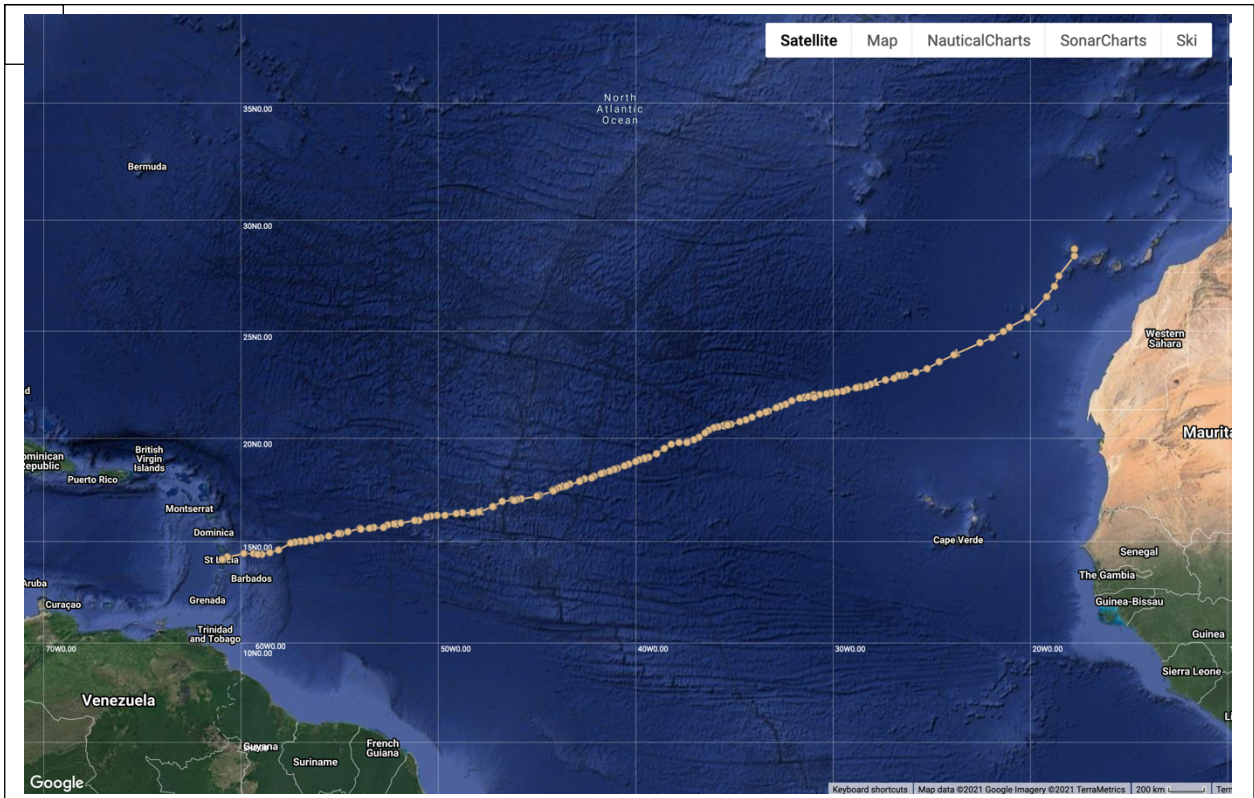


SHIP'S LOG: SV AT FIRST SIGHT TRANSATLANTIC PASSAGE ARRIVAL SITREP, 15 April -04 May 2021



Top Image: Our old-fashioned paper passage chart showing our planned route, our actual track, and serial position fixes. This shows how far south we were expecting to go before picking up steady Trade Winds. Fortunately, they filled in much sooner than we anticipated, shaving off more than one hundred miles.
Bottom Image: Satellite image of our passage track from Santa Cruz de La Palma, Canary Islands, to Rodney Bay, St. Lucia.

We ended our last SITREP with “If the forecast holds, and if we get a few more days of similar weather to follow, we estimate arriving in Rodney Bay on the morning of May 3.” Well, of course, Mother Nature had her own vision for how our voyage would end – and it did not include arriving in St. Lucia on May 3.

The “Champagne Sailing” continued for the next few days. In fact, the weather and seas were so kind and comfortable we were able to grill the tuna and mahi-mahi we caught on the fantail, rather than use the gimble stove in the galley.



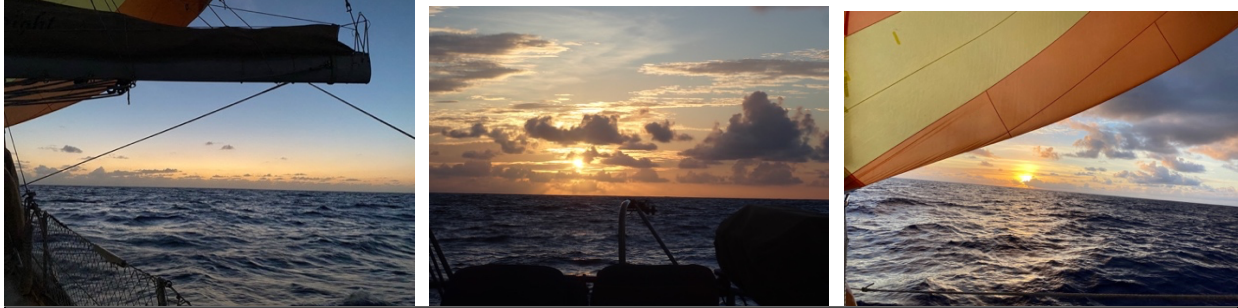
Left: Ignacio with his just-caught Yellowfin Tuna. Right: David with his just-caught Mahi-mahi. Both fish were landed just minutes apart.

