departures and arrivals', the weather forecast, treasures of the bilge' (about items you want to sell or give away), and the important 'social activities'. You then learn there are numerous activities you can participate to, varying from yoga or tai chi lessons on the beach, shopping trips, or a visit to a monthly held exchange of well-read books. We skipped most activities, but valued the transmissions highly, also because we learned about Fast Manaku, a radio-net advertised outfit where we could phone in our orders for bulky ship's stores, and retrieve them a couple of hours later from the dinghy landing dock. Very handy!



Prickly Bay marina has a nice bar and restaurant area with free wi-fi. The service was really perfect: above stone tables with benches (see background of above picture), there were round armatures with light fittings and electricity sockets. All visitors could thus connect themselves to the Internet, while charging his or hers smartphone, tablet or laptop at the same time. Unfortunately reading a screen has priority over engaging in social contacts; thus it can be really crowded, and still not a word to be heard. And it is not only the youngsters doing this: 95% of the yachties are elderly people, or old geezers.



Friday night was dedicated to live music, Wednesday evening was for bingo. There also was a karaoke night, and special Christmas activities. Fortunately we were that far from the marina that the noise did not bother us too much.

The large distance between our anchorage and the marina once more emphasized the fact that our electric outboard engine, the MinnKota, really did not produce sufficient thrust, although it functioned well. We were in particular handicapped when distances were large, seas rough or currents against us. In addition, the connection between the MinnKota and the battery supplying the electricity was prone to malfunctioning, so could not be trusted 100 %. Luckily, at walking distance from the dinghy landing site there was a Honda dealer, which also sold Yamaha outboard engines. To our great relief they had one 4 HP two-stroke outboard engine, exactly what we had been looking for. These outboards are no longer sold in the USA or Europe because of environmental concerns. Their replacement, a four-stroke engine, is doing a great job, but is much heavier to carry. For us the weight factor was critical, and it did not take us long to decide to buy this engine. While inconvenient that we now also have to carry a supply of petrol, we are extremely pleased with the engine's performance, which gives us the freedom to anchor a bit further away from a settlement than we are used to doing.



Buying wholesale, with delivery at the dinghy dock. It cannot be easier than that! But buying is only a small part of the provisioning process: because of our battle against cockroaches, every item is washed down with a 4:1 solution of water and vinegar. We then store the cleaned cartons and cans in plastic crates, also cleaned with vinegar, in our hanging clothes locker. The clothes are folded temporarily.



St. George, Grenada's capital, is quite a nice and vibrant town. Architecturally it is as English as can be, reminding the casual tourist of Oxford or Cambridge. There is a lovely waterfront (The Carenage), but strangely enough there are no outside terraces. So, there is no opportunity to watch the world drift by with a beer in hand. What a pity, because the town is visited weekly by hundreds of tourists from visiting cruise ships, and they have no place to go, just wandering about.

One day when we were wandering around a bit, we passed a hardware store, Hubbard's. All of a sudden my eye caught a sign, proclaiming there was a Honorary Consulate of Spain located above the hardware shop. My cries of joy were loud. For some time now I had been trying to locate a Spanish embassy or consulate in the Caribbean, where I could legalise copies of original documents such as my passport, wedding booklet and Spanish residencia. These legalised or True Copies (copias cotejados) are needed to start the application process for a state pension, which in my case has to come from three different national authorities, being The Netherlands, Ireland and Spain. The only embassies nearby were the one in Trinidad (we had already passed that island) and the one in Jamaica (not on our route); the existence of this (honorary) consulate was completely unknown to me, despite extensive internet searches. Two days later I could pick up the signed and stamped true copies; costs: zero.



