

Dawg Tales

Newsletter



Homeward Bound
on SV Escape

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From the Helm

We are winding down the activities on our Homeward Bound Flotilla, assisting boats and crew to get to the US in a period of extreme uncertainty from COVID-19. Islands were closed through the Caribbean, including boatyards to get boats hauled and secured for the hurricane season. And, flights were not available to get crew in to assist in an offshore passage. With so many boats facing challenges of an unplanned offshore passage with shorthanded crew, we decided the Salty Dawg organization had the skills to help. So, we canceled our Spring Rally, set fees for the Flotilla at \$0 so no one would be excluded, stood up a large team of volunteers to manage the effort and provide assistance with shoreside coordinators, offered Chris Parker weather and routing services, created an emergency response team with long time sailors and technical experts, formed a government affairs team to establish contacts with US agencies as well as the many island governments where boats would congregate and pass by along the way, and set a location for those who could afford to make a donation to the organization. Additionally, we were able to arrange safe passage options for boats, approved on a case by case base, through the Bahamas with opportunities for rest stops and fuel – a big help to shorthanded crew and weary sailors.



The full tally of boats participating is 184. That is far larger than any rally we had ever hosted. We have another 45 boats left to get in safely, so our work isn't done. Our team experienced many issues with breakage, minor injury, failed engines, arrival tows, parts shipped in from the US and England, and a particularly rough sailing spring with frequent cold fronts, strong low-pressure systems, gales and, oh yeah, two Tropical Storms (Arthur and Bertha). But I have to give special recognition to our large support team, many of whom devoted a huge number of hours to help fellow sailors. Thank you from the entire sailing community to: Sheldon, Tim, Rick, Jo Ella, Mindy, Dorothy, Lydia, Howard, Ros, Ken, Joan, Brian, Russ, Linda, Bennet, Lynn, Dave, Bob, Kathy, Nancy, and especially Tatja and Barb.

You'll find more information about the amazing Homeward Bound Flotilla in this issue. As for the balance of the year we are working on adjusting our events to be conducted where possible, in a safe manner with COVID-19 still present. More details will be forthcoming on those plans.

Stay safe, --- *Hank George, President, SDSA*



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Stories From the Caribbean during COVID-19

Homeward Bound with the Salty Dawgs

by Kate Miller, SV Eclipse, April 19th Flotilla

My husband, Chris, and I have been living aboard and cruising our Caliber 47 "Eclipse" since June 2018. We started in Maine and made it as far south as Grenada where we spent the 2019 hurricane season. We were slowly working our way back toward the US and had made it as far as Antigua in February and March 2020 when the pandemic hit. Through the many cruising forums, as well as contact with other friends on boats at other islands, we started hearing about the increasing restrictions on borders being closed, shore access being limited, and other pandemic-related constraints. In Antigua we still had good access to groceries, a chandlery, and even some restaurants, but we knew additional restrictions were coming and we decided to head to the USVI in late March.

Through cruising friends, we heard about the Salty Dawg Homeward Bound Flotilla. We did a little online research about the event and decided to sign up. We had done a couple long passages, a 9-day passage with crew, and a 5-day passage with just the two of us, and we knew the passage back to the US would be challenging. Our initial passage to the Caribbean in November 2018 was a rally with a different organization and our experience with that organization was not a good one.

Our decision to join the Salty Dawg Homeward Bound Flotilla was based on several factors. We had never cruised any of the Caribbean west of the Virgin Islands and have never cruised Florida. We were looking for help with routes to go from St. Thomas to Florida, as well as guidance on potential anchorages from Florida up to the Chesapeake Bay. The information SDSA provided was invaluable. They provided detailed navigational guidance on trouble spots to avoid during the passage, as well as information on inlets, anchorages, marinas, and services along the US SE Coast. When I sat down to do my routing, the SDSA advisories were the primary input other than the charts. SDSA also helped negotiate and obtain permission for us to travel through Bahamian waters despite the closed borders, which saved at least 50nm off our passage.

