

# My Sailing Gap Year

I started planning my trip about a year before I actually finished at St Johns. My initial plan was always to sail across an ocean. However, I needed to first find a boat to sail on and an ocean to sail across. This proved far more difficult than I at first thought. I had planned to go on a replica Phoenician ship, however that was postponed due to funding issues. I then spent lots of time on the internet trying to find another boat to go on.

Eventually I found a racing yacht travelling from the UK to the Canary Islands and so on the 28<sup>th</sup> of September I drove down to the Hamble river near Southampton. This is where I started my travels which spanned 3 continents, 7 different boats, 5000 miles at sea and took over 8 and a half months.

When I got down to the marina I got my first look at my first of many boats and which I have to say was my favourite by far. Olympia's Tigress (OT) was a 40-foot-long Beneteau first 40 racer that I was helping to deliver down to Las Palmas so that it could take place in the Atlantic rally crossing (ARC). On the outside OT was a sleek, functional and powerful craft made for speed, with its tall mast, huge steering wheel and half a million ropes. However, on the inside it was a bit more basic with only a small kitchen sparsely equipped and no table or seating to speak of as everything was used to store sails and such.

I met the captain later that day as she was very busy trying to organise the trip as the boom wasn't actually on the boat but getting repaired after a disaster earlier that year. In what would become a recurring theme though all my gap year we spent a few days more than we hoped waiting for the weather to become more favourable. During this time, I got to know the other crew (5 including myself) and generally getting ready for the trip. This including cleaning the boat, fixing sails and a test sail where we went to Cowes on the Isle of Wight.

Eventually we were ready to leave (but only after a quick trip to get some fuel) and on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of October we left to our first stop in Cascais, Portugal.

My first night ever at sea there was a good 30knots of wind and we were heading across it which made for very uncomfortable sailing. The waves were big and the rain was relentless. We got through it only because of the skill of the skipper and sturdiness of the boat however I for one plus another of the crew were feeling slightly worse off when the sun finally rose up above the coast of France. Unknown to me we had reached France after only 24 hours of sailing. The next day was much smoother but we made worse progress (less wind means less speed). Soon though we reached the peninsula of Brest and entered the Bay of Biscay. Biscay is famed for being one of the worst stretches of sea in the northern hemisphere, oddly though we didn't see any of this at all for the first two days we were there which means there wasn't much to do except watch the dolphins and complain about how terrible the food was.

In the last hundred or so miles of Biscay we did get a taste of the fury the sea is capable of, the wind picked up to 30 plus knots and the waves got to be higher than the deck of OT. During this time, I had become so accustomed to living at sea that I happily felt no effects of sea sickness and so enjoyed the storm immensely (well most of it). I think this was the best part of my whole gap year, the two days I spent in that storm. This is because when I was on watch at night I was normally the one who had to go up to the front deck to change the jib or reef the main sail and there are few things more fun than holding on to the railings while you pull and strap down a 35 square meter jib while the waves are covering the deck and soaking you to the skin (I had some very good

waterproofs so I was fine). All this was happening at a rather fast speed for any sailing boat, so we were averaging 10 knots and reached a top speed of 16.9 knots in an extremely big gust

When we got down to north Portugal and out of Biscay the storm abated and the wind turned into what were in fact very good sailing conditions. During this time, we saw something I didn't know happened anywhere other than remote picture-perfect islands in the Pacific: Phosphorescence. Dolphins were also common around all that area so they were playing around the boat for much of the day and then they were riding the bow wave in the phosphorescence at night looking like torpedoes with a jet stream of light behind them.

Eventually we made it to Cascais, a small coast city in the middle of Portugal about 25 miles from Lisbon. We spent a week there while we got the jib fixed as it got ripped in the storm and waited for a good weather window to go down to the Canary Islands. I didn't do a lot while in Cascais but explore the city and head to Lisbon for a day as Lisbon is a great city and I've wanted to go there for a long while.

While we were there we also swapped two of our crew for four more who were all more experienced sailors so the next stretch promised to be easier and slightly less stressful, and indeed it was. That's not to say it was smooth, we still had days with too much and too little wind plus heavy rain and scorching sun which we had to endure in equal amounts.

After only 6 days of sailing we managed to get to Las Palmas, Canary Islands. I spent the first few days hanging out with the crew and exploring the island and recovering from my first voyage at sea. Soon though the crew started to leave the boat and I started to worry about I would do next as I had no plan for the future.

