

The One Year Trip

2006-2007

In which the Orme family sail the 5000 miles from the Chesapeake Bay to Maine, Nova Scotia and south to the Bahamas.



Presented for the Notcutt Challenge Cup by Eric Orme
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Introduction

We sailed home from our 5 month family adventure in the Mediterranean with a growing certainty that we could not allow our family adventuring to end there. We were not finished with family adventures and our first 'trip of a lifetime' across the rivers and canals of France to explore the islands of Corsica and Sardinia was to be just a practise run for the big one!



We were still happy with 'Aliz Motte', a Rival 34 but knew that for a longer trip we really needed a bigger boat. Elspeth (10yrs) and Peta (7yrs) were comfortable together in the forecabin but Sue and I really wanted a boat with an aft cabin. Furthermore, for a longer distance travel, we needed extra space for water, fuel and stores.

By the time we arrived home we had resolved to buy *Tabitha* a Rival 41 with centre cockpit. Being just a few years younger than *Aliz Motte* and built and finished in the same boatyard by the same craftsmen, we knew exactly what to expect and we were not to be disappointed.

The fact that she was lying on the American East coast suggested that our next long trip should take us north to Maine and Nova Scotia and then south along the coast to Florida and across the Gulf Stream to the Bahamas. Sue and the girls could then fly home to resume work and school leaving me with the opportunity to achieve a long-held ambition to make a solo ocean passage by sailing home to the River Deben, Suffolk.

Sue was offered 12 months unpaid leave from work and the girls came out of school for three terms. Their education continued aboard requiring approximately 2hrs per day to keep up with their friends in school.

The Boat	
Type	Rival 41C
Length, Beam and Draft	12.5m long, 4m wide and draft of 1.8m
Accommodation	2 berths in the forecabin, 3 in the saloon and 2 in the aft cabin
Rig	Masthead Sloop
Engine	62Hp Yanmar Diesel
Facilities	Gas two burner stove with oven. Seafrost fridge. Hot and Cold water

In all, the family trip covered 4,970 miles. Some of our trip was spent motoring south along the rivers and canals of the Intracoastal Waterway but the vast majority was covered under sail. We spent 326 nights at anchor in nearly 250 anchorages and 23 nights alongside at free docks or on paid-for swinging moorings.

As we went along I kept an online log of our adventures. Its main purpose was to keep in touch with friends and family but here are some extracts which I hope give a flavour of the highs and lows of the trip.

For further details of the trip visit www.audience.co.uk/adventure.htm

Will 960 Teabags be enough?

Woodbridge 30/03/06

It is a well known fact that you just can't get a decent cup of tea in America, or come to that, Canada or the Bahamas.

That is why we shall be taking 980 Typhoo bags with us. Even with so many, cups of tea will have to be rationed. There have been complaints because yesterday I bought Typhoo and not our usual PG Tips but Budgens in Woodbridge just don't do the favoured brand in the quantities and in the flexible packaging that we need. Anyway, I reasoned that as Typhoo is stronger we wouldn't run out so soon.

You dream, you plan, you work, you go

Woodbridge 17/04/06

Now, here we are, on the eve of a new adventure. It is the middle of the last night in our little house in Melton. A home we have nurtured for 14 years. The studio in the garden is packed with all of our belongings and the house echoes with the emptiness. Sue has woken every night recently overcome with a sudden rush of homesickness. I have been feeling it too. It certainly helps us understand how much our home and our life here mean to us.

Close friends and neighbours have been calling in to say good by. We seem to have been saying nothing but farewell for weeks. It is, at the same time, sad and joyful. People are excited for us which is great because we have little time for excitement right now and it serves to remind us that this trip will be exciting and fun and interesting and not just scary and rather overwhelming.

Crocodile Crisis

Woodbridge 18/04/06

The first crisis of the trip has occurred. What do we do about Peta's 4 foot crocodile?

Having won the argument over Barbie dolls (she is to bring five of the seven - not the three we argued for) she now insists that Croc must come too.

We had a similar soft toy situation last trip when we said no to Elspeth's large fluffy Tiger and suffered for months until my brother Rob was able to bring it down to the South of France on the night bus.

There is little point in doing these trips if you aren't prepared to learn the lessons they teach. In this case, don't try to argue with a seven year old about soft toys, so I guess we will have to capitulate. Off to Millets tomorrow to buy one of those

Preparations

compression bags so useful for getting large sleeping bags into tight rucksacs or in this case defeated parents out of tight corners.

So much for the skippers word being law!

Incommunicado

Urbanna, Virginia 27/04/06

It is not often nowadays that you find yourself in a complete communications black hole but that is us for the next week or so. Yankee Point Marina is a beautiful spot but there is nothing here at all. There is a 'Ships Store' which sells a good range of boat bits but no milk. There is no mobile phone signal and no internet access point. Worst of all, the HF radio that would give us email access is on the blink. It has absorbed quite a few hours of frustrating effort. Apologies if you have emailed us and not yet received a reply.

We found *Tabitha* to be in excellent condition despite our abandoning her here for 9 months. All was amazingly dry below but the varnish work on deck has suffered badly from the scorching sunshine. We also found a burst copper water pipe - a result of my failure to buy enough non-toxic anti-freeze with which to flush the system last year. Happily it was easily repaired with a short length of plastic pipe and some strategically placed jubilee clips.

The girls cope with the lack of entertainment enormously well. This is helped by the fact that Elspeth bought herself a copy of The Sims computer game which absorbs both of them for hours. Then of course there is school which is running well and in which they currently participate with apparent enthusiasm.

On Baltimore waterfront

Baltimore, Maryland 13/05/06

We spent two nights at Annapolis. The first, hanging on a rather lumpy buoy off the municipal dock and the second anchored comfortably in Back Creek - which is where we bought *Tabitha* in September 2004. It was nice to go ashore and be tourists for a while. Though all we really did was wonder the streets, the small indulgence of a visit to a coffee shop was a real treat.

We returned to the dinghy to find that water had slopped into the dinghy inflating Elspeth's automatic lifejacket which means we are down by one gas bottle and one trigger unit already.

We sailed today for Baltimore which is something of a highlight of the first month of our trip. We motored for the first hour and half and then managed to sail the rest of the way almost right into Baltimore's inner harbor which is not unlike what Ipswich wet dock might be like when the regeneration scheme is complete - only of course on a much grander scale.

We are anchored close to a submarine which is open to the public as is 'Constellation' the last square rigged sailing frigate commissioned by the US navy (1854) and numerous other historic craft and attractions. Also within a few hundred yards is Baltimore's World Trade Centre.

Dead body in the harbour

Baltimore, Maryland 15/05/06

As you would expect, life in the big city is quite different to life in the rivers, creeks and harbours that we normally inhabit. Police and fire department sirens sound with regularity and ferries and water taxis buzz past. There are two boats that drift around the harbour on rubbish collecting duty. They have big nets to scoop the rubbish up with and are very reminiscent of the child catcher in Chitty Chitty Bang Bang.

There was some drama yesterday morning when a rubbish boat found a dead body floating in the harbour. As it so often is, the American response was one of 'ultimate force' with wailing sirens and no less than four fire engines, one ambulance, the police boat, the coast guard launch and the fire department boat. We were fortunately not so close as to get more than a basic appraisal of the situation.

Yesterday's tickets to the aquarium also included admission to the USS



Constellation, the last all sail ship commissioned by the US navy. We visited it today and joined - well formed the entire compliment - of the 'Powder Monkeys' tour which was billed as a chance for children to learn about the life of the children who went to sea as Powder Monkeys and we expected just a normal guided tour. It turned out to be rather more than that with full participation required by the

Tabitha crew at every stage while the other visitors looked on. We 'braced the mizzen yard' - 'towed the line', demonstrated the hammocks, hauled on blocks and tackles and generally played the part of the 18th century tar to the amusement of the onlookers who tagged along.

Great sailing

Sassafras River 18/05/06

We had our best sail yet aboard *Tabitha* this morning. We rose early knowing that we needed to make 30 miles before the strong winds, heavy showers and thunderstorms forecast for this afternoon. We set off with no wind which is normal at that time in the morning and motored for about half an hour. Then the wind began to build from the south west and *Tabitha* picked up her heels and away we went with a quartering find giving a steady 6 or 7 knots in flat water. As we sailed the pressure dropped as low as 995 which we have not seen in these parts before.

The wind really began to blow as we turned east into the Sassafras River and we shot in at 8 knots over the ground. We anchored well up the river and went below for lunch followed by flapjack baked at 7 knots. We have had a few bold puffs but so far nothing threatening.

Tomorrow we leave the flat waters of the Chesapeake Bay and venture up the C & D canal towards the Delaware Bay which has an altogether more robust reputation. From there our sailing will be out on the ocean. I think we are pretty much ready for it.

PS. Just tested the water - I don't think it can be as warm as 17.1C - I think we need to recalibrate the thermometer.

PPS. The Coastguard just came on the radio to warn of a thunderstorm and 30 knot winds coming our way. It should be here at 1605. 45 minutes notice isn't bad at all. Just time to deploy the new homemade lightning conductor and have a quick swim!

Just another day in the family adventure business

Cohansay River 20/05/06

The wind blew and the tide flowed and we flew - a steady 9.5 knots over the ground as we raced south and ducked into the Cohansay River in New Jersey - our fourth American State so far! We are now anchored just a couple of meandering loops up river amid marshland very reminiscent of Havergate Island on the River Ore just south of Orford. The wind is now howling in the rigging though I am sure it will moderate later. We are cosy below as I have lashed the wind generator to reduce the noise which tends to make things sound much more wild than they really are. Elspeth and Peta are watching their first DVD of the trip on the other computer and Sue is reading the pilot book.

Tomorrow is another early start but hopefully we will be in Cape May for a late lunch. We remain absolutely delighted with *Tabitha* and are beginning to look forward to our first offshore passage.

Cape May

Cape May, New Jersey 23/05/06

There was much debate over whether the Cohansey River was the most beautiful or the most eerie anchorage we have had so far. I found the flat bleak landscape, the cry of the sea birds, the salt marshes wonderfully reminiscent of the muddy creeks of the Suffolk and Essex. Sue just found it creepy and unsettling. I know what she means but I felt very much at home there.

We had a wonderful sail down the Delaware which is noted more for its sudden changes of weather and short rough seas. Sailing with the tide we averaged close to 8 knots over the ground and whizzed out of the mouth of the bay on to the Atlantic Ocean. The only less than perfect moment was as we felt our way out between two unmarked shoals having taken a short cut across the shallows off Cape May.

We anchored in Cape May harbour in time for a late lunch and were happy to get in before the wind blew up, gusting well into the high 20's (knots). The dinghy ride ashore was somewhat wet but the sun was shining so we soon dried out. Our plan was to land at the Corinthian Yacht Club and appeal for the use of their showers. Of course we were made very welcome. We even managed an offer (unsolicited) of a lift into town which is a 2 mile walk away. Wally the club member who drove us in gave us a quick tour of the town.

Cape May is said to have been America's first seaside resort. It also has the country's largest collection of Victorian buildings. A really pretty place with a population dominated by retired folk and in the summer, holiday makers. The town is just gearing up for the season which starts officially next weekend when the nation has a public holiday, Memorial Day. We hope the weather will warm up soon. Its reaches the 70's (low 20's C) quite often but is often only on the high 60's (17-19 deg C). We had 80's in the first week which was just perfect. I think most locals would agree that the warm weather is a little late this year.

New York 50 miles to port

40 deg 21.7N 72deg 47.9W 25/05/06

It is 0030 on Thursday 25 May. When Sue called me at midnight for my watch we were making 4 knots but, as anticipated, the wind has dropped and now it is only 2.3 knots. At least it gives us steerage way and moves us slowly towards our destination which is Block Island between Long Island and Martha's Vineyard.

We left Atlantic City at 6am this morning with sufficient wind to make good progress for the first hour or so, then it dropped and we motored for most of the middle of the day. Then some steady downwind sailing in reasonable flat seas carried us through until well after dark.

Dolphins arrived on queue just as the sun was setting. All things considered, it make a pretty ideal first night at sea aboard Tabitha.

Cruising is . . . changing your plans at the last minute!

Block Island, RI 30/05/06

We got up this morning ready to sail on to our next destination only to find another lovely day and a British boat anchored next door. When we saw they had children aboard the decision to stay for another couple of days was confirmed.

Sure enough, they buzzed over in their tender to say hello. They were Jeff and Melanie (he is American and she English) and three boys aged 12, 10 and 7 yrs. They were just going ashore to walk their dog so they invited Elspeth and Peta along. They sailed over via the Caribbean in their Moody 47 'Trust Me' from England in 2003 and now live further up the coast a bit.

They came aboard for a coffee and later we went to the beach together. Unfortunately they had to sail back to the mainland this afternoon as they have school and work to go to but we hope to visit their home on our way north.

It was great to chat to some English people and also to get some useful local knowledge. They enjoyed meeting some 'cruisers' and thinking that they might get back to it some time.

This afternoon included some school-like activities, maintenance and then cleaning the ship ready for the owner's birthday tomorrow. I noticed a cake being baked as well.

To Fishers Island

Fishers Island, RI 01/06/06

Birthday celebrations went off alright. The ship was scrubbed and dressed overall for the occasion. The crew also. The sun shone.

