

Transboundary Grenadines



Sailing the Windward Isles

(map thanks to Allison DeGraff)

Tall Ships Youth Trust sends a couple of yachts across the Atlantic each year as part of the ARC. This gives some adults chance to sail a Challenger yacht in a warm sunny climate whilst helping to fund the youth programme back in the UK – a philanthropic twist to playing with a powerful yacht in the Tropics!

There were fourteen on our voyage; Skipper, Mate, two Watch-leaders and ten passage crew so enough who knew what they were doing with plenty of practical involvement for the rest of us.

A night in the marina was enough to clear any jet lag and Tuesday saw us sailing North under main and Yankee headsail. Challengers are big yachts with main, headsail and stay sail and have the added



complication of running back stays so even a crew of fourteen get plenty to do just to get ready for sea. The day was bright and clear as we passed a flock of Brown Boobies feeding on an invisible shoal of fish just off our starboard bow. Time passed with crew taking turns at the helm and we were soon dropping anchor off Hillsborough on Carriacou. Sam, our Mate dived overboard to check



the anchor was well set – not something you see off the West Coast of Scotland.

Carriacou was just a stop-over and after a quiet night we headed for Union Island. What a pretty sight with steep volcanic slopes, reefs and an outlying island with splashes of colour as kite surfers zipped around. Getting in was a more serious task amidst the reefs and a Challenger's 3 metre keel quickly finds the shallows. Nevertheless we were soon settled on a secure mooring. Lunch and a potter round the delightful town of Clifton was made the more enjoyable by the size of the crew. We made a loose knit group

exploring town and crossing each other's paths and clustering in the Wifi zones of bars and cafes before gathering for the water taxi back to the boat. Customs cleared (into the Grenadines) and armed with racks of beer as it was the last major centre for some time we were free to continue North. But not before exploring Tobago Cays where we had arranged a beach BBQ. Most islands seem to know the Challenger yachts of TS and we are greeted by locals in gaudy high-speed boats offering





fresh supplies (bread and fish) whenever we enter harbour. In this case we arranged for locals to set up a fine lobster BBQ on the uninhabited island which was a great way for the crew to get together and build as a team. Anchored off they even provided a water taxi so no wet bottoms for this feast.

Next day was another good sail with Mayreau as our evening destination. There a swim and a walk on the beach are very desirable but a walk up the hill is essential. The church at the top offers panoramic views of the sea with a myriad of colours from turquoise to deep blue as the cloud shade painted the shallows and depths off-shore. Its silence contrasted with the busy town of Clifton and offered sanctuary from the intensity of close living on-board so several of us lingered just savouring the moment.

Refreshed it was soon time to wander down hill to gather at Denise's Hideaway for cocktails - and the Caribbean's really know how to mix cocktails. Pina Coladas, Denise's Specials or Dark and Stormy were just

a few of the drinks sampled before setting back for an excellent dinner on board. Denise had a delightfully relaxed attitude, so crews regularly returned the following day to honour their bar bills and we were no exception to that. Sitting on deck later all were wearing light tops, shorts and sockless sandals as dinghying ashore in the tropics really does make for light and casual dress.

By Saturday we were off to Grand Bay on Canouan where we found a



super beach and bar to while away the afternoon before our on-board dinner. By Monday it was time to up the tempo and all enjoyed a good sail further north to Bequia. On the way we spotted flying fish and took turns helming as the yacht surged on at an easy 8knts before anchoring in Admiralty Bay. Once ashore we took the narrow, water's edge footpath passing bars, shops, hotels and more bars. At the far end of the beach rose a cliff-like hill that offered views across the bay and out to sea. The air was warm and the atmosphere relaxed so time passed easily before Sundowners presaged another good meal onboard. Some prepared, others cooked, and the remainder washed up.





Fourteen made for very light work and duties were quickly done. Monday saw us sailing south back to anchor off Hillsborough on Carriacou ready to re-enter Grenada but Customs regulations are quite relaxed and a yacht has a few days to leave one territory and enter the next. There was just time to say hello to the crew of Lord Nelson (UK training square rigger) a welcome sight at anchor in the bay. Then we set Main and Yankee for a fast beam reach to Carriacou and were soon clear of Customs so headed across to Sandy Isles which has post card good looks. The narrow sandy strip no wider than a cricket pitch with great snorkelling along its southern beach

offered welcome shade amidst palm trees and native flora. Later we enjoyed sundowners overlooking that stunning narrow moonlit strip of sand.

Tuesday started slowly and we motored amidst Frigate birds diving for food bound for Petite Martinique where banners and flags proclaimed National Day. Passing a school we heard the children singing as we explored yet another island and then settled in the shade of a nice bar overlooking the sea. Ice cream and wifi refreshed body and mind as we regained contacts at home – selfies of suntan and blue skies to friends in the cold and rain I suspect.



By mid-afternoon it was time to head back to Sandy Isle where we picked up a secure mooring. Skipper Terry's excellent team building meant by now we had gelled into a close-knit team and we all enjoyed another splendid beach BBQ. Sunset hues gave way to a velvet star filled night with the added appeal that we were the only ones on our private island – how cool is that?



It's worth taking a moment to describe our home – a Challenger yacht is 72ft long and built to beat into any weather racing "the wrong way" round the globe so emphasis is on seaworthiness rather than comfort. The toilets can be hinged 33° to suit her heel into the wind – is that comfort or survival? Her length combined with a 90ft mast makes for big winches and big sails which are kept in the sail locker and hanked on as needed. With stay and head sails it takes about 8 crew to tack her but the job quickly becomes a slick routine. Once under sail she

rapidly powers to 8 or 10 knots so the miles scud by. More details can be found on tallships.org web site.



We decided to sail south on Wednesday as most were new to Grenada and keen to tour the island so it was time to



hoist the main and Yankee for our last sail. After a good sail we stopped short of our final destination Port Louis as just around the corner is a sculpture park. Yes, an underwater exhibition free to all those willing to dive the shallows to see it. Some felt it a bit *spooky* but definitely worth the effort and then we were off to the marina to sort out the yacht. Challenger yachts

have everything you need but it was nice to have a shower with limitless water and a toilet that didn't need to be pumped twenty times after use.

On Thursday some toured the island and saw nutmeg production, a chocolate factory and rum distillation with some sites hundreds of years old making for a very interesting trip.



Others

took a local bus to the main town of St George for a meal in famous BB's. A local (mini) bus is a must as they have a conductor whose role is to attract attention of potential passengers no matter how unlikely, pack more aboard than



the Guinness Book of Records and play Reggae music as loud as possible.

Most passage crew were on the same afternoon flight home, so it was a lazy day around the marina pool before saying sad farewells after a super trip on a classic sailing yacht having explored eight very different tropical islands.