I left OT after a week and moved into a hostel in the middle of the city. Over the next two weeks I spent much of the time looking for a boat to go across the Atlantic on with the ARC. Unfortunately I couldn't find any who would be willing to take a 18 year old with minimal sailing experience. Luckily, I had been in contact with some people in the Caribbean who had survived hurricane Irma by taking their boats south, but now they were back in the British Virgin Islands (BVI) buying broken boats and fixing them up and selling them on. They messaged me while I was in the Canary Islands asking me whether I wanted to fly over there and help them. I decided then that it was the best thing I could do as I was getting nowhere with finding a boat across the Atlantic so I booked a flight to Madrid then on to BVI.

I left two days later to Madrid where I spent two days with my brother who was living out there. Then I set off on my way to the next stage of my travels.

Of all the experiences I had in my time away the worst by far was the flight to BVI. This started because the first flight took 13 hours and I was stupid enough to forget just about all forms of entertainment except a single book (which I finished). After what felt like forever I got to Columbia where I was in for a 14-hour layover spent in the airport which made the plane look 5-star as at least then I had a seat which was more than a piece of cold, hard steel and concrete. I slept sporadically that night at best but I got through it as boredom is something I am well practiced at dealing with. After an agonizingly long stay I finally got on my next flight to Puerto Rico where I was preparing to have a 17-hour layover in the airport. However when I got there I found that wasn't really an option as the airport was far smaller than Bogotá's and it closed for the night. So now I was stuck in an airport that was about to close and had no way to go anywhere or contact anyone. Eventually I started walking with all my stuff hoping to find somewhere to sleep and luck had it that after about 10 minutes of walking I found a taxi stand that still had a driver there. He told me that due to the

hurricane there was a massive power cut across much of the city and so the hotels were mostly closed, happily a new a motel out of the city which still had power. That night I did have a bed (just not a nice one) and by 6:00 the next morning I was back in the airport fairly well rested and ready for my final flight to BVIs which was cancelled.

So, I bought another one and after only a 30-minute flight on an 8-seater plane I landed in the BVIs. After a 49-hour trip I finally got to my destination and after a short taxi trip I arrived at Wild Thing - a 48-foot catamaran and the boat I would spend much of the next 6 months living on.

When I finally got on board I found that instead of just having the two boats I knew they had escaped hurricane Irma in they had two more that weren't as lucky. Both of them were Lagoon catamarans which are a very luxury form of yacht and these were rather nice ones at that. One was a 56-footer called A2 and the other was a 62-footer called Amazing. Both had no mast and had been underwater for extended periods of time so were covered in barnacles.

After a couple of days of living on the boat and getting to know the crew I started to work for my food and board as that was the deal I had with the skipper. The work I was given weren't the most fun jobs in the world as they mostly comprised of cleaning the barnacles off the two catamarans by dissolving them with powerful acid. Although lots of it was less than fun, bits of the work were very interesting because the skipper was fixing engines that had been underwater for weeks and watching him work was extremely impressive and the first time you hear an engine roar into life after so long is a very satisfying experience.

I did about a week of this before they bought their next boat and it was time for us to go and collect it. For this purpose, we took our working catamaran, Wild Thing. It took about an hour to motor round the island to where the new boat was and then about half an hour to find an anchor spot where we could work on the new boat easily. Just before midday we finally took our first look at the boat and it wasn't quite what I was expecting when they said it was only 2 years old; it was upside down and beached in only about 3 meters of water. Our first job was to patch all the holes in the bottom of the hull and get all the barnacles off it so we had a nice platform to work from. This took the rest of the day and much of the night but by 22:00 we were confident that if we flipped it wouldn't just sink right away.

The next day we strapped four or five huge lift bags to the top that was at the time the bottom and started to pull it out to deeper water. It was slow progress as Wild Thing only has two 35bhp engines and it was towing a 20 ton 42-foot Lagoon upside down. However eventually we got it to deep enough water that we could flip it.