We left Block Island this morning in thick fog but with the expectation that it would lift soon. Of course it didn't and we ended up motoring almost the entire distance (25 miles) to Fishers Island which is just off the entrance to the Mystic River. In the UK one generally wouldn't leave harbour in fog without very good reason but in this area it is a fact of life that we shall have to become accustomed to. The difficulty is that one can not tell how localised it is. You could sit in harbour for several days waiting for it to lift whilst just outside, people are sailing in bright sunshine.

Today was a good day for us to start sharpening our fog navigation skills. I have fitted a new radar so spent a good deal of time playing with that. Children hooted the fog horn as required and were posted to lookout for buoys when necessary. Elspeth seems to have a good eye but both girls sometimes allow themselves to become distracted from their duties.

US east coast heading north

We are now anchored in the west bay of Fishers Island poised to make a timely arrival at the Mystic Seaport Museum tomorrow. The Mystic River is said to be very beautiful though quite how much of it we shall actually be able to see, I am not sure.

Wet and windy weather is expected in the next few days so it will be good to be tucked away for the first part of it.

Marvellous Mystic

Mystic River 03/06/06

Mystic River is as beautiful as we expected and it was a joy and relief to chug up the river in steadily improving visibility. We went first through a railroad bridge that pivoted horizontally and then a road bridge which lifted vertically. You can imagine our joy when we arrived at the Mystic Seaport Museum to be told that the first night was not \$150+ dollars as expected (how long it took to make up our minds to actually go for it) but free of charge as it is to all foreign flagged vessels.

The museum was a complete delight. A little bit like Iron Bridge with many old building rescued from other locations and a good deal of animation in the form of



people dressed up in role. The museum also has a very active programme restoring historic vessels. Our free overnight included free admission to the museum for all onboard so the visit did not cost us anything and we were able to visit the museum over two days. We attended many of the live demonstrations including working aloft and 'the dog watch' and Elspeth quickly

acquired a reputation for asking the kind of questions which suggested a lifetime spent at sea. She takes a serious interest in nautical matters.

We considered staying for another night but felt we just couldn't justify the expense so we moved on, as it turned out, only a few hundred metres down river. The weather forecast is not good for the next few days with widespread fog. We had identified a few less than perfect spots to anchor - (not easy when the wind is forecast to swing from south to north as the fronts pass through). We saw a British boat anchored just out of the channel (the Mystic is said to have no places to anchor) we were sounding the area with a view to anchoring when a dinghy buzzed up to us with 'Would you like a free marina berth for the weekend?' Doug owns the marina we are in and having vacant space and no bookings for the weekend, kindly offered us space. So here we are for the weekend. It is a very rare treat for the girls to be able to step ashore.

Being alongside has made it easier to meet other people and one couple have already taken our empty gas bottle in their car into town to have it refilled. Tomorrow hopefully, they will run us to the supermarket. We managed to hail the English boat (an ex-working gaffer from Fowey) which has two children aboard and have told

US east coast heading north

them that the offer of free morning includes them so hopefully they will be in tomorrow.

We are also expecting Paul Heiney and Libby Purves. Paul sailed the OSTAR single-handed transatlantic race from Falmouth to Newport, Rhode Island last year and left his boat out here at this yard. He has since written a book about the experience and I attended both a book signing in Woodbridge and a talk he gave at the Royal Harwich Yacht Club. He mentioned this yard with some enthusiasm and said how his boat is right next to the railway. It is extraordinary to see it here awaiting his arrival on Sunday and sure enough, trains do thunder by periodically, merrily sounding their horn as they go.

Shortly after we came alongside today, the local fireboat rushed past - sirens blazing. Later we heard over the VHF radio that a private jet plane had come down in the water only a mile from the mouth of the river. There were three survivors and sadly two killed. It is amazing to hear the number of Pan Pan calls relayed by the Coastguard on this coast - many more than in the UK. This is the second downed aircraft we have heard about over the VHF in the last week!

To Boston with Guests aboard

Boston Harbour 18/06/06

The sail to Boston should have been a fine a fast reach in moderate westerly winds. In the event we had a light south westerly which came and went so sailing was balanced evenly with motoring. However, it concluded with a fine sail into the vast Boston harbor which made us feel as though we had indeed sailed all the way. The Boston sky scrapers were conspicuous from well off and we made a steady approach in bright sunshine. As it was Saturday morning there was plenty of activity on the water and a fair harbor chop developed. My abiding memory of Boston will be of a harbour disturbed by the choppy wash of many ferries, launches and motorboats. We picked up a mooring at Boston Waterboat Marina (\$35) which was money well spent. An utterly central location and very friendly staff.

I was very pleased to be in Boston having made an abortive trip once before when the gas tanker I was serving aboard was directed to Boston only to be redirected to Spain and the South of France (far less glamorous).

Lisa and Rob were able to hail a water taxi and step off the boat with their luggage for transport by water to the international airport in only 10 minutes. Amazing.

Tonight we have come out to anchor in the lee of an island in Boston Harbour and tomorrow have plans to sail for Gloucester. Boston has been our horizon for sometime and it is necessary now to pause and stock take before heading up to Maine where facilities are fewer and one is thrown much more back on one's own resources.

Peddocks Island

Boston Harbour 20/06/06

We didn't sail to Gloucester but instead decided to linger a day at anchor in Boston Harbour. This allowed us to re-stow the boat and complete a number of useful jobs. We very much enjoyed having Rob and Lisa aboard but appreciate the chance to get the boat back to her normal routine. With the temperature again in the 90's the girls were able to swim.

We are anchored in the 'only just' lee of Peddocks Island which is inhabited in a temporary looking way by a few occupied summer dwellings and several that seem to be falling down. Its location under the flight path to Boston airport does not add to its attraction but it is a good deal more relaxing than downtown Boston.

Elsbeth and I rowed ashore this afternoon and walked the full length of the long bay in which *Tabitha* is the only boat. It was strewn with driftwood and a useful task was completed in securing a board suitable as a fender board to protect *Tabitha's* sides as we head north where marinas become few and fishing harbours with rough stone quays the norm.

Gloucester and the Isle of Shoals

Gloucester, New Hampshire 22/06/06

Yesterday (Wednesday) we moved on to Gloucester. Gloucester is the largest fishing port on the East coast and was the setting and location for the shore scenes for *The Perfect Storm* which is a favorite film of ours. It was very exciting to visit and see for real Ten Pound Island and Eastern Point which feature at the beginning of the movie. I loved the town which reminded me of Whitby - just the right combination of commercial grit and maritime heritage. One thing you don't get from the movie is the smell of fish which is evident in some parts of the town. Sue thought it was reminiscent of Lowestoft though I thought that a bit harsh!

The town was busy making preparations for the St Peter's festival that takes place this weekend including a blessing of the fleet, a fairground, greasy pole competition and firework display. It is obviously a very big affair and we very tempted to stay. However, Elspeth's best friend Jasmine and her mother have confirmed dates for their visit which means we have to be back in Boston on 18 August so we are feeling under pressure to make progress north.

Arrival in Maine

Peaks Island 24/06/06

Since we first set out, everybody we have met has said 'Maine, you'll love it there'. It is reputed to be one of the best cruising grounds in the world with huge numbers of remote islands and inlets. Sparse population and masses of lobster pots.

Well, we are here. We arrived in Portland Harbour yesterday after a very dull trip from the Isle of Shoals with light variable winds, poor visibility and a slight swell.. We anchored last night under Peaks Island with the lights of Portland Harbour across the bay.

Already the area has a different feel not dissimilar to the west coast of Scotland (including midges!). Sue has been checking out the fly screens which go over the hatches and companionway in the evenings and at night.

It rained in the night and there is a slight fog this morning. It looks as though the sunny weather of Boston has been firmly displaced by muggy moist air. We shall hang around the Casco Bay for the next few days and see what happens. We have to buy charts for Canada in Portland and there is no point in doing that until we know that our insurance company will extend our cover for Canada and we won't hear from them until Monday.

At Peaks Island with no chilli

Peaks Island 25/06/06

Our first attempt at landing on Peaks Island was not a great success. We have two dinghys. A hard rowing dinghy and an inflatable dinghy with a 10hp outboard motor. We normally use the hard dinghy as it is less trouble to launch and makes a more peaceful ride. Unfortunately as we made our approach I managed to break an oar. Luckily we salvaged the paddle end and were able to paddle back to the boat where we pumped up the inflatable.

We finally landed on Peaks Island this afternoon to find the local population celebrating the Peaks Festival which is an excuse for all sorts of events over this weekend. The simple pleasures on offer included a look over the island's fire engine and fire boat and the island's only ambulance. Also a bag of kettle baked pop corn which was certainly the best we have ever had. All this in between visits to the laundromat which swiftly dealt with a sizable backlog of washing.

The programme of events included a 'chilli cookoff' where local competitors cook chilli in three classes, vegetarian, hot and mild carnivorous and the visitors pay \$2 each to sample one or all chillies and then vote on the best. We went ashore this evening with high expectations and not inconsiderable appetites which grew as we trekked the long distance from the harbour to the Baptist Church which was the venue for the cookout. Although we arrived well before the scheduled finish time

we were disappointed to find that those with cars had got in early and scooped all of the chilli.

We made the best of it with superb 16" pizza from the general store consumed on grassy banks over looking the wonderful scenery of Casco Bay.



Tonight is cooler. The slightly damp air makes the chill all the more penetrating. It is very confusing to us to think that the longest day has already passed when we don't feel summer has really got going. Only three days ago American radio was talking about 'the first day of

summer' when the schools broke up for their three month summer vacation. The water is cool enough and the air damp enough that inside, exposed part of the hull (below the water line) are sweating with condensation. The sun is beautifully warm when it does manage to penetrate the fog but so far in Maine that hasn't happened very often.

Tonight is colder than it has been for a while. We have no heating but we light the oil lamp which gives some heat and close the hatch and lay a cockpit cushion against the companionway and in this way we can make the boat quite cosy.

Casco Bay - beautiful when we can see it!

Great Cheabeague Island 28/06/06

When we can see it, Maine is stunningly beautiful. Casco bay is littered with islands which keep the ocean swell out to provide smooth sailing between islands which are rarely more than a mile apart. The scenery is quite Scottish with rocky islands topped with conifer trees. Unfortunately we haven't seen as much of it as we would like as the fog, for which this area is known, has been more on than off since we arrived on Friday.

We visited Portland yesterday motoring across the bay and picking up a mooring at the Centreboard Yacht Club for a few hours. We found a small city with life very much revolving around a businesslike harbour. One street we glimpsed looked as though we could have been in the 1930's with ramshackle wharfside warehouses and fishing huts.

US east coast heading north

After Portland we moved to Chebeague Island enjoying a wonderful evening sail through a forest of lobster pots. We have been warned that these will become more dense as we travel east. Already we are encountering large fields with pots less than a boat's length apart. There is one pot less since our rope cutter, fitted for this trip, began to earn its keep as we left Plymouth Harbour ten days ago.

As in England, the marine radio forecast uses coded language. We had become accustomed to 'patchy fog', and 'areas of fog' but they have now introduced 'widespread fog' which features in the forecast for next three or four days. It makes planning very hard and we are having some difficulty becoming accustomed to how to sail in Maine. We are unused to having so many good places to sail to, so choosing destinations has become harder. We need to consider the tides which run strongly but there is little point in planning a passage for a morning tide when the fog doesn't clear until the afternoon!

In rain and fog - I wouldn't be anywhere else

The Basin 01/07/06

Tonight we are in one of the most peaceful anchorages I can remember. Our pilot book 'Taft & Taft' has a star rating system for different destinations or harbours and this rates five stars. The forecast is for 15 to 25 knot winds gusting to 30 knots but here we have 360 deg protection. 'The Basin' is a pool less than half mile across with a narrow entrance which has a 90 deg turn which means absolute shelter. We can see the lights of a few houses in the distance but otherwise nothing but the natural beauty of the Maine coastline. There are no other boats at anchor.

We made a false start this morning and finding ourselves in thick fog we swiftly moved into fog-sailing mode - lifejackets on, Elspeth at the bow keeping watch and spotting the lobster pots (there are so many that she can only report the ones that are imminent run-downs), radar on, See-Me on, horn at the ready and the GPS connected to the chart plotter on the PC tracking our progress between the rocks and shoals. We cut our journey short, feeling our way into Potts Harbour. A slightly rolly anchorage where we stopped for lunch. By the time lunch was complete, the visibility was back up above 1 mile so we set off again in steady rain.

We wondered what on earth we were doing - out there on our own in the rain - motoring then sailing our way east. Then as the rain lifted and we sailed up the finger of water towards the anchorage we understood. It was great to be out there - the rugged weather fits the rugged scenery, the moment when the fog lifts and the rain eases is a wonderful moment.

And here we are - absolutely at peace in perfect shelter for the night.

Damariscove Island

Damariscove Island 01/07/06

We set off this morning with two possible destinations in mind. If the weather was good we could head for Damariscove Island, if not then Lewis Cove would be a satisfactory alternative. I thought we would have to go to Lewis Cove. Damariscove Island is quite a few miles out into the ocean and the only shelter is provided by a very narrow slit between two points at the south end of the island and therefore from the chart, looks wide open to south and south westerly winds and swell.

We were some way past the decision point and firmly on route for Lewis when I realised that weather was moderating and Damariscove might not make a bad alternative. We could always move on if it proved to be too uncomfortable.

It takes some small courage to point one's boat for a slit in a rocky lee shore only 100ft wide between breaking shoals on either side but in fact it was an straightforward entrance into a wonderful little natural harbour. We successfully traversed the entrance avoiding the rock ledge upon which the great Joshua Slocum managed to place 'Spray' some years after his legendary circumnavigation. Of course we have the advantage of 62hp iron mainsail.