We also wanted the safety benefits of traveling with other boats and having on-shore contacts and support in the event of any issues on the water. We were able to buddy-boat with Pelikan, a 46' monohull with similar sailing and motoring capabilities as Eclipse. We had not met Johannes and Diane from Pelikan until they introduced themselves, after recognizing our boat name as being one of the flotilla participants scheduled for the same departure date. As a German-flagged vessel with German citizens as owners, there was a lack of clarity on whether Pelikan would be able to enter the mainland US given the changing immigration policies near the time of our departure. Only through the amazing efforts of Hank George and the rest of the SDSA organization was Pelikan able to gain confidence that



they would be able to successfully enter the US upon arrival. We were very relieved to have our buddy-boat traveling with us. During the passage Eclipse and Pelikan separated a couple times as we sailed on opposite jibes and with different wind. The shoreside team at SDSA was very helpful in alerting us if there seemed to be an issue or slowdown that may separate us too far. It was nice to know someone was watching!

One of the things that I most appreciate about SDSA is the flexibility for boats to decide when the right time is for them to depart based on weather and other factors, rather than being tied to a set schedule. Due to forecasted light winds and a potential storm system at arrival for our original planned departure date of 4/19 (Sunday), we decided to delay our departure to 4/23 (Thursday). Pelikan opted to delay to 4/23 as well and we were the only boats from our fleet that chose to delay. We still received the full support of SDSA for the passage, even though we were only 2 boats (out of hundreds) traveling our part of the route at the same time. Having the flexibility to leave when we chose and still have the support of SDSA was a great benefit.

Our passage itself went well overall. We had great wind and sailing for the first 6 or 7 days. We ended up having to slow down before we got to the Old Bahama Channel so that we would not run into a storm front and strong northerly winds in the gulf stream. We had to motor the last couple days, but on a 9+ day passage, that is to be expected at some point. We arrived at Key Biscayne, FL in 9 days 4 hours and 45 minutes. As a first time Salty Dawg participant, I was extremely pleased with the organization and very thankful for the proactive approach taken to support all cruisers in these unprecedented times. Thanks SDSA, I will definitely recommend Salty Dawg to others in the future.



[See the Homeward Bound Flotilla](#)

[Photo Gallery](#)



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Pics & Fun



Wavelength Kicked Out of Brazil

by Mark Bigalke, SV Wavelength, May 3rd Flotilla

Here is my story of being on the run for over a month.

On March 14 I left St Helena with my Argentinian crew, bound for Fernando De Noronha off the coast of Brazil. During the 19 day passage, the Caribbean and Brazil closed their borders. We diverted to Jacaré Brazil where we had friends on a number of boats at a local marina. On arrival we were told we could stay on a mooring buoy for an indefinite amount of time, but could not come ashore. They offered to bring food, water and fuel. The next day, the marina manager was informed by the police that we had to leave within 72 hours. A call was made to USVI, and they stated that if I showed up with my Argentinian crew, not only would she be denied access, but I would also be turned away. Besides French Guiana, we did not know a country that would admit both of us.

My crew disembarked in Brazil, and I was forced to sail solo on the 2500 nm passage to the USVI with a temperamental autopilot and no windvane. This was my first solo passage. My crew, Paula, remains at the marina in Brazil staying in the marina office and on various boats. There are no flights to Argentina. To get there she will either sail with a friend from Europe on the month long passage, upon which a European will not be admitted to the country, or she will have to make the 5000 km journey overland to the border, spend 14 days in quarantine, then take a bus to Buenos Aires. Paula actually lives in Barcelona, but is not a permanent resident, and is therefore not allowed into Spain at this time

I have joined the Salty Dawg Homeward Bound Flotilla to seek my way back to the Chesapeake Bay where I set off in 2011. I look forward to meeting the other Dawgs in these crazy times.



Maiden Voyage for A Ten

by Ken Stiles, SV A Ten, May 12th Flotilla

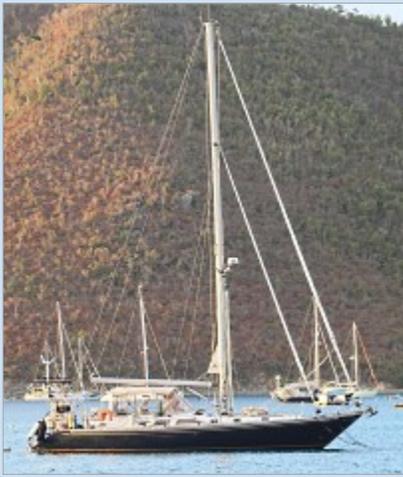
Monday April 13th, the crew of four "rookies" departed St. Thomas for the Chesapeake Bay on sailing vessel A Ten. She's a three month old Fontaine Pajot Lucia 40 catamaran on her first passage. We had been "holed up" for weeks in Maho Bay, St Johns, along with 65 other cruisers, looking for a way north that did not involve the common but closed stop over islands of the Bahamas or Bermuda. That's when we heard about the Salty Dawg Flotillas heading north on a straight shot to CONUS. After talking with several other Salty Dawgers at Maho and Crown Bay Marina, St Thomas, we decided to join the first group headed out. Chris Parker had forecast cold fronts taking aim at the mid Atlantic coastline every 24-48 hours, with small windows to cross the Gulf Stream and find safe haven. 10 days (and a crazy epic adventure) later, we made landfall in Beaufort NC on April 23rd.



