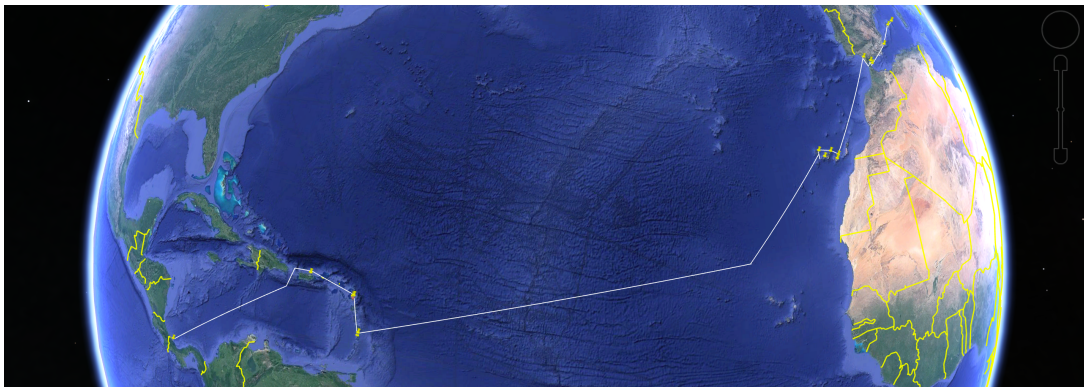


Aboard S/V At First Sight  
In Transit, Bocas del Toro, Panamá  
July 1, 2021 to January 6, 2022



We haven't posted in quite a while, and this update will describe what we've been doing since our last update, which was shortly after we made landfall in Bocas del Toro, Panamá, on July 1. It also recaps all our cruising for 2021.

Like for many around the world, COVID impacted what we did and when we did it throughout most of 2021, although you can't get much more socially distanced than on a cruising sailboat at sea. To the adage about the cruising lifestyle – butt down and head up fixing your boat in exotic ports around the world – we can now add getting swabbed and jabbed to test or prevent COVID, too. In our cases, we had our noses swabbed this year in Mahón, Menorca, Spain; La Palma, Canary Islands; Castries, St. Lucia; St. John's, Antigua; San Juan, Puerto Rico, and Bocas del Toro, Panamá. We received our first vaccine dose in Rota, Spain, our second in DeLand, Florida (Vicki) and San Juan (David), and our third in Bocas.



Our sailing travels in 2021 took us from Mahón, Menorca, Spain, to Bocas del Toro, Panamá, with stops in Cartagena, Ceuta (~2 hours), Línea de Concepción, Rota, Canary Islands, St. Lucia, Antigua & Barbuda, and Puerto Rico.

Our cruising adventure in 2021 broke down into four parts: (1) A transatlantic crossing from Spain to St. Lucia with a lengthy stopover in the Canary Islands, January – May, (2) two short passages from the Lesser to Greater Antilles in the Eastern Caribbean, May – June, (3) a direct passage from San Juan, Puerto Rico, to Bocas del Toro in June, and (4) volunteering with Floating Doctors in the Bocas archipelago. We also made a mid-year pilgrimage to Central Florida to see siblings (all doing well), Shelby's family (temporarily relocated to DeLand from Myanmar/Burma), Charlie (4<sup>th</sup> year med student at Emory) and Ben (computer design engineer in Seattle), and of course, grandchildren Maebel and Evan (simply adorable).

For specific details about the sailing and our ports of call, you can check out older blog posts at [www.svatfirstsight.com](http://www.svatfirstsight.com). At the end of the day, however, we think life is more about the journeys than the destinations, and we were fortunate to share our journeys this year with Juan Peñuelas (Rota to Las Palmas), Juan's son Ignacio Peñuelas (Las Palmas to St. Lucia, and then on to San Juan), med school classmate Karen Parko (St. Lucia to Antigua), Karen's husband Andrew Lowry and Navy shipmate Mike Barnes (San Juan to Bocas). We are grateful that these dear friends took time out from their normal routines and comfortable lives to cross oceans and seas with us, sometimes in challenging conditions.



We were fortunate to have several friends join us this year for various legs of our passages from the Mediterranean to Caribbean Seas. They included (L to R), Juan Peñuelas (Spain to Canary Islands), his son Ignacio Peñuelas (Canaries to Puerto Rico), Karen Parko (St. Lucia to Antigua), and Mike Barnes and Andrew Lowry (Puerto Rico to Panamá).

More than just idle passengers, they stood watches in the dark of night, prepared meals in a cramped and rolling galley, and helped with cleaning, maintenance, and repairs of our floating home, S/V At First Sight. Thanks guys!