It is interesting that it is the most ancient natural harbours which, in our travels by boat, have proved to be the most remarkable and memorable i.e Bonifacio in Corsica once used by the ancient Greeks and Damariscove used by early European settlers and no doubt native Americans many years before that.

We were all set to anchor but one of the island caretakers was on her boat and waved us towards a mooring in about 10' at low water. With only 20' to the shore on each side of us each side of us we had to lay out a stern anchor but the wind from the south kept of comfortably in the middle of the channel.

What a fortunate decision it was to come here. It is, with little doubt, the best place we have visited in the two and half months of this trip. An island only one and half miles long an nearly half mile wide, it was apparently settled by Europeans well before the Plymouth brethren set sail.

Now it is a nature reserve whose only population is two young interns acting as caretakers on behalf of the nature trust and the occupants of the recommissioned Coast Guard station who have it as a holiday home. We were ready to anchor but twice today, boats came in and turned out again when they found that the only mooring was occupied (by us).

We explored the island thoroughly following the well defined trails set out by the conservancy trust. Sitting in the cockpit we noticed otters playing in the water nearby and Elspeth and Peta enjoyed some time off the boat rowing themselves to play ashore. Sue did some painting sitting in the cockpit.

Maine sailing and a new pair of trousers

Camden 04/07/06

We had an excellent sail from Damariscove Island to Tennants Harbour in the Penobscot Bay. *Tabitha* really showed what she was made of until the wind eased and we found ourselves making more sedate progress. The slower speed provided the ideal opportunity for fishing and we caught three mackerel one of which had to go back as it really was too small. The first fish, filleted and fried in olive oil with onions provided sandwiches for lunch and the second helped reinforce our meagre supplies for an evening BBQ.

School has been a great success these past few days with the lobster project dominating proceedings. As the lobster industry is almost universal in these waters, the girls have been doing a project on lobsters and lobster fishing. Did you know that when settlers first started taking lobsters - lobsters of 4' in length were not uncommon! That would certainly put me off going for a paddle!

Because school is only two hours a day they do tend to have to concentrate on the basic three R's which can become very tedious and uninspiring however, their imagination has been gripped by the lobster project and it has been difficult to stop them working at it.

Tonight we are at anchor in Camden which is a very smart touristy place. Sue was keen to have some retail culture before we sail to the still more rugged coastline of Nova Scotia. Actually, we did very well buying me new trousers (my only other pair having a rip in the bottom), and replacement trainers for Elspeth's only pair and a pair of sandals for her so she now has more than one pair of shoes. It is noticeable that the American trousers are cut more full in the seat - room for growth!

Nova Scotia Bound

43deg 50.6N 67deg 11.0W 07/07/06

Beautiful as it is, we couldn't resist a fair weather forecast to make the hop across to Yarmouth, Nova Scotia so we left at 0630 this morning and are currently at 43deg 50.6N 67deg 11.0W. It is 0100 on Friday morning (0600 in the UK) and we are making a sedate 3 knots in the direction of Yarmouth - well mostly. The strong Bay of Fundy tides (including the worlds highest tidal range of more than 50ft!) are steadily slipping us sideways but we trust they will reciprocate in a few hours to put us back where we should be.

We are all pretty excited to have taken down the Stars and Stripes which has flown on the starboard signal halyard ever since we bought *Tabitha* and have ready the Canadian Maple leaf to haul up tomorrow morning.

At Yarmouth

Yarmouth, Nova Scotia 09/07/06

If anything., I would say that Nova Scotia is exceeding expectations. Yarmouth is a no-nonsense fishing town with fishing boats of one kind or another coming and going all the time. The life is clearly hard at times and the local folk are all the more friendly and helpful for it.

Winters here are especially harsh. The harbour freezes over and the wind blows very strongly. At the fishing museum today, the guide told us that her house overlooks a buoy with a bell. In the winter a north wind blows , ice builds on one side of the buoy until it falls over and lies like that until the ice melts. Luckily, there is no traffic relying on the buoy as it is all frozen in to harbour.

There is much here that has a Scottish flavour. This includes the accent of several locals we have met, the tartan shop on the the high street and music on the radio. I suppose it is only logical that 'New Scotland' be north of 'New England'. It is difficult to believe that we are now on a similar latitude to sweltering St Tropez which we visited on our last trip.

More Yarmouth

Yarmouth 09/07/06

Yarmouth is becoming one of the memorable places on our trip. It helps that we have been tied up alongside. Mooring facilities are more primitive in Nova Scotia - rough town quays mostly - and consequently a lot cheaper or free. Mooring at Yarmouth is free for the first night and then only 50 cents per foot per night for subsequent nights. Being alongside gives us the chance to be much more sociable,

specifically in this case with wharf kids which Elspeth and Peta got to know and local fishermen that we have come to know. It is very rewarding.

Today the boys that hang around the wharf even bought their families down to meet their new friends from England. Though somewhat shocked by their colourful language, the girls have really benefited from finding some children to play with.

We have also been made very welcome by a local lobsterman and his wife. It is the off-season for lobsters in Nova Scotia so he is concentrating on his trip-boat business. This is his second season with a 6m RIB from which he does harbour and nature tours. Sadly, the season is a bit slow at present so he spends a lot of time waiting for custom. His wife is a Government Marine Biologist and has taken an interest in the girls.



We happened to mention that we planned to go swimming at the YMCA this afternoon. Karen called the 'Y' for us and found that they have started closing on Sundays so she arranged for us to go free of charge to the local hotel where we had exclusive use of the hotel pool, jacuzzie and sauna. A real luxury. They have also mentioned the possibility of a harbour trip for the girls in the RIB but we will have to wait and see.

Back into the fog

Pubnico 12/07/06

We left Yarmouth in fair visibility but it deteriorated shortly before we reached the tricky bit of the route, Schooner Passage. We had one or two confusing moments before we managed to orientate ourselves and with only a scrap of mainsail and the engine ticking over we grouped our way through riding the back of a strengthening tide. Again, Elspeth deserves a mention in dispatches for keeping a sustained careful lookout and listening watch from the bows and Sue for steering an accurate course though a very disorienting scene.

The weather didn't clear at all and we all agreed that sailing in the fog really is no fun. Anticipating the possibility of fog, I had plotted waypoints to within 100 yards of the harbour entrance and with the aid of the radar we could have made it in okay. However, a friendly fishing boat picked us up at the haven buoy 2 miles out and offered to guide us in. Then they arranged for us to berth in the fishing harbour - there being no yachting facilities of any kind here in Pubnico.

Most of the fishing boats in the area are named after the daughters of the owners, for instance tonight we are moored alongside 'Michelle and Lisa' and across from

‘Chelsea and Caylee’ and from ‘Jasmine IV’. Naturally enough when the skipper of Chelsea Lee who guided us in came across for a chat he wanted to know which of the girls was called Tabitha!

He had been out with two other crew for four days and they had taken approximately 28,000 lbs of haddock and cod. He seemed reasonable happy with that.

Fogbound in Pubnico

Pubnico 13/07/06

It is happening again! That feeling of complete contentment not to say abject happiness. I remember the feeling from the last trip. This may not be a very sustainable way of life in the long term but I love it none the less.

It seems to have everything, firstly, it is rewarding. The sense of accomplishment in successfully sailing the boat from place to place is immense. Life is supremely uncomplicated. The clutter of consumer and political fuss rarely intrudes. One is to a great degree, master of ones own destiny. Then there is the business of being out of doors so much, which, working in an office at home, I miss so much. Beyond this, I am immersed in the environment that interests me most - thoroughly absorbing ever changing scenes of nautical activity. To be able to share all this with ones immediate family is an enormous privilege.

From the above, you would never guess that we are still fogbound in Pubnico. We



are lying in a fishing harbour, rafted up to lobsterboats that won't be going anywhere until the lobster season begins again in November.

It is difficult to walk past anyone here without stopping for a chat. The girls watched Edward (French pronunciation) and another man offload 8 tons of seaweed that they cut by hand in only 2 hours this morning. It goes for fertiliser

and to make ice cream and jelly.

In the afternoon Edward's father took us for a tour in his truck. First to the newly built windfarm - 17 huge wind generators ghostly whirling in the fog at a height of 400 feet. Then on through the village to see his house and a few yards down the street, the house where he was born, then further along, the house where his late

wife was born, the dock from where he used to fish (no refrigeration in those days) and from where Edward now fishes in season. Edward's house, which his father built, the local church (catholic) and the cemetery.

Then later we bought lobster from a man on the quay - three smallish ones at less than £1.50 each. It is off season and later we measured them using the lobster measure that Emery gave us in Yarmouth - at least one was undersize (though only just). These were 'under the counter' lobster. Later still, a fisherman turned up with some haddock. A gift cleaned and skinned especially for us - kedgerree for breakfast tomorrow.

By Friday, the wind should go round to the north west which should clear the fog and give us a good passage to Shelburne. In the meantime - we are very content to be fogbound in Pubnico

Sheep shearing at Cape Negro Island

Cape Negro Island 16/07/06

Eventually the fog lifted and we set sail around Cape Sable which is said to be Nova Scotia's Cape Horn! There are several strategies for getting around this Cape which is known for permanent fog and furious tidal rips.

My natural inclination was aim for least tidal activity i.e. slack water but this is a very narrow window and didn't really fit with civilised hours. After some debated we took the advice of the local fishermen who suggested we the ebb tide all the way round. Thus we shot around at speeds of up to 10 knots over the ground (in only a SW 4), We travelled the 40 miles to Cape Negro in a little over 7 hours with thick fog all the way.

As we shot around the corner we noted the sea temperature falling to an all time low of 7.3 deg C. (It was nearly 13 deg C in Pubnico and 15 in the Chesapeake back in April!). Condensation again formed on the inside of the hull and we all put on an extra layer.

When we sail above 4 knots, the propeller starts to turn with the force of the water. Typically, it was as the water temperature plummeted that, for the first time, we picked up something around the prop. I had visions of having to go over the side with the bread knife in order to free the prop when we had anchored. (We carry a wet suit for just this event in these cold waters but it is not much consolation). However, we ran the engine to come into the anchorage and this appeared to shift the problem.

The fog lifted as we came in at about 7.30pm last night to reveal a beautifully remote setting. Only then did we realise how tiring was the constant bustle of Yarmouth and the fishing harbour at Pubnico. It was wonderful to be back in the natural environment.

Or at least this would have been the case on any other day of the year. . . We awoke this morning to the sound of a fishing boat, overflowing with children and adults and towing multiple skiffs. It was the day of the annual sheep shearing. Approximately 300 sheep make up the only inhabitants of the island. Once a year the extended family of the owner assemble to do a day's work corralling the sheep. Sheep shearers are booked and local shepherds turn up with their Boarder Collies. One of these was a fisherman we had got to know in Pubnico but we have become used to such coincidences in a small community - around here people often know who we are even before we introduce ourselves.

We had planned to press on to Shelburne today but had the good sense to delay. Going ashore after lunch we spent the entire afternoon working on the shearing. I have never seen Elspeth work so hard, collecting lambs and holding them while their tails (and for the rams - other parts) are ringed, marking those that had been done, rescuing smaller lambs from being trampled in the overcrowded pen, collecting and holding lambs while they were wormed and much else. Peta and I were also fully occupied collecting and marking the sheep.

Tonight - three or four hours after they were released, we can still hear, lambs and ewes baaing away on the beach struggling to become reunited after, what has been for them, something of a traumatic day.

It is remarkable how this cruising life presents so many opportunities which we just wouldn't otherwise encounter. They are impossible to plan for - we never know what the next day will hold but at the moment, each day seems to be better than the last!

Shelburne

Shelburne 18/07/06

Shelburne is something of a honey trap for those crusing SW Nova Scotia. In the case of the other English boat in the harbour, so much so that they have made an offer on a house here. For us the appeal arises mainly from the fact that it is four miles up a wide estuary and therefore enjoys a climate more akin to the warmer inland areas which suffer less from sea fog.

On our way here we suffered our first significant mechanical breakdown. The heading sensor for the auto pilot seems to have stopped working leaving us without an electronic auto helm. Of course we still have the Aries wind vane for when we are sailing - though pretty much untried as yet - and also a tiller pilot which I have yet to rig which - when fitted - should operate the Aries for motoring.

At least we have plenty of hands for steering. Our auto pilot is not manufactured anymore but I hope that we will find that a similar fluxgate compass will do.

Reunion with old friends

Shelburne 19/07/06

It seems that we too, are caught in the honey trap of Shelburne. However, we do have good cause, namely the arrival of 'Blackberry Ramble' who are friends we made in Annapolis 12 months ago. They have twin daughters Judy and Ella aged 12 yrs who made fast friends with Elspeth and Peta. We knew they were headed to Nova Scotia this summer but it still a very pleasant turn of events to be able to spend some time with them again. They spent the winter in the Bahamas as we plan to do this year - we are a bit taken aback to hear that the water temperature in the winter there was quite similar to what it is here!

I have been working hard on bringing the Aries wind vane back into commission and also in setting up an improvised electronic autohelm system to work via the Aries. Hopefully, both will be operational by the time we leave here on Sunday or Monday.

We shall be here for a few more days until Tropical Storm Beryl has passed. The US Hurricane Centre produce predictions which fan out from the current position of the tropical storm in a cone shape for three and five day predictions. The five day prediction has Shelburne at the in the centre of the cone on Saturday so we have moved into a position alongside some other yachts inside the substantial government dock.