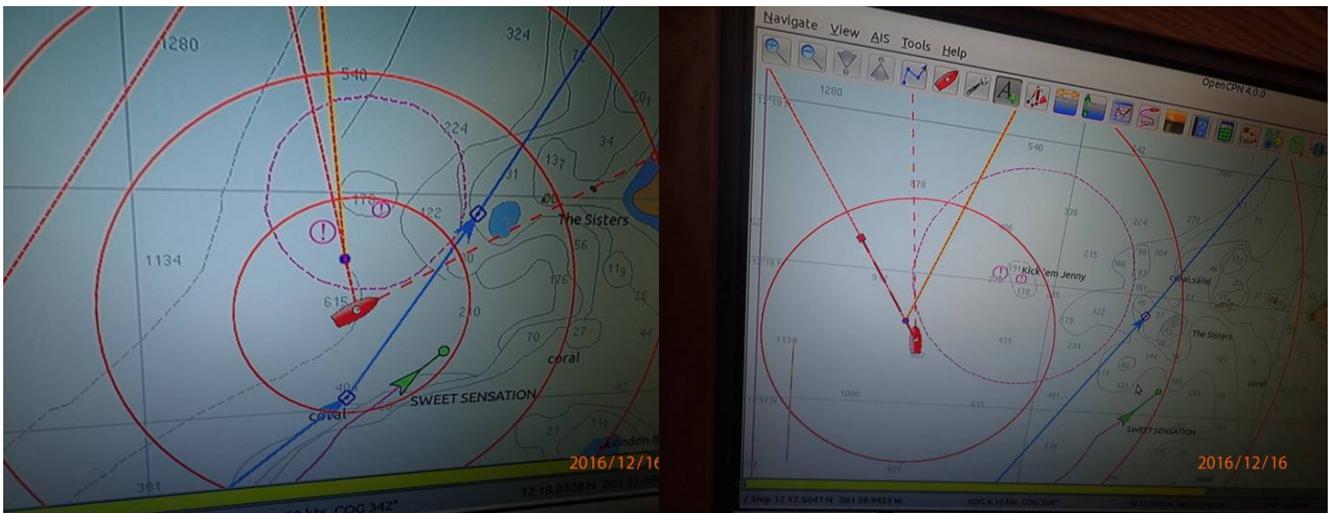
From St. George one could travel by bus to Annandale Waterfalls; according to documentation, a fine site to do some walking. Once arrived we found out that the walking trail was only 5 minutes long! Here I was, fitted out with my mountain boots and trekking pole! Fortunately we met some nice guards, who directed us to a small road which led into the Annandale Forest Reserve. It was one of the nicest walks ever, through dense rain forest. Since there were daily rain showers, the path was very muddy. My walking boots came in real handy. Bob, walking in his sandals, had mud inside his socks.

On Thursday December 15 we hoisted anchor and motored in the direction of Carriacou. We passed the West coast of Grenada without any problems and were rewarded with a fine view on St. George. In the afternoon we anchored in Halifax Harbour, a beautiful bay that has been completely ruined since they built an open waste incineration installation on its Southern shore. The stench was bearable because the wind blew it out to sea, but for the first time since months we were attacked by hundreds of flies. We quickly barricaded ourselves behind our mosquito screens. In the evening we had a good view of two cruising ships that passed by really close.



Along Grenada's West coast, passing St. George.

The next morning we got up at 03.00 am and left immediately. In the beginning, we motored doing 4.5 knots, but gradually we started to feel the effect of the current (against), and our speed dropped until we were doing not more than 1.9 knots. Of course, we did not progress much with that speed, and it made it very difficult for us to pass a so-called exclusion zone. That zone is forbidden for yachts and indicates an area with an active underwater volcano. There was no other solution except turning around and heading West and North for a while. Immediately Sunny Spray took up speed, and we flew with 8.3 knots speed over ground. Some simple arithmetic showed that we had not made any progress because of a 3 knot current against us. Lesson learned: do not disregard the current, it is a major factor.



The underwater volcano area is named “Kick ‘em Jenny”. Because of the underwater obstacle and due to the volcano’s activity, the water is very turbulent. The authorities have drafted an exclusion zone, forbidden for ships, indicated on the maps above as a purple circle. On the left you see Sunny Spray just touching the edge of the circle, we did not manage to get past it. On the right we have turned around, and sailed with 8 knots past its Western border.

