

S/V AT FIRST SIGHT

St Lucia - Panamá

May - July 2021



After two weeks R&R at Rodney Bay, St. Lucia, Karen Parko joined our crew for a short trip to Marigot Bay, and then a 3- day passage to Antigua & Barbuda.

Long Overdue Update

Okay, I'll acknowledge up front that I'm a lousy blogger. Our last post was in early May, and we're already into September. And I'll need more than a modicum of luck to get this update posted before the end of the Labor Day weekend. Truth be told, I had penned an update back in late June chronicling our passages from St. Lucia to Antigua; and I updated that *masterpiece* twice in July to incorporate our stopover in Puerto Rico. I even kept it open on my computer until a couple of weeks ago with the good intentions of inserting the appropriate pictures and posting it. Then life got in the way, and the more time advanced the *behinder* I got.

Since our update from St. Lucia, which we explored for 2 weeks, we spent a week in Antigua & Barbuda (with med school classmate and longtime friend, Karen Parko, joining us for the 3-day voyage and sightseeing in and around Nelson's Dockyard); a month in San Juan (where we bid farewell to Ignacio Peñuelas); and two weeks in Central Florida (spending time with siblings, all our *kids*, and most notably our two grandchildren). From there we returned to San Juan, and welcomed aboard friends Mike Barnes and Andrew Lowry (Karen's husband) for an 8-day dead downwind, trans-Caribbean passage direct to Bocas del Toro, Panamá, where Vicki and I have been since our arrival on July 1.



Thanks to Ignacio for this fantastic drone shot of AFS under canvas in route from St. Lucia to Antigua!



We visited Shelby, Maebel, and Evan shortly after they had resettled in DeLand, Fla. Travis secured several weeks of home leave from Myanmar, and Charlie and Ben made the reunion complete. This image is from Mead Gardens, where Vicki and I were married ~40 years ago. The organized a surprise anniversary brunch, a few months early.

Special Guests Come Aboard

Vicki and I were delighted we finally put miles under the keel with Karen aboard, and later with Mike and Andrew. Some of our fondest memories as a family date back to 1996, when we spent a few days houseboating on Lake Powell, Utah, with Karen, Andrew, and their two daughters. And we've been trying to get our families together again on the water off and on ever since, especially for the 3+ years we've been cruising.

To make it work this time, they flew together from California in late April to meet us in St. Lucia, where they had to endure 14 days in quarantine. Unfortunately, on the thirteenth day, Andrew was called back to San Francisco for a pressing family urgency. Karen then joined us solo for the 3-day leg from St. Lucia to Antigua; but we held open the possibility that Andrew would join us at a later date. We were glad it worked out that he could come back for the San Juan to Bocas passage. Our fingers are crossed that next time they'll be able to vacation with us at the same time!

Meanwhile, Mike sailed with us on our maiden voyage in AFS, from North Carolina to DC back in August 2014. He next spent 3 weeks living aboard AFS from April-May 2018. Embarrassingly, however, we were stuck on boatyard jack stands in Deale, Maryland, waiting for paint to dry - well, actually we were waiting for the unseasonable period of winter weather to pass making it consistently warm enough to apply several coats of epoxy primer and antifouling paint. Instead of sailing from Maryland to North Carolina to Bermuda, as we had billed it to Mike, we put him to work, and he graciously rolled up his sleeves every day, donned protective gear, and pitched in with other dirty boat jobs for >2 weeks until spring-like weather arrived and we could sand, prep, tape, and paint for another week. Then, just as we were getting underway for the transit to North Carolina and beyond, Mike had to unexpectedly return to his home in Colorado to tend to a family matter there. We hope the passage from San Juan to Bocas helped make amends for the period of indentured servitude in the boatyard.



Karen hoists the Antigua & Barbuda courtesy flag (left) while Ignacio does the same for Puerto Rico. (The yellow Q flags are because we needed to clear in with customs, immigration, and health officials.)



Picnic time, Fort Burkley, English Harbour, Antigua & Barbuda.



All ashore who's going ashore! Taking our tender, 2nd Sight, ashore to clear in with officials at English Harbour, Antigua.