It is a bit early to have taken such defensive action as it is a glorious day and we would be much more comfortable at anchor away from the noise and bustle of the commercial dock, however, if the storm does come through (and it may well stall or divert) there could be competition for space so we are in early along with Blackberry Ramble and several other more cautious boats.

Waiting for Beryl

Shelburne 21/07/06

We are enjoying some of the best weather so far this trip while we prepare for the worst weather yet.

There is an air of calm anticipation on the wharf as we await winds which I guess will be between 40 to 60 knots with some higher gusts. If it stays out of the north as the current weather forecasts suggests, we should be okay and even if it goes north it will hopefully just be a matter of discomfort.

We have numerous lines out ashore and to other boats. All loose things on deck have been stowed below and the sails have been lashed down and we have a heavy anchor out to the north east. There is very little more that we can do so now we are off to hear some live music at the festival.

Back to Yarmouth

Yarmouth 31/07/06

From Cape Negro Island we sailed around Cape Sable. We didn't break any speed records this time but the water temperature did drop to an all time low of 6.6 deg C. We carried the tide (and the fog) around the Cape and tucked into Clarks Harbour right under the tip of the Cape before it turned against us.

Clarks Harbour is a large area of water within the shelter of the rocky shelves and off-lying islands of the Cape. It is entirely given over to fishing. We anchored comfortably in the lee of one of the islands.

I don't think they see many leisure boats in the harbour because not one but two of the three fishermen who chugged out for a chat assumed that we had broken down! Why else would a yacht come into their harbour? The fact is that we have enjoyed the commercial harbours enormously. The fishermen have been tremendously helpful and friendly and it has been fascinating to learn so much about their way of life.

In contrast, the places with yachts are the only places where we get charged for mooring, and the whole business seems so much more superficial. As we head south we gloomily anticipate increasing reintegration with the yachting fraternity. I suppose visiting a harbour where a visit by a yacht is a rare event harks back to the early days of cruising under sail. People are interested in what you are doing and keen to help. As yachts become more common, their interest tends to turn to the financial return that can be gleaned from visiting yachts. Its quite understandable.

To the English, a Canadian accent can be difficult to distinguish from American. This was certainly not true in Clarks Harbour where we found the locals speak with an accent that sounds like a Norfolk accent with a West country lilt. Two local lads came by for a chat and later returned with a gift of two freshly caught lobsters ("If any one asks, you don't know where you got 'em"). It is off season and when measured with our lobster gauge both were clearly undersized. Having wrestled with our conscience's we later returned them to the wild .

The next morning - Clarks Harbour was clear of fog - a world first!. Unfortunately we were not long underway before it came down thick enough to force us outside of the islands rather than taking the pretty short cut through Schooner Passage.

Coming back into Yarmouth was like returning to home waters. We picked up a vacant mooring and rowed ashore to be greeted by Emery with an invitation to supper at his home. We went last night and sampled a variety of Canadian home cooking including mussels, clams and scallops, a traditional Arcadian pie of grated potato and chicken, and a dish of pasta and turkey.

The lobster eating contest

Yarmouth 01/08/06

On Saturday I ate 7 lobsters!

The occasion was the Parade of Lights in Yarmouth, Nova Scotia. All sorts of music and activities were set up on the wharf and quite a crowd was in attendance. I rowed back from the boat to meet Sue and the girls to find that they and a friend had entered me for the lobster eating contest. Someone had pulled out at the last minute and they had fixed it for me to replace him.

Each contestant is given a box of cooked lobsters which have been weighed. The

aim is to eat as much as possible in three minutes before the boxes are weighed again. The person who reduces the weight of the box by most wins and all contestants get to keep what they don't eat. The humiliation of such gluttony in public is compounded by the fact that contestants have to dress up in full length fisherman's oil skins and sowesters and each sits in a different coloured rowing



dory hauled up on the quay surrounded by a cheering public.

As I ate my first lobster only three weeks previously, I didn't hold out much hope and was satisfied that we would come away with a good quantity of lobster meat to finish off the next day. However, eating was never a weakness with me and I won the heat and found myself in the final.

The final (only two minutes and three lobsters this time) did not go quite so well. My technique was poor and I came third though only by 0.05 pounds! We had a wonderful lobster bisque for lunch today.

The Parade of lights was fabulous, especially for Elspeth and Peta who were lucky enough to ride in the parade aboard Emery's zodiac which was decorated by the women from the Tourist Information Centre. It gave us the opportunity to haul out the lights we were given by the fisherman in Shelburne and to decorate *Tabitha* once again though we didn't take part in the parade.

Mount Dessert Island

Mount Dessert 03/08/06

We made a rather slow and windless passage from Yarmouth with more use of the engine than I would have liked. At least the visibility was reasonable. That is until we approached the bit where good visibility really matters. The final approach. I guessed something was up as we still couldn't see the 1500 ft Mt Cadalac long after it should have been quite apparent on the horizon.

We assumed our usual fog positions for the approach. Me on the radar, Sue at the helm and Elspeth at the bow on look out. This worked well enough though we were well inside Bar Harbour before we saw any sign of it. The customs insisted that we come alongside but then only sat in the cockpit for a bit of form filling before clearing us in for a six month stay in the USA. Sue took the opportunity of being alongside for a quick dash ashore, not least to buy beer which we had missed in Nova Scotia it being expensive and for those without cars, difficult to come by.

Bar Harbour has very poor holding and is uncomfortable with the coming and going of many 'whale watch' boats and also at the mercy of winds and swell from many directions. We moved to just north of the harbour where we anchored very comfortably.

We have really landed on our feet with this anchorage as it happens we are lying just below 'The Atlantic College'. Andrew, The Marine Superintendent buzzed out to see us and offered us the use of all college facilities - launderette, dinghy dock, showers, canteen, water, everything! Furthermore, today he arranged the load of bikes so that we could explore the trails of the Acadia National Park.

Andrew is in charge of all of the marine facilities (boats) at the college which has quite a range of life science based marine and island research programmes. I believe he has my ideal job.

The day was hot and very humid. Probably not the best day for cycling in the mountain trails but after many trials and frequent stops we made it to a mountain stream where we were able to change into swimming costumes and bathe. What a relief and how refreshing. I now understand what those horrible jacuzzi/bubble spas tubs are trying to achieve.

Mountain climbing

Mount Dessert 05/08/07

Yesterday we bought an expensive new 'North Face' day sac to replace the ageing 'Karrimor' so today we just had to try it out with a family ascent of the local mountain. Actually, being located in the Acadia National Park there are several local 'mountains' to choose from. We chose Mt Dorr which at 1270ft is the second highest.

I am reading 'Between a rock and a hard place', Aron Ralston's account of how, when climbing in Colorado his right hand became firmly trapped beneath a rock and being some days from civilisation he had to cut it off at the wrist using a multi-tool. We therefore packed our bag with care - (omitting a multi-tool).

The friends of the National Park fund a free bus service which we used to get out to the base of the trail. They will pick you up and drop you anywhere you like along set routes. Commenting to the driver that the mountains looked a good deal taller close up I was somewhat concerned at her comment "Yes, its pretty much Moderate/Hard routes in this area!" However, we set of up 'Ladder Trail' which was a steep climb including, as the name suggests, the ascent of several vertical ladders set into the rock face.



Elspeth and Peta absolutely loved it, Elspeth bounding ahead like a mountain goat "This is too easy!", her parents wheezing up the hill behind her. "Thank you for bringing us here" said both girls as we ate our lunch at the summit. Living in Suffolk, they have been rather deprived of mountain pursuits however, Elspeth

for one, is determined to right that wrong when she gets home.

We made a more leisurely descent along the ridge and caught the bus back into town where we rewarded ourselves with a rare visit to a trendy coffee shop.

We only intended to visit Bar Harbour for one night but the hospitality of The College of the Atlantic (look it up on the internet!) has been extraordinary. The girls did school in excellent college museum, we ate food in the canteen grown organically on the college farm, walked the wonderful grounds and the nature trail and made full use of the laundry facilities.

A night ashore

Buckle Harbour 12/08/06

Last night we slept ashore for the first time in four months.

Andrew, (Marine Superintendent at the College) had invited us to go out and visit him at the Great Duck Island Research Station about 7 miles offshore. He and his Assistant, Pheobe will be living and working out there on annual maintenance. We picked up a mooring at the north end of the island and were rewarded with lunch in the form of masses of mussels harvested from the mooring's pick-up line. Andrew and Pheobe came out to pic us up in their zodiac.

The adventure began with a the landing which is achieved by shooting the boat in from the ocean onto a trolley which runs up a steep ramp. The boat is made fast to the trolley and a diesel winch hauls the boat about 80' up a steep ramp and into the boathouse - a reverse of the way lifeboats are sometimes launched in the UK. Elspeth and Peta later enjoyed shooting down the ramp 'roller coaster' fashion when we launched the boat.

The research station is based in the old lighthouse keepers cottage at the southern end of the one mile long island. Various scientific projects are conducted but the main one is the study of Petrels about whom little is known because they only come in from the sea at dusk and then into burrows underground. Areas of the island were populated with coloured flags indicating the presence of remote underground sensors which monitor and record conditions in the nest/burrows.



We went up into the lighthouse and had a tour of the whole island including several log cabins which are now used as accommodation for researchers who are based on the island for around six weeks at a time. The island also has an old airstrip which Andrew uses when he flies his own light aircraft out to the island.

Most of the island is owned by the College and the Nature Conservancy Council but it has a colourful history including subsistence farming and trade with passing ships and use as a psychiatric clinic. One man deduced that it was the site of Black Beard's treasure and bought the whole island on the basis of his theory. Andrew has met the man's niece who says that he did indeed find the treasure but her account was somewhat suspect.

US east coast heading south

We didn't have to think for long before accepting the invitation to spend the night in one of the log cabins and Andrew took us back to the boat for bedding and other things. We took with us our mussels and several litres of wine.

We really enjoyed sleeping ashore. The beds were rough bunk beds each with a mattress but nothing else. Light was provided by an oil lamp and the toilet was a outdoor latrine. A real 'loo with a view' with a magnificent aspect over the ocean. The tradition is that a closed door means that the facility is vacant and an open door means that someone is inside enjoying the view.

We spent this morning helping Andrew with his work. All supplies including fresh water are bought in by boat, transferred by chain winches and transported across the island on the tractor and trailer. One of their tasks for the next month is to build a new store so I spent the morning helping Andrew to load and transport the lumber whilst Sue helped to organise the medical kit at the research station.

We were relieved to find that *Tabitha* also seemed to have had a comfortable night when we returned later today and sailed here to Buckle Harbour on Swan Island. Right now a thunderstorm is passing by over and what was a comfortable anchorage is fast becoming less so.

Islands

Matinicus Island 14/08/06

The experience of visiting the islands is very different to that of visiting mainlands.



Each island has its own distinct character. You can tell the level of sophistication of each island by how far it is before the road ceases to be tarmaced and becomes a dirt track.

On Isle au Haut where we were a few days ago the road was metalled for about 1/2 mile from the landing then it became dirt track. At Matinicus - our most recent island, there was no

metalled road at all. Matinicus is the most remote of the permanently inhabited islands in Maine with only a small number of fisherman and their families living there year round.

It was obvious that we had arrived on something of an unusual day as the small harbour was crowded with visiting lobster boats doubled up on moorings with the local boats. A wedding celebration was well underway and boatload after boatload of merry fishermen and their families came out in dinghy's to board their boats and make their way home to their own islands.

Later ashore we found on the noticeboard the wedding invitation inviting all islanders to the celebration. Ancient 4 by 4 vehicles and more modern quad bikes passed by, each heavily laden with multiple passengers all waving cheerily. We walked the dirt tracks. Being Saturday afternoon, the island store was closed and we got back to our dinghy just before the retreating tide left it high and dry.

There is little more to say about Matinicus. It has an airstrip and a ferry which comes out only once a month!

At Ilse au Haut we were in time to meet the boat - a high social point in the life an island. First off came the people - mostly visitors coming to stay at the island's expensive B & B 'The Lighthouse' then pallet after pallet of luggage and supplies of every kind - provisions for the store gardening implements by special order and timber for house maintenance.

One of the most extraordinary things about the islands are the vehicles. The MOT regulations are obviously rather more lax on the islands than on the mainland and this leads to an amazing collection of relics from a bygone age still in daily use. With 'gas' (petrol) at \$3.80 per US gallon, it is a good thing the islands don't have many roads.

Pot trouble

Cape Small 17/08/06

Tonight we find ourselves in yet another stunningly beautiful Maine anchorage but we had a small adventure on the way here.

Close tacking through a channel we managed to pick up a lobster pot (one of the two or three million deployed in Maine to trap lobsters and unwary sailors). It became firmly wrapped around the propeller (we were sailing). The wind was pretty gentle but we were off a rocky lee shore in 60' depth. We noticed a dramatic reduction in speed which soon became a full stop. We tried various sailing manoeuvres to try to dislodge the obstruction but in the end had to drop the anchor and the sails, launch the dinghy and thankfully the pot became free with not too much use of the boat hook from the dinghy. These are just the kind of incidents which can start a sequence of events which lead to much greater difficulties.

We have picked up pots twice now, both on slowly executed tacks (today's was more of a missed tack). The first time we had no choice but to cut the pot free. We

retained the colorful pot marker as a souvenir. They really are a menace to navigation frequently laid right across a main channel.