The voyage was the first for me as a skipper with only 2 years sailing experience and one passage as crew from Newburyport MA to Bermuda to St Thomas. Crewing the trip proved quite difficult as the COVID crisis was in full swing and caused numerous travel and health related concerns. In the midst of this, a dream team formed (also the first passage for my 3 crew members): my niece Megan who had only sailed two weeks in the VI with me before we left - but a true "natural", Louise who has many years crewing on big cats and is an incredibly competent sailor and Steve who was my "go to" with decades of skippering big sailboats around the VIs and off the California coast.

Just off the container ship from La Rochelle in January, my sons, various friends and I outfitted A Ten and put her through sea trials and shake downs between the VIs. But this was nothing compared to the trials she would face on the high seas enroute to CONUS! Upon arrival in Boston, A Ten will enter the SailTime program in May to be enjoyed by six other members while cruising Boston Harbor and the New England coastline for the summer season. But there were many miles and hurdles to get the boat there!





All in all, it was the ultimate shakedown cruise: three cold fronts, thunderstorms, gales, two times up the mast to repair a broken halyard, a full day of 30-45g60 winds and 12' seas, a busted boom topping lift, a few days of light winds and some real nail biters, but we made it! We saved fuel for the final push, motored the last two days with winds on nose and only a slight push from the GS as we mostly traversed it. We wanted to make landfall in the Chesapeake but weather precluded that and we diverted to Beaufort NC.

Being at the leading edge of the 200+ boat SDSA flotilla headed for CONUS did not give us much in the way of "hindsight". But thanks to Chris Parker's accurate forecasting and routing suggestions, along with the years of experience from the Salty Dawg crew, we were made aware, given assistance and were able to deal with the many weather and logistical issues. Even little things were challenging: like finding a marina in your divert port that's open!



Our fuel, water and provisions held strong. We ate excellent meals with fresh salads for the first five days before pairing down to longer term storage stuffs. We used 65 of 150 gallons of water (no water maker). We burned 68 out of 115 gallons of diesel (no wind or solar, so had to use generator or engine to charge batteries).

In Beaufort, we took two days for repairs, fuel, provisions, laundry, long hot showers, a crew swap and some real fine southern hospitality from Tony and Clark at Homer Smith's Marina . On April 25th we headed out for a leap frog hop up the coast to Boston, ducking in as needed to avoid bad weather. As it turned out, we used the coastline as shelter from the NNW winds (thanks CP and Forrest!) and we made the 5 day trip to Boston with only a short fuel stop in New Bedford MA.

As for the next passage, a few things I'd do the same and some I'd do differently. Salty Dawg and Chris Parker are on my list of required resources. Obviously, a competent crew and a sound, properly outfitted vessel are mandatory. The only comms we had were a Garmin, InReach and a rented Sat phone. No SSB, and the crew member with the iridium Go had to cancel so we missed that connectivity. Although adequate, the InReach limitation of 160 characters was cumbersome in this day of high speed data. Next trip we will have an Iridium Go or equivalent. Thanks SDSA!!

Little Martha's Big Adventure

by Emilie Cook , SV Little Martha, May 3rd Flotilla

If you had asked us six months ago whether we would be willing to undertake a long passage this season, the answer would have been a resounding, "no." To be fair, you would be hard pressed to find two sailors who knew less about sailing than my husband, Tommy, and I did when we cast off the lines on November 14, 2019, and backed Little Martha, our 1987 Island Packet 31, from her slip in Jekyll Island, Georgia.



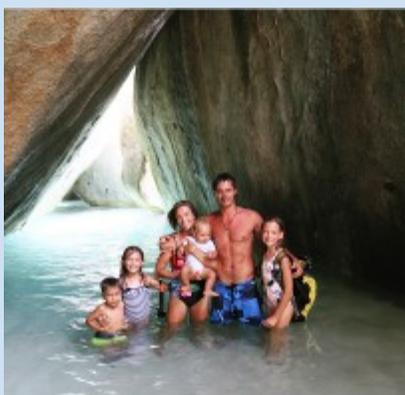
Our travel plans? Try to make it at least as far as the Exumas before either turning the boat around, or continuing on into the Caribbean. As we shoved off from the docks, we were acutely aware that our success this season was entirely contingent on us not sinking the boat, and not killing ourselves, or each other. There were no givens here.