Ship's Log, June 24-25

6/24 @ 1200. Welcome aboard Mike and Andrew! Busy morning with final preps for getting underway. Everything good to go. Underway soon. 1700. Smooth transition from marina life to life at sea. Exited port of San Juan and quickly set jib & jigger. After lunch (leftover pizza), we poled the genoa to stbd and hoisted the drifter to port. A few scattered squalls, but none have impacted our benign sailing conditions. Lots of dolphin as we enter the Mona Passage between Puerto Rico and Dominican Republic.

1800. We just blew out the drifter at the tack. Not sure what happened, but we think a shackle failed first. Regardless, the sail may be toast. 2300. Except for blowing out the drifter, we couldn't ask for a better first day and night underway. The wind and sea are both being kind to us. And we have a beautiful, nearly full moon giving us a 360° visible horizon.



We had plenty of dolphin escorts showing us the way from the port of San Juan to the Mona Passage.

"Underway Under Canvas"

Leaving Puerto Rico through the Mona Pass, with only sails we took that Pass.

With fair winds and following seas to put us at ease, the full moon begins and the daylight ends.

By Mike Barnes, Resident Poet

6/25 @ 0700. Scattered moderate intensity squalls overnight, but a beautiful morning this morning. I erred and left two port lights open in the aft cabin, and the bed is soaked. Vicki not happy... Hopefully, we won't have to take everything topside for things to dry out.

1700. Today flew by between small boat projects, meals, naps, fishing, and making water. We had a monster fish on for >45 minutes before the line broke. On the positive side, the bed dried out with just a fan blowing air over it.

It was obviously an arduous first day at sea. Thankfully, Vicki was at the helm.



Ship's Log, June 26-28

9/26 @0400. Tranquil night. Lots of stars visible despite the nearly full moon, which illuminates the horizon for 360°. Watched a squall develop from a bank of clouds, turn ominous looking, and then race by us. The next one hit us, but it wasn't too bad.

1100. We consumed ~40% of battery capacity last night, probably due to all the radar use, reliance on autopilot with a complex following sea, and refrigeration. We'll need to use the genset again... Busy morning with a light field day below deck and organizing fishing gear above deck. Great cruising conditions now with both the wind and sea at our backs.

1700. Retarded ship's clocks 1 hour to UTC-5 (same time zone as Bocas). Saylor detected a pod of 6 dolphin playing in our wake. Pickled the watermaker to rid it of foul-smelling critters. Ran genset for 5 hours to bring batteries from 49% -> 98%. Vicki now sautéing Mahi almondine for dinner. Another great day at sea!

9/27 @ 0500. We had a super 150nm run yesterday, but it's unlikely to repeat today due to forecasted variable winds, 10-20kts. Overnight, we had no squalls after the sudden burst at 1930ish that seemingly came out of nowhere and caught us somewhat off guard, in part, because we had just finished dinner. We'll have to carefully assess our sail configuration today because we had to fall off 10-15° to stbd to keep the poled-out genoa full. Perhaps we'll want to ease the pole forward to 45°, or douse the pole and go with a conventional genoa, main, mizzen rig on/about a beam reach?

1300. Tranquil morning except for one squall. Wind now ESE, and we're on a beam reach, port tack with genoa, main, mizzen staysail, and mizzen. Mike &



"The Marlin"

I'm a Marlin out swimming in the watery blue. Minding my own business like I usually do. When I was offered an appetizer by At First Sight. It seemed kind of rude to not take a bite. Well, you know this story, the battle was on. Participation trophies for all, but yours truly won.

By Andrew Lowry, Resident Poet

Andrew on baggywrinkle detail. Vicki made her famous No Bakes and she repaired a rip in the mizzen staysail. We landed a 3kg Mahi, which will make for a nice dinner later tonight; or lunch tomorrow.

2200. Quite an amazing night - star-filled sky, smooth sea with gentle swell, comfortable wind on a broad reach, and sharing the experience with my Hon and with good friends.



Thanks Mike! Mahimahi for dinner.

9/28 @ 0800. Great run overnight with moderate winds giving us excellent boat speed over a relatively flat sea. Much less sargassum, and the DuoGen must have remained clear most of the night because we consumed just ~16% of battery capacity, instead of the usual 30%. Without the sargassum, we should be able to catch a fish or two today.