Beside's today's pot incident we had a wonderful sail. We still have no autopilot but the Aries wind vane does an excellent job. We use it as much as we can as I want to be sure of its performance (and more to the point, my ability to make it perform) before I set off across the Atlantic next spring.

The river Deben at home where we have our mooring is a really beautiful river but it has nothing on the magnificent beauty of the countless anchorages we have enjoyed in Maine and Nova Scotia. Tonight we are anchored (fore and aft to ensure we stay in the channel) in yet another stunning setting surrounded by high hills covered in dense pine trees which come right down the water. We have our full mosquito defences deployed - fly screens on all hatches and citronella candle as, for a few hours at dusk, the area is thick with the little pests but otherwise it is nothing short of idyllic.

Our brush with The Perfect Storm

Gloucester Date 07/09/06

No we haven't been sailing in extreme weather though winds were extremely light this morning incurring mutinous mutterings among certain members of the crew as the skipper insisted on sailing long after more reasonable captains would have sought the aid of the iron topsail.

We are back in Gloucester, setting and location of one of our favorite film's, 'The Perfect Storm'. The film is based on the true events surrounding the loss of the swordfishing boat the 'Andrea Gale' in 1991. Many of the scenes are set in a fisherman's bar and rooming house called the 'Crows Nest'. This we sought out this afternoon and enjoyed a beer, a game of pool and company of fishermen.

The bar is even more rough than depicted in the film but we were made to feel very welcome and met an Irish fisherman who worked out of Lowestoft, Suffolk for a while.

The day was also made memorable because we managed to speak for the first time at length on the HF radio to Trudy in Barbados. Our friend David of *Tabithas'* sister ship *Tuesday* based at Orford has long recommended that we make contact. She coordinates the Transatlantic Maritime Net monitoring the progress of boats sailing across the Atlantic. Hopefully we shall be speaking often in the coming months.

We had planned to sail on to Provincetown on the northern tip of Cape Cod tomorrow but we have been enveloped in a thick fog which makes our departure tomorrow rather doubtful.

The word is that Tropical Storm Florence will pass to the south east of these waters on Monday and Tuesday and should therefore be less disruptive than she might have been.

Whales ahoy!

Provincetown 10 /09/07

It is 45 miles from Gloucester to Provincetown on the very tip of Cape Cod so we set off before breakfast. Though the winds left us floundering from time to time, we made good progress in this direction.

Spying a whale watch boat stopped in the water for some time we back tracked to see if we could glimpse any whales. This was a move that cost us 3 hours as it put us well down wind of Providence and we managed to get caught out in the tide race around the tip of the Cape and could make only 2 knots over the ground against the tide.

It was worthwhile though as on the way back we were lucky enough to spy a school of hump backs and watch them for around ten minutes before they sounded.

Later, sailing back we were all in the cockpit when we were startled by a whale smashing its tale on the water right next to the cockpit. I think both whale and the ship's crew had been caught napping. All we saw was the massive whale tale slam the water as it crash dived and the a mass of bubbles welling up to the surface. It was a bit of a shock but a great story too.

The \$100 Fish

Martha's Vineyard 16/09/06

Martha's Vineyard -- Before we left home, more than one person joked that, once we were here we would not want to come back. Tonight, for the first time, the fleeting thought occurred - could we really return leaving all this behind?

As you can tell it has been a good few days. We had a good sail from Onset to Hadley Harbour where we were able to pick up a free mooring provided courtesy of 'The' Forbes family. Our friends Mel and Geoff tell a story about the tiny and pretty Hadley Harbour. They visited it once on their way home from spending the winter in the Caribbean. Asked why he didn't go swimming their oldest said 'Don't be silly Dad, there might be sharks!'. 'Of course there aren't sharks' said Dad. A week later they read about a 25' Great White which had got itself trapped in that very harbour. Hadley Harbour is just across the water from Woods Hole which is home to a cluster of marine and oceanographic research organisations. We travelled in the inflatable a mile or so across the bubbling waters of the the Woods Hole tide race to visit the world famous Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute. We were knocked out by the fabulous and fascinating work they do. Elspeth determined to become an

US east coast heading south

oceanographer but can't reconcile herself to the amount of school work she would have to do.

We sailed yesterday in heavy drizzle and strongish headwinds the 15 miles from Woods Hole to Martha's Vineyard. With the tide under us (and therefore against the wind) the waves were fairly steep but after a bit of motor sailing with one reef in the main we switched off the engine and pulled out a little genoa. *Tabitha* coped wonderfully and we raced towards our objective sailing a steady 6 knots (through the water) hard on the wind which pleased us greatly. Standing at the bow as it crashed into the seas I could not help but whoop with exhilaration. It was marred only by the discovery that my waterproof leggings are no longer waterproof and that Peta lay on a bunk below being sick into a bucket.

We arrived in good time at Martha's Vineyard and rafted-up with our friends 'Trust Me'.

The morning was spent pottering aboard and then off clamming. Only a few days ago we paid \$20 per pint for fried clams which Elspeth loves so we were delighted to gather more than a bucket full. The twins from Blackberry Ramble were there so the children had a fine time on the perfect sandy beach.

Later Sue and I took the dinghy into Edgartown. Standing at the dinghy dock ready to return to the boat, I was approached by a man. 'Would I be interested in a Stripped Bass?' He had been competing in a fishing competition and had a fish he didn't want. He led me to the boot of his car and presented me with the most enormous fish. I de-scaled and cleaned it. Put some in the fridge and cooked the rest on the BBQ. Sea Bass is quite a luxury and Geoff reckons our fish to be worth in excess of \$100. It certainly tasted it with fresh lemon and crusty French bread. How rich this life is.

Tonight we fed the children pasta with grilled Bass to follow and now they are aboard 'Trust Me' watching a DVD whilst the adults from 'Trust Me' are eating ashore.

New York

NY 22/09/07

The passage through Hell's Gate, down East River and up the Hudson was characterised not by fearsome currents or knockout architecture but by the high visibility security that the Americans now exercise around the port of New York. Coastguard and Police with big guns mounted on the foredeck.

In contrast to the UK, the Coastguard in the United States, are as much concerned with 'homeland security' as they are with the safety of life at sea. They are the policemen of the sea and in a position to make life very difficult for foreign boaters so we view them with a degree of wariness. Our best defence for all officials are two

pretty fair headed little girls with cute smiles. "Quick girls, men with big guns, wave!!" is a duty they have to perform every few weeks along this coast.

Our entrance to New York was slightly anxious as I had phoned our intended destination to reserve a mooring only to be told that the mooring field "looked pretty full". As they offer mooring balls in downtown Manhattan for only \$30 a night, they are pretty popular with long term cruisers. Sue spent an anxious time on the phone trying to find an alternative but the best she could come up with was a marina berth on the New Jersey shore of the Hudson for \$123 per night. We trusted to Neptune and Tabitha's luck and managed to pick up one of the last available when we arrived.



We have only two days here so we wasted no time in getting ashore. First stop was 'Ground Zero'. "We walked all this way for to look at a building site?" was Peta's understandable response as we joined the crowds at the wire fence. None the less, it was a thought provoking visit for all of us.

Later, I took the girls to the top of the Empire State Building. I wondered what the girls would think but was well satisfied with their excited reaction to the amazing view.

We left New York on Monday afternoon and sailed south along the New Jersey shoreline Cape May at the entrance to the Delaware Bay. We had one of our best ever night sails in fairly flat seas and an offshore wind or around 12 knots. With sustained speeds often in excess of 7 knots and the Aries gear steering a perfect course we made 133 nm in 23 hours which is our best ever distance in 24 hours (I once made it from Langard Point, Felixstow to the lock at Vlissingen in 16 hours in Aliz Motte but not without considerable help from the tide). This was despite quite a number of gear failures en route including the port sheet winch (we were on starboard tack for the entire distance so this mattered). We managed to use our back up system spending the entire trip with the port sheet stretched across the cockpit to the starboard sheet winch but now face the difficulty of finding someone to repair or make a replacement for the bronze primary cog which is cracked right through - (our Australian made 'Barlow' winches being no longer available). It is definitely time to lay-up in the Chesapeake Bay for a few weeks to catch up on maintenance!



Through the Dismal Swamp

Alligator River, N Carolina 25/10/06

Elizabeth City at the end of the beautiful Dismal Swamp Canal makes a big thing of welcoming boaters on the ICW. A free dock for 48 hours and a cheese and wine party for the boaters to meet each other. We arrived in the town with the ship dressed overall as it was Peta's birthday. Earlier in a lock one of the boaters rushed over with a present wrapped in pink tissue paper. It was a mini pumpkin which is very timely as the whole country seems to be going Halloween crazy.

Although inhibited by some very strange State laws relating to children and their proximity to alcohol (they had to stay 6' from the table with the drinks on) they made a big fuss of Peta and all present sang Happy Birthday.

We celebrated Peta's birthday with a perfect coffee cake made by Sue. No easy achievement in our oven which is very unpredictable.

The weather has become quite cold especially in the evenings. For the first time last night we had to use the clay 'flowerpot on the gas stove' trick which managed to raise the temperature within by about 5 deg C. We awoke this morning to find ice on deck - quite a hazard. If anything, tonight looks likely to be even colder. How we look forward to some warmer weather further south.

We made it safely across the Albermarle Sound which can be one of the more hazardous stretches of the Waterway and tonight finds us at anchor in the Alligator River. I don't think there are many Alligators here anymore (that too comes further south) but the primeval swampy banks would certainly be a fitting setting for them.

Calm before the storm

South River, N Carolina 27/10/06

Friday evening finds us snuggled well up the South River just inland from Cape Hatteras. With a deep low pressure system moving just north of us we are expecting gale force winds overnight and winds of 35 to 45 knots for Elspeth's birthday. Although she had hopes of moving on to Beaufort, North Carolina tomorrow where we know of other boats with children, she is quite mature in accepting that instead we will be riding out a gale at anchor and unable to leave the boat. In fact, I think she quite likes the thought of it.

Trick or Treat and the ICW

Beaufort, N Carolina 04/11/06

The weather was comfortably warm in Beaufort, North Carolina on the evening of Halloween.

I had suggested that the girls go trick or treating around the anchorage in the dinghy and was prepared to dress up in my survival suit mask and head torch for the occasion but the girls had been speaking to the other cruising children and they knew different. The riches pickings were to be found ashore. As it was - we took some time to get ashore as nearby boats beckoned over Peta (dressed as a pumpkin) and Elspeth (dressed as a Vampirate) to give them the sweets they had prepared.

Joining forces with children from several boats, we roamed the residential streets visiting only houses with a welcoming porch light to signal their participation to the marauding groups of witches, ghouls and cartoon characters. Many houses and their occupants were dressed up and ready with buckets full of candy to give out. There was no sign of any tricks though. They seem to skip that part and the children just present bags swag bags to be filled with sweets.

Afterwards we were invited to the catamaran *Dream Catcher* and were surprised with a birthday cake they had made for Elspeth and Peta - such a generous gesture.

Beaufort is a cruising crossroads with many boats waiting to sail offshore to the Bermuda or the British Virgin Islands and other pausing on their way down the ICW. It was therefore the setting for farewells to several boats we have come to know well. In particular we said 'bon voyage' to Blackberry Ramble who we first met in July 2005 on the day we first launched *Tabitha* and then met again a year later in Nova Scotia.

We had hoped to sail on the ocean down to Carolina Beach but the weather forecast changed at the last minute and we decided to go 'inside' i.e down the ditch taking two days instead of one. The first day was motoring all of the way but on the second we managed to sail in the waterway for almost the whole day.

It is said that some people really love the waterway whilst others loath it. Having done the French canals on a previous trip, I had expected to be quite comfortable with motoring down the ICW but instead I find that the proximity of the ocean - and therefore of a coastal passage missed - rather spoils my capacity to enjoy the waterway for it's own sake. We have rather a deep draft to be sailing down the shallow waterway so it can be quite an anxious time.

That said, it is a pleasure to see the landscape slowly changing with palm trees becoming a frequent (though ornamental) feature. Dolphins are regular visitors even in the rivers and the motoring in flat water allows ample opportunity for school to take place.

Georgia! Oh Georgia!

Cumberland Island 13/11/06

Another leap outside on the ocean finds us at Cumberland Island and within striking distance of the Georgia/Florida border.

As the prevailing wind is south west and we are travelling south we have to wait for a front to come through and leap on the northerly winds that accompany it. This leap began in winds of 25 knots and more which was as strong as we have sailed as a family. However, it is really the seas that cause the hazard and as the wind was offshore we weren't too badly effected. It was wet though and Tabitha's cockpit is pretty salty now. After a 5am start, Sue and Peta retired to the double bed in the aft cabin and didn't reappear until 4pm! Elspeth and I enjoyed the ride up top. Elspeth especially seems to relish the more lively sailing.

We will stop here at Cumberland Island for a day off tomorrow. It is a beautiful island, now a national park. We can't say much more about it yet as we haven't yet been ashore. From the boat we have seen quite a few of the wild horses that inhabit it but as yet none of the wild turkeys who accompany them!

Dolphins and the highly humorous Pelicans continue to feature strongly as we make our way south.

No Wild Turkeys but plenty of Armadillos!

Florida 16/11/06

Several visitors to Cumberland Island said they saw the wild turkeys but our exotic animal sightings were limited to the wild horses (they didn't look that angry to me!) and lots of Armadillos. We were of course, particularly excited to see the Armadillos which we British normally only ever see in zoos. (Today we are on the look out for Manatees but have already past through one Manatee zone without seeing one).