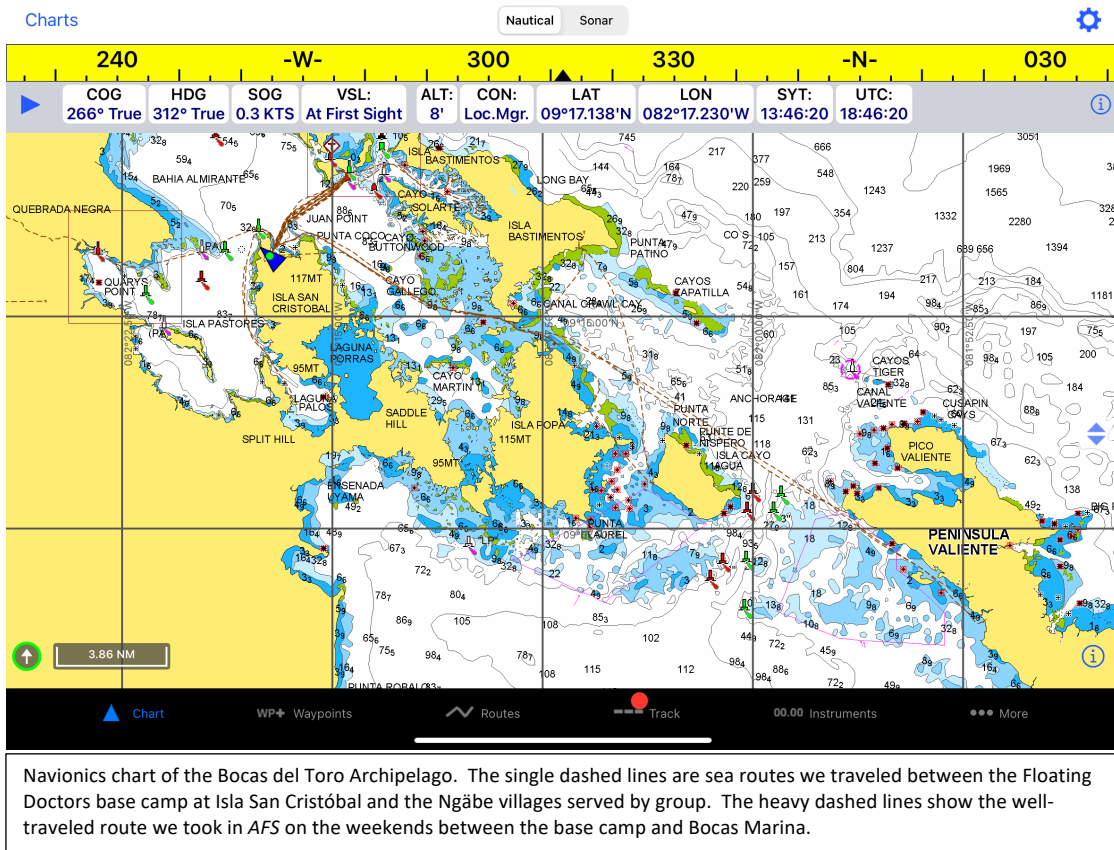


As noted above, we arrived in Bocas del Toro in July, and volunteered full-time with Floating Doctors ([www.floatingdoctors.com](http://www.floatingdoctors.com)) until Christmas Day. A typical workweek began on Sunday evening with introductions of new volunteers and a community profile brief for the Ngäbe villages being served that week. (The Ngäbe are native to northwest Panamá, and together with their nearby cultural and linguistic cousins, the Buglé, make up the largest indigenous population group in Panamá. They live in isolated, spartan island communities of a few hundred to a few thousand people all around the Bocas Archipelago and in the surrounding mountainous mainland.)



Monday morning saw the team loading a dozen waterproof pelican cases of medical equipment and pharmaceuticals, boxes and boxes of fortified rice for malnourished children, food and water for the team, and everyone’s camping gear aboard *Dr. Blue*, the large, native-style *cayuco* Floating Doctors uses for navigating from its base camp on Isla San Cristóbal to the Ngäbe villages. We would repeat the process in reverse on Thursdays, arriving back at the base camp in early afternoon, allowing Thursday afternoons and Friday mornings to reload and reset for the next week, when the cycle would start over. These multi day clinics were both rewarding and a lot of fun – and also a lot like real work. But rather than describe them in detail, we’ll show you with a few pictures at the end of the post what they were like.

Many cruisers cite the Bocas Archipelago as one of the best cruising grounds in the world. Hurricane free? Check. Caribbean ambiance? Check. Magnificent beaches? Check. Fruit-laden rainforests? Check. Vibrant local culture? Check. Snorkeling, diving, fishing, dolphin, and more? Check. Unfortunately, we did zero cruising during our entire stay; and although we lived aboard *AFS* when we weren’t away on multi-day clinics with Floating Doctors, she mostly served as our weekend water taxi for ferrying us on Friday afternoons from the base camp at San Cristóbal to Bocas Marina, and back to the base camp on Sunday. We did that trip so many times, we’re convinced *AFS* could have done it by herself without anyone at the helm.





On the other hand, we enjoyed socializing (outdoors) on weekends with many expat cruisers from Europe, Australia, South Africa, and of course, the United States. This most often meant attending the Friday night barbecue at the marina's Calypso Cantina.

I wrote most of the narrative for this update on Christmas Day. We got together on that day with the other volunteers (from England, France, Mexico, Holland, and USA) for an international potluck Christmas Dinner at the base camp. We motored the following day to Bocas Marina and begin to make detailed preparations for getting underway again, which we did on January 6. But more about that experience in the next update.



We had Christmas Dinner with new family – our friends and colleagues at Floating Doctors. Who knew they were also Santa's Elves, and would pay us a visit at our anchorage the day after Christmas, seen here chillaxin' after a hard night's work?

When we arrived in Bocas in July, we were planning to transit the Panama Canal when we finished volunteering, and begin cruising in the Pacific. However, our plans have changed, and we're now intending to sail to Florida.

What's the draw to Florida you might ask, compared to the adventures that await us in the Pacific? Grandkids! As noted above, Maebel and Evan (and their parents) had their tour curtailed in Myanmar/Burma, and they've temporarily settled in Florida – but only until summer when they'll report to their next posting in South Africa. We didn't want to miss this golden opportunity for quality time with Shelby and her family, and to be within striking distance of visiting with Charlie and Ben, in Atlanta and Seattle, respectively.



We hope you had a safe, relaxing, healthy, and joyful holiday season, and that 2022 brings all of us more of the same. Fair winds.



Six months volunteering with Floating Doctors summarized with 20 pictures.

