

A Pirate in the Caribbean - Part Three : --- the adventures of Mike Greenland continued

Virgin flight from Gatwick to Barbados 8hrs, watched 3 films, 4hr transfer wait onto Castries St Lucia via St Vincent, on LIAT Dash 8, and on time for LIAT, thats almost a record! Nick picked me up from the airport and into the bar for a few; then bedtime! ie 3am uk time.

Spent a couple in days in Rodney bay, sailing, eating, and drinking, just to get acclimatised plus 'jump-up' Friday night in Grosilet, bed by 3am just to set the trend.

Sunday evening flew to Grenada to meet up with Robin as planned but, the landing was hold on tight lads a bit of a storm! then at customs 'anything to declare' as I had already said nothing on the immigration form thought it was an idea to mention (£300) a few items in transit, the stropy cow hand fisted thro' my bag found a couple of receipts and decided I would have to pay duty on them, thankfully she never looked properly in all the boxes. The prices on the invoice she thought they were in EC's (they were in £'s) I had to pay 14ec about £3, so escaped smiling; it should have been about £15! (4ec to £) and should have paid this at every airport! 'goods in transit', nice little earner for them for doing F### all.

Outside the terminal was greeted with this storm, rain and wind horizontal but no Robin? However, after 20 minutes Simon appeared saying Robins ill saying in a hotel with his Mother, Simon and Mother had been with Robin on a charter and he felt ill a few days previous, Dangué fever was suspected. Next day I took him to the hospital; they confirmed he could have this fever which can kill! the doctor said it will get worse so we decided or Robin did; we would leave immediately for Trinidad, 22 hours later we arrived in Chaguaramas not without incident. On the AIS (Collision at sea navigation system) about 3am I spotted two ships moving at 2.6 knots about 20 miles away and wasn't concerned however, we kept hearing a radio message from a ship and deduced after an hour it was calling us, unfortunately he sounded Russian attempting to speak english. Suddenlly on our AIS system it was saying we were on a collision course with something approaching at 20 odd knots within 200 metres! this vessel then trained a surchlight on us! the alarm bell ringing on the AIS and some demented Russian on the vhf radio telling us to change course to 130° ie head to wind, did he know yachts don't sail straight into the wind; engine on f###k! anyway after 20 minutes of almost going backwards we notice a 300m+ ship up our arse, so as these two survey ships were miles away the word bollocks to this survey protection vessel we reverted to our 190 course with sail power.



Approching Chaguaramas Trinidad



The usual Storm

Daybreak as usual as we passed the oil and gas rigs; this brighten up the day nearly there, Robin looked like shit and with little wind we progressed at under 4 knots towards Trinidad. What happen next was the usual for me as we entered port, thunderstorm, must be my omen of mine upon arrival in the Caribbean. Mooring on the customs quay for clearing imigration customs etc plus our fees ££ or TT's +50tt (£5) for the harbour master why? The Caribbean experience I was told, we are here after half an hour sleep in 24. Eventually we moored on Peter Peaks private pontoon (owner of the marina) which was good of him as Simon (the Raster clarvoient!) hadn't sorted one out for us. We then met up with Zack, (22yr old south African) and Herbert (60yr old

German) whom had been employed by Robin for working on Como No; the Dutch built steel yacht. Robins new adventure to make a few dollars instead of chartering!



How many toys can you have?



Over a 1000 yachts here hiding from Hurricanes



£6 million toy with tender

This yacht was brought cheap as the hull had rusted thro' from the inside below the fresh water storage tanks, the time I had arrived 75% had been refitted, now its my job to finish off. I will fast forward a week as I have just about fitted most things back with sweat and frustration ie: where are the screws for this, which wire went where etc and and ?? Running parallel with this is the painter guy called Cow who has been sub contracted to paint the entire yacht, 7 weeks of an 8 week project he's 6 weeks behind! What with Robins health its not been good news for him, stress doesn't even come into it as they still haven't finished preparing the deck, two weeks time we are ment to be sailing away! Also, I had a list of jobs on Sophie Ems ie no instruments since sailing from Grenada which turned out to be corrosion in the wires at the mast base and fit all the LED lights bought in Ikea, its fun all the way here! Still, only on our thrid pack of 24 beers after a week and a half, plus we've run out of rum although I do have a stock in St Lucia thanks to Sherma. Nicks looking after them until we sail back to St Lucia; when ever that will be.