We were also excited by the forest which was made up of old knurled Live Oaks with vines and moss hanging down and an under story of palmettos. We visited Dungeness which was the summer 'cottage' of the Carnegie family in the first half of the 20th century. It burnt down in 1949 so we could only visit the ruins. We also loved the beaches which have a very fine white sand which is characteristic of the Georgia Bite and Florida.

We arrived in Florida, our final US State this morning. We have now visited all of the US States on the eastern seaboard. We plan to stop in St Augustine for a few days where we hope to do the almost final provisioning and equipping of the boat for the Bahamas and the Atlantic crossing. Waiting for us there should be a 130W solar panel which we hope will give us around 20 amps per day and tip the balance of our daily electrical deficit.

US east coast heading south

Because everything is very expensive in the Bahamas (beer is \$50 US per case!) we need to take as much as we can with us. We have already filled most of our lockers



keeping a log of all of our supplies and their locations on the computer. It is amazing how much a family of four need for four months. We are now thinking that I might sail home from the Bahamas so we also need to provision and prepare the boat for that. It won't be cheap or easy to obtain things I need for the crossing when we have to leave the US which

could be in as little as 2 weeks time!

Prepared for the worst

St Augustine, Florida 16/11/06

It is our first night in Florida and we are prepared for the worst. Florida is known for its extreme weather and it seems we are to be treated to a taste of it tonight. Just as we began to relax having come through the hurricane season unscathed we are again battened down for possible 50 to 60 knot winds and severe thunderstorms. A tornado watch has been issued for our area.

It is a common enough rule anywhere nowadays but particularly in America - when there is trouble switch the telly on. We have tried to give our TV away several times in the last few months but I guess it is a good thing we still have it. On the evening news we were able to observe the devastation that the coming storms have already brought well to the west of here and to view projections of what might hit the area we are in. Of course it will probably amount to nothing more than a bit of heavy rain and a strong wind but by the time you know what you are actually going to get it is too late to make the necessary preparations so you always have to prepare for worse than you expect.

Come what may, we are ready, moored in a deserted creek about 12 miles north of St Augustine. We have three anchors out, rode well protected against chafe and all the loose stuff on deck is either below or lashed down. For the unlikely event of a tornado warning we have the washboards ready to put in place. On the bad side, we are moored in a flat area with little protection from the wind but on the bright side, we are a long way from where debris might be picked up and dumped on us and there are no other boats about to drag down on us. The banks of the creek are soft mud so if we did drag there shouldn't be too much damage.

For us the main line of storms hits around 2am and should be clear by dawn. It'll be interesting to see what we get. So far this trip we have been very lucky.

The fish are flying but no Alligators

Key Biscayne, Florida 29/11/06

After some time in the protected waters of the ICW we put to sea again today making 70 miles from Lake Worth to Miami and Key Biscayne- our terminus on the US East Coast. We navigated 1000 miles of the sometimes 'thin' waters of the Intercoastal Waterway running aground only once and only for a few minutes.

It wasn't really the motoring ordeal that I had envisaged. We probably sailed a good third of the distance and the motoring was not too bad. Our only regret is that we never saw an Alligator. Maybe it was the time of year. We did, towards the end, see plenty of Manatees which was quite a treat and dolphins were common.

Today's sail was brisk in 15 to 20 knots from the east and seas of 2 to 4'. It is a while since we were last on the ocean and were delighted to find it transformed to a deep blue and abundant with flying fish. We sailed within sight of shore for the entire day. A strip of sky scraper apartment blocks which was continuous from Palm Beach south for 60 miles.

This evening finds us anchored close to Key Biscayne with the brightly lit nighttime profile of Miami looking very urban and impressive on the horizon to the north.

Our weather window for crossing to the Bahamas has migrated to Sunday or Monday. Cruisers in Lake Worth told me about a weather net on 4045kHz at 0630 (EST). We listened this morning and it sounds just the ticket. I'll listen over the next few days and together with info from a few other sources, we will decide when to move.

We are all keen to move on to the Bahamas. It seems that we have spent the entire six months so far running away from the sunshine or struggling to keep the cold at bay. On our previous trip, swimming from the boat played a huge part for the girls (and the boy). This trip I should think we have swim no more than a half dozen times. The girls have been fantastic and fully deserve what awaits us in the Bahamas - daily swimming, fabulous sandy beaches and some of the best snorkeling in the world.

A-Rival in Paradise

Bimini 05/12/06

You can't imagine how delighted we are to be in the Bahamas. Elspeth's conclusion this morning 'We are in paradise!'

We were too late to pilot our way into the harbour last night so we anchored outside, sounding our way in by the light of the full moon. It was magical. They say that in the Bahamas you can count the starfish on the sea bed in 30' of water.

We awoke this morning to still waters and perfect turquoise water. Diving down I found a live conch which is now living in a bucket on deck awaiting my first attempt at conch extraction.

We shall be in Bimini for a couple more days awaiting the right weather for a day/night to Nassau. Right now, a cold front is blowing through so we have quite a blow (25+ knots and evil looking skies). A strong tide flows through Bimini and we have anchors out up and down tide. Having set these we discovered a huge tractor tyre on the bottom so I took a line down to that as well for good measure.

When sailing in the Bahamas, the ability to read the depth of the water by its colour and appearance is an essential skill. Generally the deeper the blue the deeper the water but the graduations are quite specific. We are having to learn it very quickly as there are few reliable marked channels.

We cleared through customs and immigration with no difficulty and went to the beach before moving *Tabitha* out to anchor. Bimini is a small ramshackle town which was a favourite of Ernest Hemmingway though sadly we found 'The Complete Angler', his favourite haunt, to be a pile of ashes. It does however have a good library for school and a good beach for relaxing so we should be okay until the weather changes.

Passage to Nassau

Nassau, Providence Island 08/12/06

Bimini was probably the perfect introduction to the Bahamas. The contrasts with their affluent neighbours only 43 miles across the Gulf Stream is amazing. The vast majority of the population are the Black descendant's of slaves bought from Africa. The economy is that of a second world country, mostly dependent upon the sea or tourism.

The British colonial legacy is clear. Most obviously because Bahamians drive on the left hand side of the road. The shops have many British brands in evidence. The children bought chocolate bars that they hadn't seen for some time, I found a jar of Branston Pickle and we found an Anglican Church. This among about 10 different

active churches in a town not much larger than our village at home and both Catholic and Anglican church schools. They are certainly not short on religion.

The girls were intrigued by the number of children playing in the street and quite envious of their freedom to roam. The children in the street, in turn, were intrigued by Peta's hair about which they were vocal in their admiration much to Peta's pleasure and embarrassment.

Sailing to Nassau meant crossing 'the banks' meaning about 14 hours of sailing in only 4-6 metres then a further 10 hrs on the ocean. Some long periods of 0.5 to 1m under the keel were quite worrying but it is a well trod path and we were assured that the mail boats that sail between the islands have cleared the path of coral heads. Never the less, it was a great relief to pass into the deep water (going from 2m to 2km in the space of about 1km).

Our mixed luck with fishing continued. Using our best gear - the new pink squid lure - we hooked two Dorado both around 2' long. I managed to lose the first as I reeled it in but I did get a good look at it as it leaped clear of the water. We managed to get the second close up alongside the boat, Elspeth standing by with a bottle of rubbing alcohol with which to stun the fish as soon as it got aboard (you pour it in the gills not hit it with the bottle). Sadly the fish took with it our favored pink squid and we had no further interest in the tackle we set after that. It is such a shame to have wasted such a beautiful creature as I am sure it won't survive with the lure still caught in its mouth.

Nassau to Allen Cay

Allen Cay 14/12/06

We weren't sorry to leave Nassau with its awful holding. We had to set reset the anchor no less than eight times in six days. Once we returned to the boat to find that other cruisers had had to re-anchor *Tabitha* while we were ashore when she dragged down on another boat (no damage). Quite a shock to us as we consider ourselves to be quite competent at anchoring. Still, it does sometimes happen. I too have helped rescue a few stray boats in my time.

We hosted drinks last night for the two boats that rescued *Tabitha* plus the boat we dragged onto. Very pleasant and another opportunity for us to glean information about the road ahead. I was able to further return the favour this morning when *Seaduction* managed to wrap her dinghy painter around the big boat prop and I dove down to cut it free.

The Bahamas

A motor sailing passage of 35 nm into a 20kt easterly brought us to Allen Cay. As we crossed the shallow Yellow Bank I stood at the bow spotting the coral heads which often have less than 2m over them. They were quite easy to see, distinctive dark patches against the yellow of the sandy bottom. Allen Cay (pronounced Key) is a set of islands inhabited only by many Iguanas. The children were soon ashore with lettuce and cabbage to attract the prehistoric beasts. One of our visitors last night said they were once cornered by a 6ft Iguana on the beach here.



This is the start of the Exuma chain of islands which run south to George town, our main objective for this stretch. The Exumas are pretty close to paradise with amazingly clear water and beautiful sandy beaches. Snorkeling is like swimming in a tropical fish tank. '*Dream Catcher*' is here and Nichol (an Elspeth clone) exclaimed 'I feel like I am floating in the sky'. At times, snorkeling around *Tabitha* the water is

so clear it certainly does seem as if one is suspended in mid-air.

Sadly, it is a bit windy in paradise at the moment - pretty constant 20-25 knot winds spoil the experience slightly but we are still very pleased to be here.

Allens Cay

Allens Cay 15/12/06

Elspeth and Peta worked hard to complete school early yesterday so that they could spend the day exploring this wonderful setting on one of the few precious calm days. They are good friends with the children on '*Dream Catcher*' and played all day in and out of the water. Being a catamaran with much more space to play, that vessel became the host to the days activities which extended into the evening with a conch feast.

I spent more than three hours snorkeling among the reefs, a 4' spear in hand, hunting for our supper. In the event, all we were able to find were some large conch which in the evening became conch fritters and conch chowder. The array of tropical fish and different types of coral was of course stunning.

Normans Cay

Normans Cay 17/12/06

We stayed an extra day at Allen Cay and hopped straight to Norman's Cay. The distances are now much shorter making for easy days.

Norman's Cay was once a stronghold of a Columbian drug baron and walking ashore, it is very easy to imagine bandits smuggling drugs into the States from the airstrip on the island. We dived today on the wreck of an aeroplane which was shot down by the American drugs enforcement agency. It was amazing to see the plane - fairly intact with fuselage, both wings and tailplane and cockpit all in place but encrusted with weed and with coral beginning to form.

There are few facilities on these islands and we ran out of bread yesterday but Sue today produced two wonderful loaves. Her first ever bread!

We met-up again with *Dream Catcher* and walked ashore. On the dock a group of Bahamian fishermen were butchering a beautiful giant sea turtle. A protected species I suspect, though they said they were allowed to take one a year. They normally live to a grand old age and it was a sad sight.

Exuma National Park

Belle Island 20/12/06

We sailed south east along the chain of Exuma islands and came to the Exuma National Park. This was the world's first marine nature reserve and it certainly fits the bill with pristine beaches, astoundingly clear water and beautiful areas of coral.

We are in the company of the American catamaran *Dream Catcher* so the girls are happy. Yesterday we anchored close to an area labelled on the chart as an aquarium. Snorkelling down we were amazed to be completely surrounded by thousands of colourful fish of up to 50 different types of brightly coloured tropical fish. After we had left, '*Dream Catcher*' found we had also been in swimming in the company of a small nurse shark.

We have had some wonderful sailing in 18 - 25 knots of wind. Sheltered from the ocean by the islands we are sailing in relatively flat seas and thus getting speeds of 7-7.5 knots which is great fun. Elspeth sailed aboard *Dream Catcher* this morning and is still aboard as we have ended up some distance from each other and the weather is not suitable for a long dinghy ride.

Parrot for supper

Staniel Cay 22/12/06

It has been a good day. It started as usual with school which went reasonably well. I was called away to go 'hunting' with Dave and DJ (brother of Nichol) from *Dream Catcher*. We were after lobster and took our spears out to a nearby reef but we didn't see any. Dave managed to bring back a large conch while I managed to spear my first fish. A sizable Queen Parrot fish. I think we could have got more but the tide was strong and it was hard work swimming just to stay in position. We ate him for supper - grilled on the BBQ with rice and lentils.

The girls spent the day at the beach with the swimming pigs whilst I went into town



with Dave. We left gas (propane) bottles to be filled but of course they hadn't been done - we are on 'island time' now! I managed to buy a tiny frozen chicken which will become our Christmas lunch. I had hoped we would be able to find a fresh bird but the Bahamains seem to do very little subsistence farming. I guess it must be the lack of rainfall but we see very few

areas of back-yard cultivation.

Later I dropped the girls off at the beach and was able to see the swimming pigs for myself. They live on the beach and readily swim out to greet dinghy's arriving at the beach. The females seem to be of the pink domestic variety whilst the males have a more wild boarish look to them - I am not sure whether that makes sense or not. I guess the real coup would have been flying pigs but swimming ones do make another first to add to my sailing experience!

The girls have built a den on the beach which has already been invaded by the pigs. Not that the girls seem to be worried by that. They are more concerned with the ongoing war between them and the boys from the French Canadian catamaran + DJ of course.