Flipping it was very difficult as it involved sinking the back so it turned vertical and then pulling the front forward and then inflating the back lift bags so it all ended up the right way up. At this point it was floating fine as it was supported on the lift bags but that was not ideal for moving it. We slowly deflated the lift bags and so tested the repairs we made on it. Unfortunately, it floated just long enough for us to have dinner and get ready for bed then it started to go down. This meant that we had to go over there at 11:00 and while the skipper was underwater patching holes I was using a couple of big petrol pumps to keep the boat up. After a couple of hours, no more water was coming in so we finally went to bed but left an automatic pump on Stardust just in case.

The next day mercifully Stardust was still up so fairly early we started to drag it back to our flotilla of boats that were all anchored in a harbour called Nanny Cay. The trip took a good four hours, most of which I spent in Stardust scooping all the mud out of the cockpit and getting rid of the rest of the

barnacles. We got back to Nanny Cay mid afternoon and then spent a long time trying to park Stardust as it had no engines or steering so we had use a couple of our dinghies as substitute.

That night we spent an enjoyable evening not doing a lot but going to the local beach bar. However, at about 9:00 we were told by a local that our boat was half underwater and assuming it was Stardust we took our time going back as it had spent 8 weeks underwater it will survive another couple of hours. When we did go back half an hour later though we found not Stardust but Amazing with one of her hulls under the surface.

The next 3 hours were spent in the bilge of this Lagoon 620 bailing out water with a bucket while my captain went around looking for a pump big enough to drain the Amazing. It was a long night but by the end of it we had Amazing up and floating and all 5 boats secured and safe again.

The next few weeks passed without much interest as most of it was spent working on Stardust, cleaning buckets of mud from the inside, fixing the engines and getting them going again and also using acid to get the barnacles off the outside and making it all white again.

By the time Christmas came about Stardust was as clean as it ever was and we were planning how we should spend the holiday. We settled on going to Norman Island for a few days of lobster hunting and fires on a beach. We took the two undamaged boats and anchored in a small bay about 4 hours from Nanny Cay.

Norman Island is a deserted island among the BVI archipelago with nothing on it but goats. That first day me and the skipper went hunting for goats as they were wild and everywhere on the island. Because guns are very hard to get in lots of the Caribbean and Australia (skippers home country) he had to use a bow and arrow. After a couple of hours of me waiting in the dinghy the skipper finally came back out of the trees but he had no goat. The one he'd shot had fallen off a cliff on the other side of the island. Instead, he'd found an abandoned baby goat so I was sent off to retrieve it, which I did. It took about 5 minutes to catch it.

We managed to get it back on the dinghy which involved swimming 50m holding it above my head. On Wild Thing we had 8 people on board, 5 men and 3 women which meant there were loads of people to help look after this very young goat. Plus it provided a very fun form of entertainment as it wasn't very stable on its feet but still had lots of energy.

For Christmas lunch we needed to eat as we had failed to catch any goats that were big enough to eat so instead 5 of us went snorkelling and found lobsters in abundance. We got most of them by using a cray loop (a device used to catch lobsters) but some of them we got with our bare hands, which is quite hard as we had to hold our breath and swim down.

On Christmas Day we had a big fire in a cove on Norman island and cooked about 18 lobsters that we had caught earlier that day. On Boxing Day we sailed back to Nanny Cay and I spent a few joyful days in Nanny Cay not working but hanging out with the friends I'd made there.

New Year was the next excuse for us to leave the island of Tortola and head over to Jost Van Dyke for what is one of the biggest beach parties in the world. We got there a little late, so the entire anchorage was full of boats. This would have been a problem to most skippers, however mine reasoned that because we only had Wild Thing there should be space close to the beach, so we went right up to the beach and beached ourselves in only about 1.2 meters of water. We put down an anchor and left it there thinking we can unstick it when we leave in a few days. The plus side to this

was that even though we got there hours after everyone else we were also the closest boat to everything, in the perfect position.

The New Year's Eve party on Jost Van Dyke was amazing as it had over 3000 people and one of the most famous reggie bands in the Caribbean.

The next day none of us really wanted to go back to Nanny Cay so instead we left Jost van Dyke around mid-day and went to Smugglers Bay on Tortola which has one of the best beaches in the BVIs plus it is only accessible by boat, so it was not busy at all.

The month of January passed quickly, we got more boats and sold others and I spent much of the time fixing them up.

The few memorable things that happened were mostly the goat growing up and becoming more and more fun especially when we started taking it to shore and watching it play with everyone who came near. We also spent a few weekends exploring the island of the BVIs on our boat and other peoples. The best of these was going to Anagada on a friend's 700BHP power boat for a lobster festival, which meant we just ate a lot of lobster in all sorts of ways.