1300. Winds freshened considerably this morning, and for a time we had 30kts true wind speed! We quickly reefed down all the sails and dogged the port lights on the upwind port side. Wind settled out in the 18-20kts range. Boat speed has been >=7.5kts most of the day. Boat speed and bright sunshine have helped to charge the batteries.

2000. Nightfall snuck up on us and we had dinner with everyone together in the cockpit, in the dark. Dinner after dark can be challenging in calm conditions, but we were having 20-25kt winds and 8' seas with occasional 10-footers. Fortunately, Vicki had fixed the perfect meal for these conditions - tuna fish and egg salad, which was easy to eat as a sandwich. Setting the watch. Mike up first.

2400. We had a great run today - 185nm under sail!!

Ship's Log, June 29-30

6/29 @0200. DuoGen fouled with what looks in the dark like a long black electrical cable? (Later identified as a long bamboo vine.)

0800. #2 reef line parted due to chafe (inside boom?). Gray, overcast morning with relatively smooth sailing, and reasonably comfortable despite F4-F5 seas with 8' swell off port quarter.

1200. DuoGen out of commission, for now. Plastic connecting cone failed, probably from the deceleration stress of the vine last night?

2000. Setting the watch. Vicki on deck. We have prepared for a series of "significant" thunderstorm activity, per Chris Parker, Marine Weather Center, on HF radio. Prophylactically reefed both the mizzen and poled-out genoa. Handheld electronic devices all in a bag to put in the microwave if lightning develops nearby. Foul weather gear at the ready.



Mike on baggywrinkle detail. Baggywrinkles are soft coverings used to protect sails from chafe. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baggywrinkle>



What's so interesting there, fellas? Trying to make an expedient repair to the DuoGen after it was damaged by a large vine. Fixing it would have to wait until Bocas.

2300.

*On this dark and cloudy night,
Über strong Trade Winds, they are a blowin'.
The big swells and waves, they are a rollin'.
Ketch At First Sight, she is a goin',
Its audacious crew, they are enjoyin'.
By David Lane*

6/30 @ 0200. We sailed 170nm yesterday in the 24hrs ending at midnight. Thus far, we've seen lightning in the distance to the south and to the west, fortunately none nearby. Mike noted several dense storms passing within 5nm, including one that tracked on radar moving at 60kts. None have hit us, yet! Saylor seems on edge.



0500. Mini storms have popped up out of nowhere and then disappeared just as quickly. The wind gets funky and it smells like rain, sometimes with a diffuse lightning burst; but then it dissipates, thankfully.

0900. Fortunately, the forecasted "significant" t-storms did not develop. Similarly, the forecasted doldrums has not materialized today either. We're sailing with reefed down jib and jigger and making 6+kts. At this speed, we'll arrive off Bocas before daybreak tomorrow, and we'll need to *heave to* offshore.

1900. Spoke too soon... Totally relaxing day until ~1 hour ago. Hit by moderately severe squall that popped up out of nowhere with winds to 36kts and angry 10-12' swells with breaking wavetops. Reefed genoa ~50%, dumped mizzen, and sailed on a beam reach until the squall was off the stbd bow, then doused all the sails and turned slightly to port and motored directly into the decreasing wind and diminishing seas.

Ship's Log, July 1 – Land Ho!

0600. Uneventful night, motored all night with Peter Perkins because little to no wind. Only a few scattered, low-intensity squalls. Daybreak finds us ~24nm out from Canal de Bocas, but surrounded by squalls, including considerable electrical activity and thunder. Saylor is not a happy camper.

0730. Land ho!! It finally breaks out from the haze.

1500. None of the of the charted aids to navigation were in place during our approach to Bocas, which was unsettling to say the least. Fortunately, we had deep water all the way in. We arrived at the South Anchorage at 1130 and dropped the hook. Repaired DuoGen and enjoyed lunch while waiting for the Port Captain and Health Officer to come aboard at 1400. They reviewed our boat, personal, and health documents and then ferried us ashore for in processing with Customs and Immigration. No hiccups.

1700. We moved from the anchorage to Bocas Marina in order to plug in and use the air conditioning. It's hot and sticky here. Welcome to the tropics in July!



(L to R). Arrival in the Bocas del Toro archipelago. Hoisting the Panamanian courtesy flag. First liberty call in Bocas.