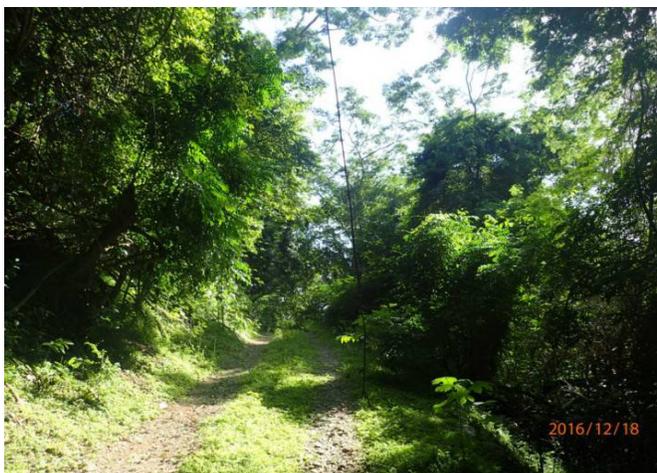


At 1.30 pm we entered Tyrell Bay in Carriacou. It was a Friday, which means that in the night every little bar turns up its sound installation to the max. We did not get much sleep, but the holding ground was very good, the bay is safe and the area beautiful.



A typical waterside bar, The Sundowner. The beer is cold, the prices high, but they do offer free wi-fi!

So far we are very happy being in Tyrell Bay. There are many boats, but the yachties are very quiet. Ashore we can buy the basic necessities (potatoes, beer, good Chilean white wine, meat from the freezer). Every 4-5 days we take the bus to visit Hillsborough, the capital, where we can shop in supermarkets with a more extensive assortment, and where there are banks to withdraw money. The beaches are superb. The water is clear and warm, so we have taken the opportunity to clean the bottom, using our 5 litre diving bottles (we needed 4 refills before Sunny Spray was clean again). Without having to take a bus, we can directly go for beautiful walks in the forests and in the hillsides.



Bordering Tyrell Bay are forested hillsides, containing the original dirt roads connecting the East and West sides of the island. On the trail on the left we encountered this turtle, who scuttled away as quickly as he could.

The only negative of this site is the Friday night music, and the music on festive days. On Christmas Eve the rasta and rap started at 4 pm in the afternoon. It continued all night, and went on the next morning (Christmas Day). Around noon we escaped into the hills, but even there the blasting music could still be heard. Christmas afternoon we spent on Paradise Beach, the only Beach where the noise could not be heard. Around 6 pm (the music had been going on for 26 hours) they finally went quiet. I am not looking forward to New Year's Eve.



All kinds of nice people pass by in small boats plying their wares: a bottle of cold white wine, fish, lemons, ice, oysters. I bought a fresh tuna from one of them. The one I bought serves me for 4 meals. This is how I prepare it: Cut off the head, put it into the pot for the soup. Remove the gills and throw these overboard (they make the soup bitter). Remove the skin with a very sharp knife, if you want put a bit of salt on the knife to make this job easier. Make a long incision (lengthwise) along the spine. Slide in the knife ever deeper, careful now, following the resistance of the ribcage (the spines). This way you are cutting loose a big chunk of filet from the ribcage. Follow the same procedure on the other side, and along the belly as well. In the end you will have four perfect filets, without spines. Everything you cut off goes into the pot for the soup. The filets can be eaten fresh or frozen, they freeze very well and do not take up much space.



I bought 12 oysters from a passing fisherman for €7. He was so happy with this sale that upon leaving he gave me a big bowl full of oysters. It served us for three delicious meals. I clean the shells in seawater just before using them. Then you open the oysters, put the meat into one shell and throw out the other shell. Cover with garlic butter, adding a pinch of fresh pepper. Put two minutes under a hot grill. You can also open the oysters by putting them directly under the grill (also 2 minutes).

Leading up to Christmas every bar, or bus, broadcasts Christmas songs. These songs cannot be distinguished from the regular rasta and rap, they have the same beat and the same type of word rhythm. However, if you listen closely to the words, you hear some Christmas phrases. A very popular song has the returning phrase "I need a woman for Christmas". Our oyster man (he lives alone) clarified what he means by that: "I am so happy I sold these oysters to you. Now I can go tomorrow to a lady and give her money for Christmas. On Saturday she can do the shopping for food. Sunday I first go to church, and after church I go to the lady friend. And then she will cook for me and we will have a fine Christmas Day. If I sell some of these oysters to that Swedish boat, I will even have some money to buy her a gift!"