I also did a bit of work helping to fix the island in more ways than boats. On one of my days off I went to a beach on the other side of Tortola called Josiah's Bay where a friend of a friend needed help rebuilding his beach bar which was destroyed by Irma. We spend a very fun day first clearing the whole beach of all debris and then rebuilding the bar around 4 palm trees that were still alive and in a vague square using wood that we found in the trees next to the beach.

By the time February came around I was starting to feel a little bored of being in Nanny Cay and was eager to move on. Happily, this was looking more and more likely as we had whittled the 10+ boats we had accumulated down to only four, one of which was staying in Nanny Cay getting re-fibreglassed so we didn't need to stay there any longer for that boat.

The other 3 boats were all sailable but still need new parts, so we decided in the end of February we would take them to Saint Maarten as it is very cheap there.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of March the fleet of boats set off to Saint Maarten. I was on a 39-foot lagoon called Istar, Wild Thing was still with us as they hadn't managed to sell it and then the skipper and this partner were on the latest boat called Cascadia. Cascadia is the single nicest boat I've ever sailed, it's a 56-foot lagoon catamaran with 4 ensuite double berths.

The trip over to Saint Maarten was one of the best things I did. This is mostly because I was with only one other guy who was one of the best friends I'd made on my travels. We started in Virgin Gorda as it was closer to Saint Maarten than Tortola. It took us 22 hours so even though we left at 4 in the morning we still only got there at 2 in the morning. On the way we did very little except talk and fish; we caught a very nice 40cm tuna which we ate mostly raw with a bit of soya sauce. What was quite funny about the trip was that the 3 boats were meant to stay together as it's easier, however our boat was so much slower that the other two boats were out of sight after only 10 hours and we had to guess where we were going on Saint Maarten as we didn't know where we were anchoring.

We did happily find a slot in the dark after a bit of searching. The next day we all got up late as it was a long day however we still had time to have a look around the town on Simpson Bay where our boats were anchored. That night we had the first meal out in a restaurant I'd had in months.

Saint Maarten turned out to be just as badly damaged as the BVI's but the Dutch side essentially was looking far better than the BVI's as the Dutch government had given a lot more money than an independent country.

We were lucky to get 3 anchor slots right next to the entrance to the harbour which was surprising because the Heineken regatta was going on and there were hundreds of extra boats both racing and spectators. Because of this there were lots of activities going on, like concerts and races to watch. We had a lot of fun the first few days doing all these things and enjoying the new island.

While in Saint Marten we had a lot of frustration as we were only there for getting parts to fix the boats, however many of them weren't on the island and so had to be ordered in and the problem with living on an island is that it can often take many weeks. Because of this we only wanted to stay in Saint Maarten for a few weeks but ended up staying there on and off for almost 3 months.

Most of this time was spent anchored in Simpson bay working on boats and enjoying the modern life on shore that we didn't get in the BVI's, which was a non-franchise country. Although we didn't move the boat around the island we did have some big dinghies we could go around on and we had a friend with a car that allowed us to explore the island in some detail. What we found was that on the Dutch side all the major infrastructure was back up and running after the hurricane whereas on the French side many of the houses still didn't have power or were simply abandoned. Marigot (the capital) was the only place on the French side that showed signs of serious repair but still not as much as Philipsburg, the capital of the Dutch side.

Life on the water in Saint Maarten was in many ways more pleasant than in Nanny Cay as we were farther away from land which was nice as we felt more isolated and it was all more peaceful, except for the endless jet skis. Being away from land also meant that the number of mosquitos decreased dramatically as well which was a huge positive as in the BVI's it was becoming a serious problem. The only real problem with our anchorage was the waves which were normally not too bad but when it got really windy or a fast boat went by the surf would rock the boat enough to throw your food all over the place.

Although life was in many ways more boring in Saint Maarten than in BVI's as we had no islands to visit or boats to salvage and fix up, we did do a lot more fun water sports. Because of all the equipment we found in shipwrecked boats we had a wide selection of toys to play with including wakeboards, water skis, a windsurfer, huge inflatable rings, sea-bobs, snorkels and many other things.

After about a month a couple of us got bored of staying in Saint Maarten so we decided to take Ishtar, which was mostly finished, over to Saba for a few days.