Under preperation



Primed outside balancing on scaffold boards 8' up!

Fast forward again by another 4 weeks and they still haven't finished the top deck; when I arrived Cow told me it will be painted on Monday, I said to Cow in December I assume there weren't any Mondays in November, I don't think he understood! By now Robin is getting better until he fell off the bike and twisted his ankle! We still had no idea when we will get the boat back in the water. Robin decided as soon as the deck was finished we sail to Carracou and have its top sides prepared and painted there. I wasn't in agreement with him and both Herbert and I said noway, I will paint it! any twyat can spray including me but preparation was the key. After many days of frustration with these painters Ollie (Robins son) arrives thinking he will be on a sailing adventure, thought he would have known his dad by now! To allow him into the country Robin had to go to the airport to prove who he is and show the ships papers to confirm his point of stay. You are allowed 90 days before you have to leave.



Robin looking like a local. Ollie why am i here? work experience son. Finish job 6 coats 4 white and two high build primer. Two days to fit 8 new perspex windows. Don't ever leave a software salesman to remove stubbed screws from your '8 windows'! its not a PC Robin.

We got to the point with the painters excuses that if we put the boat under cover they could finish the deck, or so we hoped. Robin found a large shed which had just became vacant so within 4 hours the boat was moved. The first excuse when in the shed its now 3.30pm and if we paint now the bugs may land on the wet paint!! During the previous week we prepared the exterior for painting which took about seven days. Complications arose as the previous owner had had below the water line shot blasted and this left a rough ridge at the waterline of about 6-8mm; which I flared in with filler and a lot of sweat and sanding. Before the boat went under cover that weekend I managed to put one coat of epoxy 2 pack on the Saturday, looked at the finish on Saturday afternoon and wasn't pleased with the lumps and bumps so Sunday morning we rubbed down areas and filled again. At 11am a thunderstorm! which lasted till 3pm, thankfully the sun appeared at 3.30 and said lets just cover up all the repairs with a local coat; it looked respectable ready for a second coat. Its now 5pm and its dark by 6pm, right Robin lets go for it; he mixed I sprayed; one side was completed as the sun was setting and the other was sprayed in darkness! Monday morning in daylight it looked perfect but the night air had carried the overspray over the adjacent covered boat to the next!! Fortunately grey dust washed off their pristine white yacht, a bottle of red and white wine cleared the air. They were an english couple, In his previous life he ran a paint spray shop and had given me some advice.



Careful still wet paint!!



Michael the driver (not that good a driver!)

With the engine fuel system looked over by Duncun an english guy who has been out her for several years; he and I couldn't concluded of how the header tank was filled from the main keel tank however, he managed to start the engine with a total relief from Robin (and me) first time, Robin hadn't smiled for a while! With the boat moved inside plus Ollie recovered from his illness or was it the shock of having to work; the final paint was concluded in 7 days.

Mast up and rigged she was almost ready for launch. This is now December 10th; I arrived on the 13 October, have I just lost 2 months? wish I had seen more of Trini. We went to see the Divali festival, a day on the beach even though it did rain, taxi tour of Port of Spain, St James, plus and a few evenings having a good time with all the other yotties. Oh; and trying to start Herbert's yacht engine as he and long time girl friend Ericka were about to be thrown out of the country! The engine hadn't turned over for a year! a minor rewiring, removed the injectors, heaters etc I managed to get it going for them.

Launch day it rained, and no leaks from the repaired hull even though it hadn't been tested by filling up the inside with water! Robin.



As we had two yachts to sail Jerry flew down from St Lucia to assist me in taking Como No to St Lucia, again Robin had to go to the airport to collect him re documentation. As Jerry has sailed these waters alot more than myself I let him take charge which in the end was the innovator on fixing things which go wrong at 3am in the morning.



Leaving Chagurarmas



Ship repair dry dock!

So we are leaving tomorrow said Robin now the boat is in the water! Next day Jerry and I spent time in connecting and checking things out like the 24v alternator is dead, the water pipe connections to the sink taps leaked; he made up olives from a pile of bits, this went on and eventually we left after spending 3 hours in customs and immigration offices, they don't have a photo copier so you have to write information down on six identical forms. Robin had to write a letter to state that he had given permission for Jerry to take charge of his yacht, plus Jerry and Ollie had to pay an exit fee as they arrived by plane not by sea. Robin decided to stock up on diesel and acquired 35 20 litre ex cooking oil containers, why you ask? its 15p a litre here! Petrol is 25 pence., we carried half each on of the boats. Robin put most in the bow; forward shower area which didn't help speed thro the waves. We carried most in the rear locker.