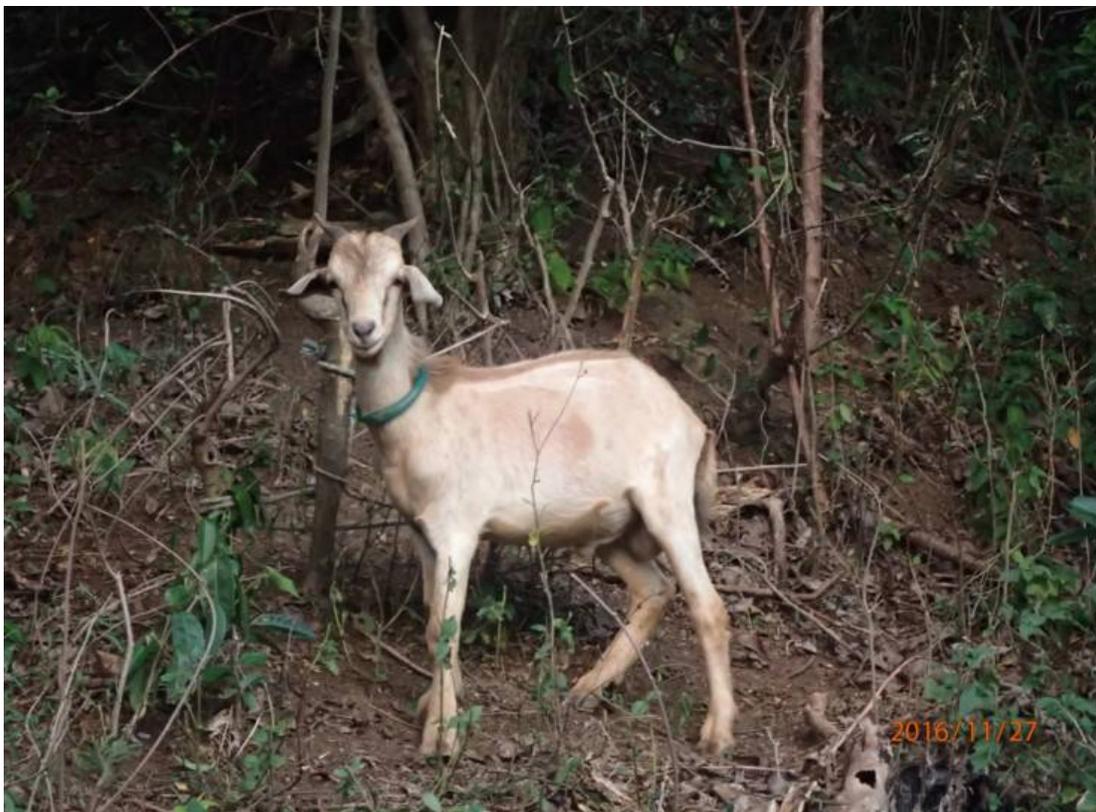
It was unclear to me whether the lady friend also provides other services, but it was clear that our oysterman "needs a woman for Christmas"!

After Christmas he passed by again. I asked how his Christmas day went. Was your lady friend happy with your gift? Did she cook a nice meal? Yes, he said, it had been a very good day, she had cooked a fine meal and it all had been very nice. In fact, he said, it had been a bit too nice, because now she wanted to marry him! That was not to his liking, it was already difficult enough to scrape by a living for one person!

Animal of the month: the goat

We first encountered "goats on the roads" on Grenada. You find them everywhere. Every house with a bit of a lawn has at least 1-2 goats in a pen, gradually eating the grass short. Even at public building you find goats doing the lawn mowing. You also encounter many goats on or alongside the paved and unpaved roads. Sometimes tied up, more often not. It is a miracle that the goat population is not heavily decimated by collisions with the buses that race past.

I do not know whether people eat or milk the goats. I have never seen any goat meat for sale, nor found goat cheese at the road stalls or in the supermarkets.





Hasta la próxima!

Lots of love,

Helma

The AIS is back on all the time, so you can follow us again at www.marinetraffic.com, ship's name Sunny Spray, MMSI: 244780434