The trip over to Saba was another great trip with a lot more fishing and music on the way. You can see Saba from Saint Maarten on a clear day, but you don't get much of a sense of how big it is from so far away. As we got closer and closer it got taller and taller.

Saba is an old volcano that towers 888 meters above the ocean surface on only about 5 square meters of land which means that the whole island is just one big hill with no flat parts at all. Actually, that's not entirely true as there is an airport on one side, however it is only 1300 feet long making it the shortest international airport in the world - a good 200 feet shorter than any other. The rest of the island is covered in vegetation that goes up in layers as you go higher.

We took a mooring buoy in a small bay on the south side of the island as anchoring isn't allowed near Saba. The first day we walked to Windward Side, the main town on the island. To get there however we had to go up a stair case called the ladder that starts at sea level in a small bay only accessible by boat and ends 800 steps above up an almost vertical cliff. This sort of ruined the plan of the day as it took us a long time and too much energy in such a hot day to do this, so we didn't bother to get the top of Mount Scenery. Instead we walked back down and spent the rest of the day on the boat fishing with a small rod and snorkeling around as Saba is a haven for reef sharks and turtles.

The next day we started early and instead of going up the ladder we took the road which is way easier (though less picturesque). Soon we got to an old sulphur mine down at only 150m which from the outside was just a hole in the rock but which actually extended almost a mile into the cliff through twisting tunnels. From there we started to walk upwards. As all three of us were fairly fit we decided to take the less travelled path up the mountain instead of the big stair case on the other side of Mount Scenery. This turned out to be a great move as we were the only ones on the trail and the trail turned out to be quite wild which suited us just fine. After 3-4 hours hiking up we got to the crater at the top of the volcano. On the way we had started out on almost dry plains at the bottom but as we got higher it got wetter and soon we were in a woodland-like forest, then rain forest and finally in the crater we got to cloud forest. Due to the fact that Saba makes its own weather there is an almost permanent cloud at the top which made the view completely invisible, however the real view is in the crater surrounded by a 100 m high wall of rock all covered in thick, green forest and swimming in a pearly-white fog.

It took us another 2 hours to make our way down again to Windward Side by which time we were fairly exhausted but we made it and after a quick beer in one of the bars we made our way back to our boat again.

The way back to Saint Maarten was the most successful fishing trip I did. We ended up catching one large tuna, 3 large mahi mahi, one small jack and even a marlin although it got away before we could get it on the boat, all this meant we were eating a lot of fish over the next few days.

When we got back we found that we were in luck as it was the carnival in a couple of weeks and we found that it is always worth a watch. It turned out to be more like the famous one in Rio than the small floats I was used to back home, with hundreds of people wearing feathers and loud music booming through the streets of Philipsburg.

Snorkelling became the main form of entertainment for a while because even though it wasn't the best marine life in the Caribbean the water was at least warm, and the spearfishing was rather good. What is more it was a good reason to practice my freediving skills which were getting quite good, I could get down to 10m and stay down for almost a minute which was enough time to get a lobster or conch.

Another source of entertainment was there were lots of hills inland on Saint Maarten that were perfect for walking up, and it was up one of these at the base of a cliff that we found our second set of boating companions. Under a sheet of corrugated iron which was lodged between some trees we found two very young and starving puppies. As they were already so thin we guessed that they hadn't been eating enough so it would be better if took them back to our boats. When we did we washed them down with shampoo as they were infested with fleas and then fed them puppy biscuits in milk. Although they at first were too tired and scared to touch the food, within hours they

had got the hang of it and were soon eating as much as they could find. It took a few days before they were back to good health and with their health came an abundance of energy that only puppies have. Soon there were fit and healthy enough to give them names so we chose Zeffer and Zina.

Although we had stuff to do we all started to get bored again soon so near the end of April we decided to take Ishtar and Cascadia over to Anguilla for a few days. I was on Cascadia for this trip and this made the passage very smooth as she's so big most waves don't have much of an effect.

We spent 2 nights on Anguilla during which we hired a car to explore the island and also went snorkelling where we saw a hole load of stingrays and other exotic marine life. Then we headed off to a deserted island 10 miles from Anguilla call Dog Island.