Before we left two yachts sailed for Panama; with all the talk of Pirates of the Caribbean and Somalia the Venezuela pirates attacked one of these yachts within 7 miles of us, the woman was on the helm; her partner was below, she said oh there is a small fishing boat coming over to us, they had set off with another yacht but he didn't stay with them! the idea was to sail together! Five men boarded and at gun point took all their money and jewellery, she was hit around the face with a gun to make her take off her rings. Last October at Frigate Island off Union Island similar happen but the woman there had a machetti to her face; broke her jaw let alone the facial scare she will have for the rest of her life. Think twice about sailing here.

By 2pm we left on a Friday 13th, rain storm again but we did have a canopy over us but no front screen to dodge the waves coming over! Robin, Ollie on Sophie Ems and Jerry and myself on Como No. We headed north towards the east side of Grenada but with the NE breeze we found it too close hauled and eventually made a decision to head to the west side of Grenada. We called Robin on the vhf and although we were within 1 mile of one another and had an initial response Jerry found himself talking to himself, that was our last radio contact. Sailed thro' the night with no charts no log no depth gauge infact nothing worked but I did have Robin's 7" tablet with the charts and software program on it; but it wasn't working!! So after an hour of whats going wrong I went up top with the tablet and it started to show our position, 'steel boat no satelite signal inside' lesson learnt.

Daylight dawned and Grenada on the horizon; Sophie about mile behind we travelled up the west coast and had to put the engine on as we were in the lee of Grenada so, no auto helm, no charging on the 24v system; which only powered the lighting system and anchor winch on the boat, hence we had sailed without any nav lights; only the anchor light at the top of the mast to save power. As we headed north we decided to stop over night in Chatham bay; Union Island. We couldn't contact Robin and hoped he would follow us as they were about 2 miles behind, however we tacked and headed inshore but didn't seem to follow, by dusk we lost them!

We dropped anchor and radioed for any good guy to pick us up and drop us ashore in the beach bar for food and drink, we had a reply! Pick up in 10 after I've dropped off others, 20 went by then 30 minutes right said Jerry lets make our own dinner and by 9pm we put our heads down.

At 3am I woke up; the boat was moving up and down quite a bit, I looked out 'Jerry we've dragged the anchor' and about 2 miles out at sea in a force 8!! The anchor was still biting now and again so, I stood at the bow and operated the anchor winch and Jerry drove forward under my guidance, the engine stopped and would restart! Thankfully I new what had been altered on the fuel system and switched on the electric pump but no fuel came thro', we then changed both fuel filters; this boat had enough spares to repair any eventuality, still no fuel coming thro'. Right plan B use the bypass valves and connect up the fuel to one of the containers, thankfully we had 15-20 litre cans on board, after bleeding the system she fired up. Its now 4am and about 3 miles off shore and drifting fast, I was getting slightly worried by now! Right; try and retrieve the anchor and chain, oh dear not enough power in the winch to pull it up, oh well sorry Robin I let it go, standing by with knife in hand expecting to cut the rope from the chain; being the final attachment to the boat Robin hadn't tied it on. Thats Life!

Next phase we decided to motor round to Clifton Harbour the other side of Union Island; (were we had run aground before with Sophie earlier in the year) hoping to pick up a mooring. With this headwind and the currnet against us it seem hours before we even saw the navigation channel lights to the harbour enterance, just as we passed Frigate Island and a reef the engine cut out! we were drifting straight for the reef and we very quickly unfurled the headsail and managed to clear the reef but finished up back at Frigate island. Jerry went below and bleed the fuel system as we had emptied out one of the cans. The problem was although the fuel was coming out of the container the return line of the system was sending the unused fuel back to the tank in the keel. So I held the boat trying to hold ground while Jerry connected up the return hose back to the container. Right second attempt to get to the harbour, the moon was helping but as we approached the harbour entrance the moon disappeared behind the hillside. I could see the port channel lights but no starboard lights, there isn't any! Jerry said watch out for the unlight posts! He warned me and thanks to his knowledge of the area we managed to get in the harbour. We still couldn't see the moored yachts unless you were within 10 metres of them, Jerry took the helm and I went forward looking for any spare mooring bouys; couldn't see one but we noticed a jetty and took that whether it was private or not, we tided up and I put my head down for a couple of hours, an eventful night.