Thunderball Grotto

Staniel Cay 24/12/06

More school and more hunting yesterday (Friday). This time I didn't manage to spear any fish but I did find a conch and Robert from the French Canadian catamaran speared a lobster which we enjoyed aboard their boat. The Atlantic lobster found in these parts differ substantially from the American variety found in Maine and Nova Scotia. They have no pincers and therefore rely on defensive manoeuvres (hiding under rocks) to survive during the day. They are very difficult to spot.

The big event of the day was to dive at Thunderball Grotto. This is an underwater cave that featured as a location in the James Bond films 'Thunderball' and 'Never say never again'. You dive through a hole in the rock to enter a large cavern within. The light filtering through the various caves into the grotto make a most impressive site and masses of colourful tropical fish top off the experience. We all dived in and Elspeth and I spent some time swimming in and out of the underwater caves. A truly memorable experience.

More spear fishing today and more lobster caught but sadly not by me. They really are very hard to spot.

I got back to find that the girls had decorated the cabin. We have a twelve inch Christmas tree and various decorations that they have made. It really does look very festive. Tonight we will pull out our strings of colored lights and decorate the cockpit.

Christmas afloat

Staniel Cay 27/12/06

Christmas in the Bahamas started with a beach party. People bought food to share and their own drinks. We built a fire during the day around which the more enthusiastic sang carols and Christmas songs.

Elspeth and Peta put their seaboots out in the cockpit for Santa (he came on the VHF several times during the day to say he was on his way). Someone read out 'the Night before Christmas' craftily adapted for cruising folk as we settled down for the night.

There was no snow but on Christmas morning the girls found their seaboots full of presents. At noon we braved a rather rough sea in the dinghy (fully toggged in foul weather gear) to head for the sailing club at Staniel Cay for their annual children's party at which of course Santa made an appearance. There is free wi-fi internet access so we were able to view our online Christmas cards and Skype (telephone) home.

Christmas lunch - served in the traditional manner at about 5pm - was a small but absolutely delicious chicken cooked in our tiny oven with roast potatoes. It was one of the best Christmas meals we have had and despite its modest proportions there was still too much for us to eat in one sitting. Sue made an absolutely delicious baked pina colada cheese cake to follow.

Among the girl's presents were three videos which we picked up at a bookswap shelf in a marina in Florida. One of these was 'The Sound of Music' so in keeping with British tradition we all sat down to that Christmas staple while we waited for the chicken to cook.

Even the Queen's Christmas speech featured in our Christmas day as it was rebroadcast on Radio Bahamas in the morning.

Happy New Year

Staniel Cay 01/01/07

The last day of 2006 bought with it a beautifully clear moonlit night with only a gentle breeze to keep the temperature at midnight at a perfect level for shorts and T shirts. The girls went to bed for a bit and we woke them after 10am for the dinghy ride to Staniel Cay.

Festivities were in full swing and we joined the party at the yacht club before moving on to fireworks on the beach and then on to a Bahamian Club for dancing.

There was no sign of Junkanno (carnival) which traditionally starts at 4am on New Year's Day. We were in bed by then but I turned on the radio at 7am this morning to hear live commentary on the Junkanoo parade in Nassau which was in full swing. It is by far the biggest event of the year and causes a great deal of excitement.

We will stay here this morning to watch the racing before moving south 6 miles to Black Point ready to sail for Farmers Cay tomorrow and George Town the next day.

It will be nice to be able to move on once again and hopefully catch up with friends already there.

The five girls and the lamb

George Town 16/01/07

Some people thought we were mad to allow Elspeth and Peta to host a 'sleep-over' with three 11 year old girls as guests last night. Actually it was a great success. We had girls from two American boats and one Canadian.

Lamb is the cheaper meat in these islands and it is our favourite so we had lamb curry. We were amazed to find that neither of the Americans had ever tasted lamb. There was some concern over 'the poor little lambey' (they eat pig and cow without apparent concern) but I noted all plates were empty at the end of the meal!

Later they settled down to watch our only decent video, The Sound of Music. Another first for at least one of the girls.

The girls have spent hours working on a fort/den on the beach. Very elaborate with lookout posts, a meeting room, ropes for climbing in and out, etc. Of course the boys have caught on and claimed a palm hut on the beach as their den. They launch occasional assaults on the girls fort which has only once required adult intervention to prevent serious injury.

The wind is moderating and due to go a little more northerly tomorrow which should give us the chance to make our way east to Long Island. None of us will be sorry to leave the 'organised fun' of George Town for a while.

Escape to the tropics!

Long Island 18/01/07

George Town lies a few miles north of the Tropic of Cancer so it was only today, Wednesday, that we finally crossed the line and arrived properly in the Tropics. At



Thompson Bay, Long Island we find the kind of authentic Bahamas that was so obscured by the volume of cruisers at George Town. What a relief it is to have escaped the Butlins holiday atmosphere of George Town.

At 35 miles it is a short day sail. Today's winds were variable in strength and direction but we used the engine for only a short part of

the distance. We fished of course and I managed to find yet another way of loosing tackle. This time by lifting the line into the radius of the fast spinning blades of the

wind generator. Sue thinks I should write a book about the creative ways I have found to loose fishing tackle whilst avoiding catching any fish.

Turning into the bay here, we were delighted to find '*Meander*' at anchor here. She is a British boat we first noticed in Newport, Rhode Island in June as she sailed in to anchor under sail. The next day Sue met the crew (from Cornwall) in the laundry at the Seaman's Mission and between them they managed to flood the basement knocking out the showers and the washing machines for 2 days. We saw them again in Tennant's Harbour, Maine in July and in Jewell Harbour, Maine in September.

They are purist sailors who built their own beautiful boat who sail everywhere and always anchor under sail. There is a lot we can learn from them.

I've got a lovely bunch of coconuts

Long Island 20/01/07

Twice before, we have tried to make our way across to the ocean side of the island where the beaches have quite a different character. Each time we have been defeated by the salt ponds which give the local village its name. Today we studied the chart closely before setting out but still struggled to find the overgrown footpath which leads across the ridge of the island and down to the windswept bays on the other side.

After one false trail we finally found our way and had a wonderful time beach combing and swimming in the waves. A great deal of flotsam is washed up on the ocean side which can provide rich pickings but is mostly a sad sight dominated as it is by bits of colourful plastic, fish crates, bottles and jerry cans, polypropylene rope and fishing floats, polythene sheeting and plastic bags.

While Sue searched, unsuccessfully for Seabeans and interesting shells, I gathered coconuts. Most of the nuts washed up on the beach are light in weight which means that they are empty and useless however, some are heavier and one can feel the liquid moving inside.

Unfortunately we hadn't taken our machete with us so we couldn't remove the husks and bring them home. I tucked some away for a return visit and bought just a few back to the boat. Later I tried the fresh coconut milk with a shot of Pineapple rum - what a beautiful combination. I shall be back for more. We also spied some green coconuts growing on a low tree. These provide good milk but not the thick white flesh which we enjoy.

Carnage on the high seas

Long Island 22/01/07

Today was a great day for sailing so we set off 20 miles north up the leeward side of Long Island and then planned, maybe, to sail on to Conception Island. There was

quite a swell on the ocean but not enough to prevent us sailing to Conception, another 17 miles.

With the biggest flying fish we have seen flitting across the waves we guessed there would be fish to be had if we streamed the lines. Sure enough it was not long before the reel on the rod began to wizz. A bite. It took a while to slow the boat and land the fish which was a sizable Barracuda. They are considered a delicacy by the Bahamians but we know that they carry the cigurera bacteria which can be very nasty and have permanent effects. We knew we had to throw the fish back but they have big teeth, how were we to retrieve our tackle?

We tried the 'rubbing alcohol on the gills' trick which is supposed to stun the fish but it didn't lie down to an extent where I felt inclined to handle the fish. After a bit I cut the fish's throat. This was not a good move as blood coursed around the deck in a scene reminiscent of the pictures we saw in the whaling museums in New England. The effect of this was that, decks awash with blood, Elspeth and Sue became seasick and asked to turn around.

We turned back to tuck into a rather rolly anchorage at the north of Long Island and felt sorry not to have made it to Conception. Two lessons were learned - 1. Don't bleed fish on deck in a rolly sea and 2. Don't turn back just because people are uncomfortable. They only regret it later!

Shark shocker

Conception Island 25/01/07

Conception Island has certainly lived up to expectations with the clearest water we have ever encountered and coral waters teeming with every colour and size of fish. We arrived yesterday knowing that our stay would be short. The island is very exposed and another of the winter fronts is about to come through. Tonight could be uncomfortable.

Still, we think it will have been worth it with lobster (crawfish) and conch in abundance. The island is a nature reserve with a large lagoon. At high water today we motored round in the dinghy then rowing so as not to disturb the many small sea turtles that make it their home. It was astoundingly beautiful. A most unswampy mangrove swamp with crystal clear water fringed with soft white sand and green mangrove bushes. Turtles played in the shallows close to the dinghy coming up for air every now and again.

Later we took a walk on the island following a trail along pristine white beaches to the headland at the north of the island. Unfortunately there is a price to be paid for everything and in the winter in the Bahamas it is the frontal systems which come through tracking east from America. Sometimes there are several a week. Most good anchorages offer shelter from wind in one or two directions but with the passing of

The Bahamas

a front the wind veers all the way around making most anchorages exposed - usually to the west.

First thing tomorrow, as the wind fills in from the west we must be on our way - back tracking, probably to Thompson Bay, Long Island which we like and offers some small protection from the west. This will mean saying goodbye to *Dream Catcher* with whom we have spent some very happy times. They are heading back to George Town to shelter from the fronts and to visit the Doctor. Yesterday, Dave, the skipper managed to burst an ear drum diving down to pick up a small anchor he had dropped to the sea bed. He got the anchor but surfaced in agony having dived too deep. We had returned to our boat to fetch a powerful magnet which we have for just such occasions which would have done the job nicely.

A call on the VHF for non-emergency medical advice resulted in a relayed conversation by VHF and telephone to a Doctor on the island of San Salvador who advised no more swimming and a consultation with a doctor in the next few days so poor old Dave is banned from swimming which must be hard in these beautiful waters.

The girls got a bit of a shock today when swimming close to the boat. Their friend Nicky had swum down deep and surfaced to find a mean looking 8' Reef shark swimming toward the group and not ten feet way. They all shot out of the water and into the dinghy with lightening speed. Flooded with adrenaline they all screeched all at once and it was all we could do to calm them down and restore order. They are normally careful to avoid being in the water between 4pm and 8am when the sharks are feeding and have the advantage of poor light or darkness but today they just got carried away. I don't suppose it will happen again!

The woman of the well

Long Island 30/01/07

Tuesday finds us still at anchor in Long Island. We are very comfortable here though it is filling up with people seeking to escape the growing crowds at George Town. Still, it is quiet enough to be getting on with school and other jobs.

The current school project is the mapping of a man-made boat basin bordering the bay. It appears to be a minor example of the many grand schemes we see in the Bahamas which start with a big vision but end up as a half built development scarring the landscape. No matter, it suits our purpose as a subject of study and the girls have been measuring it with our long steel rule and mapping its features using the sextant and lead line. The next step is the production of a scale drawing. Of course Sue's skills are key.

One skill she was working on today was the traditional women's art of washing at the well. There is a well close to the beach which is a rare source of fresh water in this area. Taking her laundry with her, Sue spent the morning hauling buckets of water and catching up with a backlog of washing which is now drying in the rigging.

Supplies of rum have been getting low so Elspeth and I launched an expedition to the liquor store. The nearest is in Deadman's Cay which is some miles south of here. Luckily Long Island has only one main road which runs the 75 miles from the north of the island to the south. It is certainly no wider or busier than Saddlemaker's Lane in our village at home. Even so, sticking out our thumb, the very first vehicle picked us up and the one behind followed suit when the first turned off. Having bought two bottles of rum and a real treat -a bottle of red wine - from the store which was in the front room of a house, we walked out onto the street and in less than a minute were being transported back. What a great public transport system they have here!

Hitchhiking and the Blue Hole

Long Island 03/02/07

How friendly these Long Islanders are! Hitchhiking 7 or 8 miles to the museum then another 5 to the Blue Hole and then home, not a single vehicle passed us without stopping to pick up the entire family. It is a great way to meet the islanders. Most boats seem to club together to hire a car but I am sure we have the better experience.

The Blue Hole was astounding. The depth of water in the Bahamas is indicated by the depth of the blue. Very shallow water is a sandy white, slightly deeper has a tinge of blue, deeper still is turquoise and the ocean is a deep blue. The local navigate without charts just 'reading' the water but of course they need good sunlight. Blue Holes are deep holes in the seabed (or on land) surrounded by shallow water. The Blue Hole we visited is in a tiny cove. We were able to paddle up to the edge of the

hole which plunges, within a few feet to 660 feet. It is about 100ft across. An astounding phenomena. We wondered what was living in the depths.

Escape from Long Island

Flamingo Cay 08/02/07

It has been a struggle but we have finally managed to overcome the inertia that we developed in Long Island and have sailed to the island chain slightly south east known as the Ragged Islands or Jumentos. We were sorry to leave that wonderfully friendly island but not sorry to say goodbye to Barry, our pet barracuda, who had taken up residence beneath our boat. He was always there, lurking. Swimming from the boat became less of an attraction as a result.

Our troubles with barracuda didn't stop when we left the island as we hooked about four of them on the way over. We only landed one and that was easily unhooked with our largest pair of pliers and flipped back into the water. The others robbed us of two sets of tackle which was very annoying.

The 45 miles passage includes one stretch of 8 miles where we had only 0.5 - 0.6m beneath the keel. We have become quite used to this in the Bahamas but it can still be a tense time. However, with only 10 or 12 knots of wind behind us, the going was quite gentle.