And we celebrated “Half-way Night” with two beautiful and delicious homemade specialty pizzas that we devoured in under 15 minutes. We also made a satellite phone call to our daughter, Shelby, and grandchildren Maebel and Evan, who had recently landed in Florida after being evacuated from Yangon, Myanmar/Burma due to the unrest there.



Vicki made two delicious specialty pizzas for celebrating our crossing of the imaginary midpoint of our journey based on our pre-departure route. On the left is a pizza made with vegetarian Spanish chorizo that you’d be hard-pressed to know wasn’t the real thing. On the right is a Greek pizza with spinach, feta cheese, black olives, and sundried tomatoes. Both were delicious!

But by April 26, our 12th day at sea, we were seeing signs that conditions were about to change. No, it wasn’t a falling barometer and storm clouds on the horizon, like in the movies. Rather, it was quite the opposite: winds dropping below 10kts for progressively longer periods of time, and our boat speed dropping to 4kts or less in response.



Above: Several of the spectacular sunsets we experienced on passage, especially during the middle segment.
 Below: Sailing under a brilliant moon made the horizon visible, even at night.



On the other hand, we had increasingly beautiful skies for the next several days. And before moonrise, the heavens were ablaze with thousands of stars from our galaxy and beyond; and afterwards, the nearly full waxing moon gave us a 360° visible horizon to steer by.



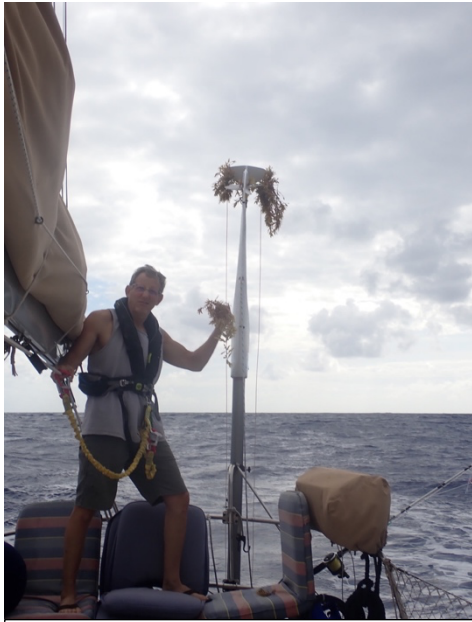
We saw calm conditions for the next several days, calm enough for us to break out our

large, symmetrical spinnaker – none of those small pole-less cruising chutes for us – which seemed to give us an additional 1.5-2.0kts of boat speed in the lighter air conditions. We also tried several unusual sail combinations – anything to help keep our boat speed up. However, we also saw ≥ 22 kt gusts in the afternoons, which given our small crew size, made it prudent to douse our big light-air sails, even when the baseline wind speed was closer to 10kts.

At one point, we even went with a traditional rig – genoa, mainsail, and mizzen – but the point of sail, light breeze, and slightly crossing swell made for an uncomfortable ride. And the incessant flopping and slapping of the partially filled mainsail had us quickly back to the two-headsail rig that had carried us most of the way from the Canary Islands.



Left: Posing for a group picture while cruising at 5.5kts in light air under our symmetrical spinnaker. Right: Here's an unusual sail combo – two pole-out headsails and the mizzen staysail.



A frequent occurrence in the Sargasso Sea, pulling up the hydro generator to remove copious amounts of sargassum seaweed.

In addition to the changing weather conditions, we also entered the Sargasso Sea – an ill-defined sea within an ocean. Surrounded by the Atlantic Ocean, it is the world’s only sea without any land boundaries. While *AFS*’s momentum seemed to take her effortlessly through the endless patches and vast fields of sargassum seaweed, our fishing lines and DuoGen hydro generator did not. They were constantly fouled by the tenacious webs of orangish-brown algae that harbors, nourishes, and sustains an incredible and diverse ecosystem within and below it. Fishing was impossible. And unless we cleared the DuoGen diving plane and propeller blades every 30-60 minutes, its output was essentially zero.

It was at about this point in the voyage that Vicki commented, “Where’s the boredom everyone talks about on passage? I want some of it.”

