

NINE OF CUPS – 45' Liberty Cutter – 7' draft – March thru May 2007

Subject area: **Cape Town, South Africa to Charleston, USA via St. Helena and Ascension Islands, South Atlantic Ocean**

After two months in Cape Town, it was regrettably time to leave. We had originally planned to fly back to the States for our son's wedding, but after much deliberation, we decided to sail CUPS back to the USA instead. We were barely out of the Table Bay, Cape Town when we noted a problem with the jib furler. Hating to return to a place we had just left (especially since we had already paid tribute to Neptune), we opted to motor-sail the 60 miles north to Saldanha Bay with only the main and put in there to make necessary repairs.

The Saldanha Bay Yacht Club is small, but friendly with a cozy restaurant/bar, guest moorings (10 days free to international visitors) and hot showers. We arrived at dusk, were directed to a mooring and spent a quiet night. David got an early start and had the problem licked by the end of the day. Canadian cruisers who had spent over a year here brought fresh bread during the afternoon and came later for drinks. The friendly club manager ferried us to shore for hot showers and gave us the grand tour of the facilities. We were off at dawn the next morning.

We had anticipated good winds, but what we got was absolutely phenomenal weather with consistent southeasterly winds 10-20 knots, a helpful current and following seas. We covered the 1,700 miles to St. Helena in 12 easy days and anchored in deep (60') Jamestown Bay along with seven other yachts and the RMS St. Helena, St. Helena's tie with outside world.

A water taxi operates daily from early morning till 8pm and is the only reasonable transport between the boat and shore even for the local fishermen. The ferry lands at a cement wharf lined with long hanging knotted ropes which you grab to help pull yourself ashore. St. Helena is a British Overseas Territory (BOT) and we were met at the dock by Port Control and escorted to the Customs Office on the wharf for a quick check-in. We were then required to stop at the Police Station for immigration formalities and the Harbormaster's office to pay our landing fees. A five minute walk along the wharf and through the "arch" and we were in the island's only "city", Jamestown.

Walking through the 18th century stone arch is like walking into another world. A blend of Georgian/Victorian, the town has maintained its island charm, but is still quite British. The main street is lined with neatly kept old buildings, including a castle built in 1708 and currently used for administrative offices. The 699 steps of Jacob's Ladder was originally constructed to move supplies and manure "up country" from sea level and are still in use today by the hardy. The tourist office was particularly helpful and their colorful and descriptive glossy brochures were a surprise. We booked a Napoleonic tour which included Napoleon's residence during his 6 years on the island (1825-1831) as well as his tomb, which, by the way, is Napoleon-less since the French removed his body and brought it back to France.

Wandering through the town in the heat of the day, we found respite in Castle Gardens, a lovely little park which happened to be on the way to Anne's Place, a yachtie restaurant/bar and one of the few internet kiosks in town (10p/minute...ouch!). In Castle Gardens, we deposited a stone from Saldanha Bay, an ongoing tradition designed to confuse geologists in the next century, we were told.

In town there are a couple of small supermarkets which were reasonably well stocked with dry goods and canned goods, but fresh produce and meat were at a premium. Prices were about double that of Cape Town. A fresh market offered very limited local produce, fresh meat and fish. The island grows very little of its own though we found some local bananas that were great. The small island library provided good local information on the island's history as well as bird and flower identification and we were also able to trade several paperback books there.

Through our friend at Tristan da Cunha, we had made contact with St. Helena Radio's Gilbert Legg who graciously acted as our host during our stay. The approach to the island gives the impression of impregnable volcanic rock. The interior, however, is lush and green, abundant with flowers and New Zealand flax. Though the island is small, there is much to see. From Jamestown, we traveled "up country" with Gilbert and his family to the island's six other districts, getting a native Saint's perspective on the island and its people. We were thrilled to sight a rare wirebird, a unique species found only on St. Helena. Our time with Gilbert and his family was indeed the highlight of the visit.