Dog Island is famous for its coast which is just a maze of tunnels both above and below the water, plus big cliffs perfect for cliff diving which I did a bit of but didn't much enjoy. It was also on Dog Island that we found a coconut tree with quite a few ripe coconuts still on, so we sent the skipper up to get a load and that night we drank fresh coconut milk and rum right out of the shell.

Back in Saint Maarten I sensed my travels were coming to an end as my money was running out and I'd already been away for 7 months. I decided that I would fly out of Martinique in 2 weeks' time as the skipper had said we would be there on time. However, a week before we were meant to leave I got talking to another skipper who was planning to take his boat across the Atlantic this year.

After a bit of thought I decided that it was too good an opportunity to ignore as it was cheap, good timing and a nice boat so I accepted and 2 days later I moved on to his boat.

This turned out to be a very good move as not only did the others never make it to Martinique but also, I got to sail across the Atlantic which was from the very start my ultimate plan for my gap year.

The first stop was Bermuda which was a week's sailing away, before we could set off though we had to prepare the boat for the voyage. This involved buying lots and lots of food, putting all the sails up and cleaning the hull of the boat so we could move faster though the water. All in all the preparation took 4 days and then we were off.

The trip to Bermuda was by far the easiest sailing I had ever done, this was mostly because for the first time ever I had a fully functional autopilot which meant we didn't have to steer at all and only had to set the sails and watch out for boats that might hit us.

During this first leg of the trip we had 3 crew on board, one skipper who was a very experienced sailor, me who was by this point a pretty experienced sailor and this one other guy who had never sailed before but was a good cook, which is just as important.

The only memorable part of this trip was that firstly the weather was perfect the whole way and secondly every night we had about 10 flying fish land on our boat. We never saw it happen, but we always found dead fish all over the place.

We got to Bermuda after 6 days and spent 3 nights there seeing the town and preparing for the longest stretch of the trip the Azores. We also swapped our chief for another crew member who also

could sail much better but couldn't cook which turned out to be fun as I turned chef and actually quite enjoyed cooking in the high seas.

I had many challenges on this stretch including big waves and high winds, but the worst part was the terrible boredom. With only 3 people on board we had to do 3 hours on and then 6 hours asleep which meant you had a lot of time alone especially at night. Happily, I prepared to a certain degree in Bermuda by finding a book swap shop, so I stocked up and got as many as I could.

Although boredom was the worst thing I faced there was many physical problems as well. One of these was one night we were running with the wind when the wind changed just enough to gybe the boom so fast that the traveller at the bottom of the mainsheet broke and the boom became unattached from the back of the boat meaning we had no control over it at all. To solve this potentially disastrous problem, I got on the wheel and was steering while the other two pulled on lots of ropes to first get the sail back into the mast and then lash the boom in the centre of the boat.

After what felt like forever we got to the Azores island of Flores which wasn't actually the island we wanted to reach but due to the wind we missed Faial. We spent that night in Flores harbour which was nice as it was mercifully flat but as it was a Sunday nothing was open which meant even though we were on land for the first time in 2 weeks we were still alone on our boat with nothing to do but sleep.

The next day the extra crew member had to fly home which left just the two of us to take the boat to Horta on Faial. This trip only took us about 18 hours but as we only had 2 people we had to do 4 hours on 4 hours off. We got there midmorning the next day and then spent a long time looking for a place to moor up. We ended up just mooring on the fuel dock for the 4 days we were there. Even though there are hundreds of spots in the Horta harbour the reason we had to moor there was because the ARK Europe race had arrived a few days before us and they had taken all the spots.

Horta was a very pleasant place to stay and recuperate while we waited for our sails to be repaired. During this time, we met hundreds of sailors who came up and stayed next to us for an hour or two collecting fuel and water.

Although Horta was a fun and interesting town I was keen to leave, I had been away for 8 months with little contact with anyone I knew and had to meet new people every day.

The reason we didn't leave after only 1 or 2 days was firstly we had no sails to use and we had no crew. This wasn't a massive problem as we both knew we could do the last bit double handed however we didn't really want to. But when we got the sails back we still had no one and so had to leave alone.

For the first 600 miles on our way to Portugal we had no wind at all, this meant we had to use the engine continually for all that time. This time was even more boring as I had even more time alone, less people to talk too and not even waves to distort the horizon.

The only interesting things that happened in this time was catching the first fish I had caught since Saint Maarten, also I decided one morning that I would make pancakes which went far better than I imagined as the boat was still rocking around quite a bit.