Leaping off for the Jumentos was a little risky as it is three weeks since we were in George Town and took on water so we only have a week or so left and there is no water available here. Before we left Long Island we filled every container we have with water from the well (literally a hole in the ground and a bucket on a rope) and have tonight been catching rain water. A small awning rigged over the aft cabin collected nearly a gallon in one shower - it tastes a little of fresh canvas but will do for washing and hopefully the taste would get washed out in a heavy downpour. As a rationing measure we have switched off the pressurised water system so fresh water can only be pumped by hand.

Spooked in the Ragged Islands

Jamaica Cay 10/02/07

In the entire 75 mile length of this chain of islands there is only one community. That is Duncan Town with only 100 inhabitants at the south end and closer to Cuba than George Town. The rest are beautiful small and uninhabited tropical islands.

We found our way first to Water Cay and then moved on to Flamingo Cay. The Ragged Islands (also known as The Jumentos) are usually deserted as there are no facilities and few places to hide during the passage of a cold front but we seem to have arrived with a clutch of boats who are all taking the opportunity of a settled spell of weather so we don't really have the seclusion we had hoped for. Flamingo was good for the cave which we were able to visit from the sea and row our dinghy

right inside and for the hunting. Tipped off by *Estelle*, we found a place with masses of conch and scooped up 10 in short time. To date six have been cleaned (and three eaten) and the remaining four are hanging over the side in a net bag in our marine 'larder'.

Flamingo Cay will also be memorable for the visit by the fishermen. It was a pitch black night and we were anchored alone in a bay as a frontal trough passed overhead. I first noticed a torch light on the beach and first assumed it was the tender to one of the yachts anchored in a neighbouring bay but the outboard was especially throaty and as it came closer it was clearly a fast powerboat (sometimes known as cigarette boats). Meanwhile from the ocean approached a large fishing boat with five or six small day boats in tow. They anchored on the outside edge of the bay. Back on shore, the cigarette boat had dropped someone off who, torch in hand, was climbing the hill. Displaying no light at all we could see the loom of the white hull of the cigarette boat as it came close to us and drifted back on the wind starting its' engine only to move back up the bay before drifting back again.

Now, one does hear stories of the Jumento's being used as a staging post for drug smugglers transporting their cargo between Columbia and the United States. Of course they don't welcome witnesses but we felt quite safe as, although the goings on looked just like something from 'The Famous Five', there were a number of yachts within sight around the corner. Eventually the torch bearer came back down the hill and was picked up off the beach by the cigarette boat which came to anchor just ahead of us still showing no lights.

In the light of morning it was apparent that they were independent of the big fishing boat. They came over to chat. They were two young men out from Long Island fishing for a few days. With the aid of a compressor they dive for lobster anchoring out on the banks overnight. They asked us to fill their bottle of cooking oil which we did and as we were leaving returned to ask for a compressor spark plug which we were unable to help with.

Full tanks

Flamingo Cay 16/02/07

It turns out we didn't need to go anywhere to fill our tanks with fresh water. It came to us!

It fell in the night in great quantities. I went out with a bucket to collect some but realised that just by blocking one scupper (deck drain), and removing our water filler cap, the rain water would flow straight into the tanks (thanks to Peter Brett, *Tabithas* designer). It had been raining heavily for a good 30 minutes so the salt had washed off and the water was good. Leaving the cap off the tank I went back to sleep to the sound of lovely freshwater flowing into the tanks. I was awoken later by the bilge high water alarm. The tanks were full and overflowing into the bilge! We had collected nearly 100 gallons of the best tasting water we have had for ages.

The Bat Cave

Rock Sound, Eluthera 06/03/07

With school every morning, we are not free to expedition ashore until after lunch but generally then, we make the effort to discover a little more about wherever we are. On Saturday we visited the Blue Hole and there we met some cruising folk who happened to mention a 'lesser' blue hole and caves some way out of town.

Following some very vague directions, we trekked out of town heading south along the a baking tarmac road until we came to a small church on the left whereupon we turned right, off the road and into the bush. Coming to a rather indifferent blue hole (actually green with a sheen of scum on top) we clambered around its edge and eventually came to a hole in the rocky ground. These were the caves we had heard about.

Clambering down the rock we found ourselves in a wonderful underground cavern with the roots of the trees above cascading down from the cave roof and bats clinging to the ceiling. Treading carefully over the bat poo on the cave floor we pressed on and found a circular root through the most beautiful 'cavescape' we have yet encountered. At one point a snake slivered across the floor in front of us.

We were thrilled to have set out on such a thin lead and to have discovered a experience unknown to the tourist guidebooks. Our trip to Disney World, Florida in November cost more than \$500 of our pitiful budget but all agreed it didn't come close to this.

Tonight (Monday) all is peaceful. I sit in the cockpit just savoring the scene. Many hours are spent this way. There is just enough wind to keep the mosquitoes at bay. Occasionally dogs bark one to another across the settlement. From sleeping in the cockpit most nights I know that before first light this sound will be replaced by that of cocks announcing a new day.

The lighthouse at Hope Town

Hope Town, Abacos 20/03/07

It is a windy week in the Abacos but slightly less windy today and tomorrow than the 25 to 30 knots we expect later in the week so we have taken the opportunity to escape Marsh Harbour and take a trip across the bay to Hope Town.

What a treat it is to be here. We are anchored under the town's light house, one of only three in the Bahamas (and probably of few in the world) that is still powered by an oil lamp.

Once every two hours Between sunset and sunrise a duty lighthouse keeper climbs the 110 steps to the top of the lighthouse to service the light. The light is a pressurized petroleum light and burns a bright light in a mantle no larger than 5cm tall which shines out through a prismatic lens for more than 17 miles. The light floats on a bed of mercury to reduce friction and is turned by a clockwork mechanism. Climbing to the top to view the machinery it was no surprise to find that the light was manufactured by Chance & Son Ltd of Birmingham - lighthouse makers to the Empire no doubt - and was originally managed by Trinity House. We eagerly await nightfall when we will be able to view it in action.

Later in the town which is rather touristy and something of a cross between the Bahamas and Cape Cod we found a breadfruit tree growing in the grounds of the 'Commissioners' office. It was one of the original 2000+ breadfruit trees collected by Captain Bligh on his second breadfruit expedition - the first being that troubled by the famous mutiny. It was looking very healthy but sadly with no breadfruit on view.

The Whale was a pussy cat

Pensacola Cay 26/03/07

Well, as it has every day since we arrived in the Abacos, the Cruiser's Net said no don't go, but we had been watching the weather and felt the time was right. Several other boats were preparing to go and we heard from one that they had got on okay so we set out to cross the Whale. With 20+ knots coming off the sea and a moderate swell driving directly into the cut (which in anycase is relatively deep and wide), we cautiously reefed down. It turned out to be one of the best and fastest sails of the trip with sea conditions some way better than 'marginal'.

Having made Manjack Cay by shortly after 11am we decided to press on for another 20 miles and tonight find ourselves at Pensacola Cay (almost 27deg N!). We arrived in time to go ashore and follow a trail across the island to the ocean. Here we found a tree- well not just one tree but a strip of about 5 trees decorated with cruiser's mementos - usually the name of the boat, crew details and dates - painted on a piece of driftwood or similar. They are rather special. This is our penultimate Bahamian anchorage so our hearts are heavy with the loss of it all but tomorrow school will be

cancelled and we will spend the time preparing our own memento. Then when we are stuck in the traffic in rain on the A14 at home it will be a comfort to think of Tabitha's name hanging from a tree on an ocean shore on a deserted Bahamian island.

America can wait

Pensacola Cay 27/03/07

The best wind for sailing to Florida is tomorrow but that would have meant rushing on today and foregoing this last chance to enjoy the special experience of the remote and uninhabited Bahamian Islands.

We decided that America can wait and so we made the most of our last 'out island' experience for who knows how long. The day started with the creation of our memento - a plaque of drift wood into which we burned the name *Tabitha* her picture, our names and home port. Next snorkeling on the reef during which we found 4 conch. Then cleaning and fashioning the conch into horns.

As we sailed west, I was beginning to think that we had seen the last of that massive shell fish and that the conch horn would become one of those unfulfilled ambitions of the trip. The difficulty is that to make a good horn, the conch shell has to be complete, i.e. without the gash that it is necessary to make in the shell in order to extract the conch for eating. All of our previous conch finds had been intended for the pot so we had passed right through the Bahamas without making a horn. This time we gave priority to the horn but in fact, by boiling the conch inside its shell, we not only managed to get the conch to release its grip on the shell and come out intact (you don't want any smelly bits of shell fish left inside the shell if it is going to become a horn), but keep it fit for eating.

Then to the beach for the whole afternoon - all thoughts of schooling are abandoned as we begin to realise how precious is the short time we have left in these islands. How long will it be before we have a sandy tropical beach, the hot sun, the sound of the surf . . . and all to ourselves?

How the girls have changed. They swam without concern in the beautiful crystal clear water as a 3-4ft shark, crisply outlined against the bright white sand, cruised up and down the shoreline no more than 6ft ...yes, that's 6ft. . . off the beach. Elspeth getting up as close as she could with her underwater camera took a snap which we hope will come out.

Before returning to the boat to honk our conchs at sunset as we have heard so many other sailors do, we crossed to the ocean side and the 'Signing Tree'.

Nothing was said as we treked, single file, along the track towards the 'Signing Tree'. I think that each of us was recalling the many special memories that this trip has produced . . . dolphins, whales, sharks, turtles, manatees, armadillos, wild horses, the

lobster eating competition, sheep shearing, Tropical Storm Beryl, the log cabin at Great Duck Island, Damarask Cove, the Crows Nest Bar in Gloucester (featured in 'The Perfect Storm', sailing through New York Harbour, the Blue Hole, Rice n'Peas with fried chicken and Bahamian macaroni cheese, the oil powered lighthouse at Hope Town. . .and so many more.

Elsbeth climbed the tree and managed to hang our plaque in the prime position. Now, when we are in cold wet England (we know it isn't always like that), we will be able to think of it hanging there, at least until the next hurricane hits.

A-Rival in America

Cape Canaveral 30/03/07

We sailed in light airs for 50 miles across the shallow Little Bahamas Bank. *Tabitha* looked after herself which meant we could attend to numerous loose ends. I processed the data from the previous day's compass swinging and was delighted get consistent results showing that the greatest error in our steering compass is no more than 3 degrees which is basically ignorable. Good to know just before I set out across an ocean.

Tonight finds us anchored close to the Kennedy Space Centre which is our objective for tomorrow. Within hours of arriving in Florida, the Bahamas seemed a distant memory.

The end is nigh

ICW, Florida 08/04/07

Just twenty more miles to the final anchorage of the trip and then tomorrow morning we move six miles south to Vero Beach Marina where we have reserved a mooring for five days. We will have logged approximately 5000 nautical miles since last April.

We are quite pleased with the fact that we will have completed the entire trip without having to pay for a marina berth (ave. charge \$2 per foot per night!). We did go into a marina in the Mystic River but only in response to an offer by the owner of a free weekend!

Perhaps I should keep quiet about the fact that when I step into the shower ashore at Vero Beach tomorrow it will be my first proper shower since November!

This is a strange kind of limbo time as we anticipate Wednesday and our trip to the airport at Miami. The rental car is booked and our time is occupied in sorting a year's accumulated stuff and auditing our food stores so I know what I have to buy for my crossing. Florida is pleasant enough but the experience certainly lacks the intensity of Maine, Nova Scotia and the Bahamas.

I am quite excited about my crossing but very sad about the end of this wonderful trip and dreading the departure of my girls on Wednesday.

Last minute grounding

Vero Beach 10/04/07

The very end of a trip is such a classic moment for things to go wrong. Spirits are high and everyone relaxes just a moment too soon.

We took the corner to tightly as we turned into Vero marina and went quite hard upon a spoil pile where we sat as the tide ebbed (range only a few inches on this vast area of inland river). We tried the usual tricks - a kedge anchor, rocking and rolling, swinging out on the boom to lean over, standing at the bow while running astern, etc, etc, but it took the combined influences of a fellow cruiser in an inflatable dinghy who pushed the bow around, rigging the genoa when the wind came up (just forward of the beam), and the wash from a passing motor boat, to get us off!

Now the girls have only one more day left aboard - 'I am homesick for *Tabitha* already' said Peta as we pulled alongside in the tender this evening.

Final day

Vero Beach 11/04/07

The atmosphere tonight is of quiet disbelief as the clock ticks counting the final few moments of the penultimate day of this trip. Timing has been good in so far as we finished a bottle of propane cooking gas tonight which neatly sets me up for a refill and two full 20lb bottles which should get me all the way to England with something to spare.

Also, we finally got a boat name beginning with 'X'. A month or so ago, we managed to run through the alphabet from A to Z naming boats we had encountered this trip but were missing a Q and X, Then we found 'Quiet Eagle' in Marsh Harbor and today, on our final day, Elspeth spotted 'Xpense' so the list is complete just in time.

Postscript

Naturally enough, *Tabitha* felt very cold and empty without my girls but within a few weeks I was ready to head out alone across the Atlantic. Finding myself weatherbound in Bermuda and the Azores, the crossing took longer than expected but *Tabitha* looked after me and I made it to Plymouth, UK by the end of June.

Tabitha has now settled in to her new home on a swinging mooring at Ramsholt on the beautiful River Deben.