After a week, it was time to move on to our next planned stop, Ascension Island. We were again blessed with fine weather, consistent southeast winds and following seas and the 750 mile run was covered in less than five days with some fine fishing done along the way which added yellowfin tuna to the galley's daily menu. This time we were the only sailboat in the deep anchorage for the week we visited. Getting ashore required the same level of expertise and timing in order to grab the hanging ropes on the somewhat decrepit, slimy cement wharf, however no water taxis ran here, so we relied on our own dinghy for transportation back and forth.

Originally set up as a British outpost to aid St. Helena in case the French mounted a rescue attempt for Napoleon, Ascension Island is quite different from most other inhabited islands we've visited. Georgetown is the only "city" on this true "working" island. There is no indigenous population and the island is primarily dedicated to the British and U.S. established military bases there as well as massive communication network hubs. The landscape is crisscrossed with wires and every conceivable type of heavy-duty antenna and radar dome. Similar to St. Helena, it is volcanic in nature and the natural sea level terrain has a moonscape feel. Architecture is utilitarian and amenities are limited. People are not less friendly, but they are there to work and therefore, are much more businesslike with little time for idle chatting with cruisers.

Also a BOT under the governance of St. Helena, we were required to check in with Customs and subsequently the Police Station for Immigration. The process was quick and easy, both in and out. Unlike St. Helena, Ascension does have an airstrip due to the military base and therefore has access other than by sea. There is a small hotel servicing limited tourists and several small restaurants with limited menus. There is one grocery store in town and a few convenience stores located elsewhere on the island. Prices were high as we expected, but the exchange rate was better than St. Helena because of the proximity of the U.S. airbase. We were able to rent a car for a couple of days and toured the upper elevations which, in contrast to sea level, were lush and green just like St. Helena.

Several "postbox" walks of varying difficulty are available for hiking where a postbox is situated at the end of each path and you can stamp a souvenir booklet or your own journal as well as sign a guest book acknowledging your visit. The paths meander up, around and through the Green Mountain National Park. Cemeteries for sailors and ruins of structures from the past were overgrown with lush, tropical vegetation. Feral cows, chickens and unshorn sheep roamed freely. Bright orange Ascension lilies were prolific and we snacked on wild raspberries the size of jumbo olives as we walked. Huge water lilies float gently on a small pond at the summit. The highest point on the island is marked with a huge anchor chain, barely visible on a muddy path lined with bamboo.

Ascension is the largest breeding ground in the South Atlantic for green turtles and the anchorage was thick with their romance and mating. We chanced to meet a young American turtle biologist who had recently arrived from the States to head up the island's Conservation Program. Susannah arranged for us to make a late night visit to the beach to watch the turtles laying eggs and witness the hatchlings making their way blindly towards the sea. This was the highlight of our visit.

After six days of exploring, we hauled anchor (manually, since the windlass had given up the ghost) and headed for Charleston, SC, our planned landfall. The winds held as we aimed for

narrowest part of the doldrums, but finally petered out at about 4°S. We had been spoiled with high mileage days and now were thankful when we made 60 miles. We celebrated our Equator crossing with an offering of rum to Neptune, but slogged along for another two days before we found the winds again. The rest of the trip was uneventful. The usual underway repairs kept us busy enough. We amused ourselves by reading, writing and making wagers on the number of flying fish we'd find in the scuppers each morning. 39 days after leaving Ascension, we arrived in Charleston on 2 May and gladly tied up at the Charleston Maritime Center.

Our longest passage to date, the total mileage for the trip was 7,150 NM in 72 days; 60 days of which were spent at sea. This also tied the knot for our circumnavigation of South America and completed the second crossing of the Atlantic in a 6-month period. After a 2 week rest in Charleston snuggled midst the visiting Tallships, we sailed to Bristol, RI to enjoy a restful summer for Cups and crew.

Commodores Marcie (AA1ZM) and David (AA1ZL) Lynn