In the morning ie 7'oclock we had the harbour master on board, he had seen us motoring around the moored yachts and congratulated us on our manovers. We advise him of our situation and said we will be leaving about 11am after breakfast and getting some provisons, he said no charge and we thanked him. Three hours later another 'harbour master' turned up or claiming to be; he said we should have to pay, we explained the situation and advised him one of his colleges said FOC; we said how much do you want? he said what do you want to pay Jerry said thats very cheap then!

We bought some food; had breakfast and was just about to leave when my 'mate ' Tiger from my last mooring disaster appeared we shook hands (he remember me from July last year) and he said I here you lost the anchor (bad news travels fast out here) I could get you one; and do you know the position where you lost yours, I'll look for it. I said about 3 miles off Chatham bay and at the time wasn't feeling like tying a marker bouy to it! anyway at that depth it would pull the bouy down with a 60kg anchor and 150 foot of chain.

We left Clifton harbour, Jerry put his head down after we cleared the channel, I helmed the yacht all the way to Bequia, had a race for 10 miles with a Swan 53 hit 8.5knots with Como while Jerry slept; no sign of Robin or Ollie.

Bequia on Sunday night was party night we picked up a mooring bouy or bought one for the night, next to the bars and food; we had a wash, I radioed up to beg a lift to the shore as we didn't feel like getting our rib off the fordeck, lift in 5 minutes; thankyou. Few drinks listened to the music and wandered off to Macs (no Macdonalds here) for a pizza, Jerry new most of the girls at the resturant being quite a well know person here. We had our meal took a doggie bag with us for breakfast and headed back, As we approached the jetty a rib was just leaving Jerry ran shouting hey hey hey they stopped and came back and took us to our boat, these guys had guns and then we discovered it was the police launch! They patrol the yachts at night to deter theft etc.

Mickey, Mikey, said Jerry at 4am; mickey sound asleep – thinking are we drifting again!!!; we will slip out of here at 4.30 after a cupper and snack, St Lucia is about an 18 hour run, Who said life in the Caribbean is fun, anyways I took Como out of the harbour and headed towards St Vincent with only the moon and stars to guide me plus the headland street lights off St Vincent; and a 7" tablet, when we got into the lee off the headland; the wind dropped and we slowed below 5 knots then motored to the top of St Vincent. Jerry decided to do some domestics and washed all our wet clothes mainly to get the salt out, everthing was nicely pegged out on the guard rail until we unfurled the head sail and the sheets wipped of my best shorts into the briney! Jerry said this gentle breeze will change after we leave the protection of the island and yep he was right, 30 to 40 knot breeze across the bow along with waves that in the troughs you lost sight of the horizon, the yacht was sailing well. By now we had fitted a tempory screen into the window apertures and one wave crashed over the yacht which took the entire perspex panels out and we both sat there looking somewhat drowned. Oh well tape it back in again! And dry off with the warm breeze. She was doing a constant 7.5 knots and for a 13ton steel she was ploughing thro' the waves like a racing yacht or was it we were not carring the 60kg anchor and chain at the pointed end?

Below top end of St Vincent breeze filling in!



Note spare anchor but no chain!



St Vincent in the background

The next landmark was St Lucia and the Pitons, oh Jerry had gone down below for a 4 hour nap and left me incharge again which as it was my adventure it was what I wanted to do. We approached the Pitons Jerry said to me 'am I a gambling man' meaning, we will take bet where Robin is hence is he behind us or infront? we had a wager; a bottle of Rum, I said he's in Rodney bay Marina and Jerry believes he's behind us. The next problem was to check; Jerry didn't bring his phone battery charger and it was almost flat, using mine had problems via the uk ie didn't want to connect to St Lucia. We also wanted a mooring in Rodney bay marina (no anchor) but the entire marine would be full with the yachts competing in the race across the Atlantic called The ARC. Jerry's friend is the manager of Rodney bay marina, good having friends like this with you; but his phone was about to expire and we couldn't get hold of Beth Jerrys partner as she was teaching kite surfing at her venue. So Jerry being an innovator went below took the batteries out of my head torch and wired two 1.5v AAA inseries and connected them tape and wire to his phone battery, 40 minutes later his phone battery was half charged and he got hold of Simon who arranged a mooring for us.