After the long period of being becalmed the wind picked up rather unexpectedly and after 6 hours the wind went from 5 knots to 30 knots and the waves got 5 times bigger. Both of us were very happy about this as although it was far less comfortable we made better progress and we were running out of fuel. The storm kept up the whole way back to Portugal and we made the final 300 miles to the coast took us less than 2 days.

We made it to Portimao after 26 days at sea and 3000 miles. It was one off the best feelings I had ever had, I had crossed the Atlantic Ocean with only 3 people on board which is something very few people have done.

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I spent as few days in Portugal as possible as I wanted to get home but that's not to say I didn't enjoy it. The cliffs around the coast were amazing and I did several long walks along them. It was a great place to end what had been a fantastic adventure.

(Scroll down to see more photos)



Olympia Tigress moored up in Cascais waiting for one of her sails to be fixed.



The pontoon in the Hamble where I first saw Olympia Tigress on my first day travelling.



Walking up the side of Norman Island looking for fire wood for the evening's meal.



My first look at the boats I would be working on.  
Left to right; Lakota (only see mast), A2, Amazing, Wild Thing.



Lakota and Wild Thing anchored next to Norman Island.

The skipper Geoff.



The baby goat Ligo a couple of weeks after we found him.

The whole crew on the back of Wild Thing on Boxing day.





A particularly good catch of lobster.

A \$13000 sea-bob we found in one of the ship-wrecks used to propel you through the water.



The saloon of Cascadia.

Cascadia sailing from BVIs to Saint Maarten.



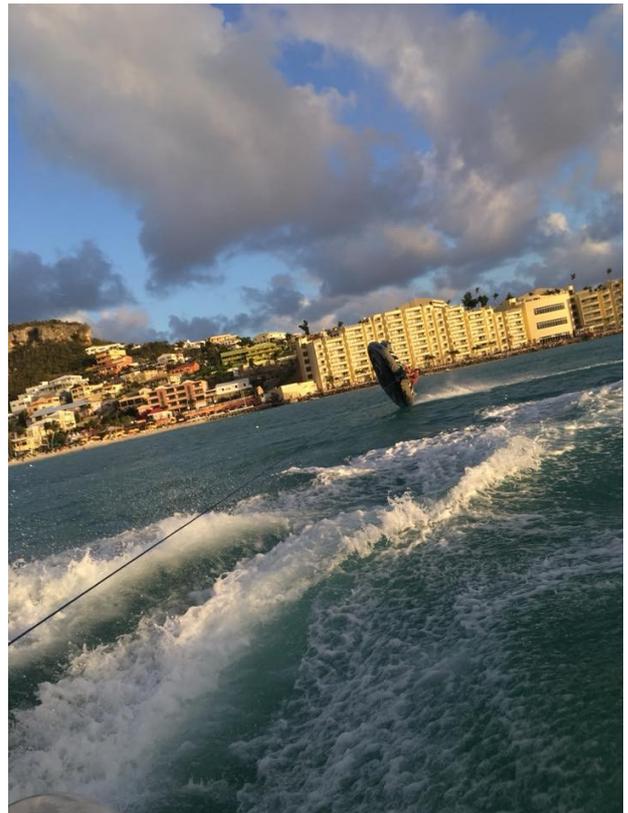


The view of Simpson Bay and the spot where our boats were anchored.

Sint Maarten—The view of the town surrounding Simpson Bay taken from the tallest hill around.



Us having fun on a inflatable rubber ring being towed behind a dingy.



A good days catch from spear fishing around Sint Maarten.



First sight of Saba from the front of Ishtar.

Me with the first fish I caught on the way to Saba.



The side of Saba we stayed on while attached to a mooring boay.



The Skipper of Ishtar (David) with the 2 fish he caught.





The view from half way up the slope of Saba.



The Ladder staircase up the side of a cliff on Saba.



The rather small entrance to the Sulphur mine.

The cloud forest at the top of Mount Scenery.





A pair of tortoises we had as pets for the whole time I was there.

The pair of puppies we found on a hill in Sint Maarten and then raised as Zeffer and Zina.



The saloon of White Cliffs and a view into 2 of the cabins.

The awesome cliffs in the south of Portugal near Portimao.



The tuna we caught on the way to Portugal.