Ignacio was tending to fishing lines and removing varnish from our wooden oars using a heat gun. He and I also raised the DuoGen every few hours to clear it of sargassum seaweed. Meanwhile, I disassembled, cleaned, and reassembled a big Lewmar 65 winch that “failed” the day before because several pawls were gummed up. Vicki assisted with cleaning the winch parts, and also baked a delicious tuna noodle casserole for lunch, while making 100 gallons of fresh water. It was well after 1400ish before we wrapped up all these morning chores. All the while, James, our intrepid autopilot kept us on course so we did not have to keep anyone constantly at the helm while we did our chores. We took this opportunity to name James as the MVP of the passage.

As if the morning beehive of activity wasn’t enough, just as we were in the Zen Zone enjoying a relaxing sunset, Vicki noticed a run of pinhole tears near the luff of the our big orange drifter sail. We partially lowered it, and Ignacio and I held it in place against the wind while Vicki made the repairs with sail tape. But to make amends for the hectic day, Mother Nature gave us the most beautiful full moon to enjoy during our watches that night.

The next several days brought an abundance of morning squall activity with more than a dozen sometimes popping up here and there and at all points of the compass.



We were threatened by quite a few squalls for several mornings in a row. Fortunately, they were generally of low intensity, and never got closer than a mile or so from our position.

Fortunately, they were of relatively low intensity; however, they nevertheless seemed to steal all our wind as they passed by, robbing us of boat speed and creating an annoying cross swell. While we would generally see 20kts again after the squall activity passed, we also saw a return of the endless fields of sargassum; so much in fact, that we totally gave up trying to fish.



April 29, day #14. No more fresh fruits or veggies, except for 2 onions.

We briefly paused on April 29, day #15, to give homage to and enjoy eating our last fresh tomato and cucumber. Hats off to Vicki for doing such a great job with provisioning!

By this point in the lunar cycle along with turning back the clocks from one time zone to the next, nightfall seemed to come later in the day. It seemed unusually dark at first. But then the moon would suddenly emerge off our stern later in the evening and illuminate everything around us. The sea looked especially glassy in the moonlight as we made 6-7kts in 10-12kts of wind. At one point 20-30 minutes of 3-meter swells appeared from nowhere, and we surfed down the waves with our speed surging to 8 to sometimes 10kts. Then the wind and sea mysteriously settled down.

As we entered the home stretch with roughly 250nm to go, the trade winds disappeared, and we went from making 160-170 miles per day, down to the low 120s. We flew the spinnaker during daylight hours and did whatever else we could to give us an extra half knot or so, trying to shave off an hour here and there. Nevertheless, it soon became clear we would have to adjust our ETA from 3 to 4 May.



The crew of AFS eagerly awaiting landfall in St. Lucia.

About a day and half later, however, the trades seemed to rebuild and we were also happy to see less sargassum, too. But then, as we started our 18th day at sea, it happened... James, the autopilot – our Most Valuable Crewmember to date – stopped working. We checked fluids, cables, hoses, electrics, and electronics, but nothing could bring him back to life. We would have to hand steer the rest of the way to our destination.

We ended up hand steering for ~36 hours, eventually settling on 90-minute rotations at the helm around the clock. It wasn't that difficult or tiresome, really, except for everyone's first watches after sunset yet before moonrise, when there were zero visual clues to help the helmsperson keep *AFS* on course. In the pitch blackness of the night, the following seas and cross swell tended to throw our stern a half boat length to either side, causing one or the other of our two head sails to backfill, only to snap loudly back into place after we steered *AFS* back to her proper westerly heading. As we wrote in our logbook, "04:00. We've been hand steering for ~18 hours now, and everyone seems to be holding up well. Steering became easier throughout the night as the seas became kinder and gentler and the moonlight shed light on the way ahead. We're now ~48nm ENE of St. Lucia. We should be seeing the glow of civilization soon, and the first glimpses of land shortly thereafter. Our house batteries are the only thing aboard *AFS* that seems to appreciate the loss of the autopilot. They're at 80% State of Charge."



Land ho at 08:44! We were ~25nm ENE of Pointe Hardy, when it became clearly visible on the horizon off the port bow. And ~30 minutes later, we had a twofer, with the island state of Martinique coming into view off the starboard bow. We had an uneventful final approach to Rodney Bay Marina, and docked at the J Dock Isolation pier at 13:55, where, after the dockhand helped us with our lines, then securely locked us behind an iron gate. A few moments later we were visited by the Port Health Officer, and a few hours after that by the Regional Medical Officer who conducted COVID PCR tests. When they came back negative, we were released from quarantine, we moved to the regular section of the marina, and we began to fully relax, savor our accomplishment, and enjoy ourselves in St. Lucia.

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Left: A Rodney Bay Marina dockhand locks us behind a gated entrance to the quarantine dock. We would remain in quarantine until our COVID test results came back the next day.
Right: The Regional Medical Officer for St. Lucia donned full personal protective equipment (PPE) to perform our post-arrival COVID tests.



Left: Vicki strikes the yellow Quebec flag, ending our 24 hours of quarantine in St. Lucia
Right: The Port Health Officer places a wrist band on Ignacio, signifying he is permitted to leave the boat and interact with the locals in St. Lucia, where masks and handwashing protocols were strictly enforced.