We arrived about 1815 as darkness had set in and the marina was chocker with yachts however as we approached our mooring we had cheers and clapping for us; Jerry shouted back thanking them all but we had just sailed from Trinidad and not the Atlantic they cheered even more a great reception for us. In the convesations with Simon someone was attempting to contact Robin but hadn't found him hence Jerry thought the bottle of rum was his however, Jerry thought if Robin was behind he would be in range of a phone radio mast on St Lucia and called him, he was in Rodney bay marina waitng for us! Jerry where is 'my' bottle of rum!

I think in the end we were both glad to be in one piece and the only damage apart from the lost anchor was my paintwork scratched as the six fenders didn't hold it away from the pontoon in Union Island.

I stayed on the yacht for two nights and then we moved to a mooring bouy in the inner basin of the Marina. By now I wanted to get off the yacht as the toilets didn't work and no rib to get back an forth to the main land. Jerry had offered the spare room at his house but Beth had given it to one of her friends for the week. Another offer came up and I spent 10 days with Shermaine and family who said I could stay with them until after Christmas as the flights were fully booked until the 29th December.



Volcano at Soufriere and the harbour with the Piton in the distance

This time on St Lucia I became a tourist and saw most of the sites and finished up driving four girls and Jorden in a hire car. On Christmas eve we went to see the girls father in the south of the Island at Laborie and on the way it started to rain and it rained, we left to travel back and the driving rain slowed us down to 15mph and then darkness. We were in a convoy of a 5 vehicles and started to climb over the central part of St Lucia following a 4wd at 5 mph and Shermaine commented that bridge you just crossed normally gets washed away. We all came to a standstill, a tree across the road, the guys in the 4wd and myself just managed to drag/spring the tree back to allow the vehicles to pass; after 7 cars we decided enough. Being slightly wet we proceed until we came to another stop. The road ahead was under 3 foot of mud and water and thats were we stopped. Eventually we got out and all took shelter in a garage workshop and we all rallied round with food and drink as we were going to be here for the night. After an hour the owner of the garage invited all sixteen of us in their house and looked after us all night, even with no power or water we were all comfortable and I slept on a couch upstairs and had a good nights sleep.

Next morning the extent of the flooding was evident, 8 people had be killed and they said the damage was worse than the last hurricane. The bridge at Canneries was washed away I had crossed it the day before on the way to Soufirere. A father and 8 year old daughter were washed away in their 4x4 as the road tarmac collapse thro' the water undermining the soil beneath. A wall collapse killed a policemen in Castries plus Castries was under water, A 40' container was moved a mile from the garage where we had filled up with petrol on our way south. With the power restored about 7am the hospitality continued, all having a hot drink and some food before we left, how do you thank people like that. As we drove off the damage was clear to see on route, we pass one area where we smelt some herbal remerdy, that obviously was there way of shugging off the problems.

We arrived back to had no power until 3pm Christmas day, we then had pasta for Christmas lunch!



Time to leave, Sherma dropped me off at Castries airport for the 9am LIAT flight to Barbados, to connect the Virgin flight to the uk, oh dear no plane; we were told 11.30 then 1.30 then at 3pm they gave me a new boarding pass for the 4.20pm flight which was running about 30 minutes late! It took off at 5.15 my Virgin flight was at 7pm, Yep I missed it. The manager for Virgin said he would get me on the flight tomorrow; come back at 4pm. LIAT quickly dispatched me in a Taxi to a hotel for the night, therefore had to spend another day in Barbados.



Oustins, Barbados



St Lucia view from the apartment

That was the end of Como No for me, Jerry and Nick worked on her while Robin was on a charter; they repaired and brightened up the old girl. In March Robin was taking her to St Maartin to sell which was the original plan for me however, I last spoke with him in Dominica; I didn't hear from him for two weeks, eventually he spoke to me on Skype and apologise for not being in contact as he didn't have nerve to tell me that during the night passage to St Maartin they hit a reef and had to be rescued! Life raft etc all worked not a drill!

Since then she has been recovered, with the damage to the hull the insurance company has written her off and paid out 50,000\$ the only thoughts were if that was a fibre glass boat it may have cracked and sunk, hence why steel boats are for sailing around the world. Only 4 buckets of water were retrieved from the inside. I haven't seen any photos but the damage was the same side the paintwork was scratched at Union Island.

Robins is planning his Pacific crossing to Australia! Anyone interested?

Mike Greenland - 11th April 2014