Fast forward five months, and much to our surprise we had made it all the way to the USVIs. All without sinking the boat, and with the two of us still mostly intact. But by early April, the global pandemic had caught up to us, and it looked less and less likely we would be able to make it to Grenada in time to fly home by our June 1st deadline. Of all the scenarios we planned for in preparing for this trip, a global pandemic just wasn't one of them.

That's when we found out about the Salty Dawg Homeward Bound Flotilla. The Flotilla sounded like a great option, but we had a couple of concerns. First, we had no offshore communication, nor did we have the fuel capacity to make the trip comfortably. We were also concerned because our 31ft boat was much smaller than other registered vessels.

Tommy reached out to Salty Dawg organizers about our concerns, and almost immediately they began the arduous task of helping us prepare for the trip. With their assistance, we contacted OCENS and ordered an IridiumGo. Organizers then set us up on Chris Parker's weather routing list, registered us for





event tracking, helped us choose the path best suited for us, and connected us to vessels with similar float plans. As we waited for a good weather window, we replaced our blocks, inspected our sheets, and purchased additional jerry cans, among other things.



Finally, on May 5th, we departed St. Thomas bound for Lake Worth, Florida. We planned to take the Old Bahama Channel route, and we knew we had at least five days of great conditions ahead of us. We were excited about the trip, and feeling good about the weather.

As promised, the first several days of our trek home were beautiful. On day three, however, we received notice from Chris Parker that we should stop in Great Inagua for a day or two to wait out a weather system. While we were disappointed about stopping, we were incredibly thankful to not be unknowingly sailing into the storm.

We dropped anchor on the south side of Great Inagua around 3:00pm on Saturday, May 9th. On Tuesday, we received the green light from Chris Parker to leave Great Inagua and proceed to the Old Bahama Channel. Tuesday night into Wednesday morning, the wind was just aft of the beam at 15 knots. We were averaging 6.5 knots and enjoying beautiful sailing!

At 7am on Wednesday, we heard SV Isabella call out on Channel 16 to see whether any other Salty Dawg vessels were within range. We responded, introduced ourselves and agreed to stay in touch. Unfortunately, by midday Wednesday, the system we were attempting to avoid had not lifted as forecasted and conditions were set to deteriorate. In true Salty Dawg fashion, SV Isabella graciously offered to relay radar information as well as details of Chris Parker's evening SSB discussion.

As soon as the sun went down (why is always at night?), things got ugly. Around 8pm we were hit by a squall. We were furling in the little bit of jib we had out when the wind abruptly shifted and backwinded our double reefed main. The preventer stopped a violent jibe, but the auto pilot became overpowered, and Little Martha started taking the growing seas directly on her beam. Tommy jumped to the helm, grabbed the wheel, and attempted to turn the boat into the wind to drop the main. As we started our turn, we heard our flexible solar panels rip from their mounts above the helm. I now stood frozen in the sheeting rain as our solar panels flapped violently overhead in 45 knot winds.

Tommy called for me to take the helm, as he headed forward. Within minutes, we had taken in all our sail. I scrambled below and radioed SV Isabella and asked if they could see the squall on their radar. They confirmed we were in the middle of a cell and helped direct us out of its path. The high winds and sheeting rain continued on and off for most of the night and I don't think I have ever been as happy to see the sun rise as I was on Thursday morning.

Unfortunately, whatever relief we felt in making it through the night quickly faded when we downloaded Chris Parker's morning forecast: "Vessels departing (or underway) Old Bahama Chnl to FL: It's going to be miserable. . For vessels W of 76W . .I'm not sure we have any good options." We were west of 76W.

Tommy sent off an Email to the Salty Dawg Shoreside Coordinator. We outlined our position and our questions. We soon received a response from Russ Owen with the Salty Dawg Emergency Response Team. He addressed each of our questions, and ultimately advised that we slow the boat to maintain minimal headway. It would be hard to overemphasize how much we appreciated Russ Owen, and everyone else on the Salty Dawg team in that moment. Not enough can be said about the comfort it brings just knowing you aren't alone out there in the elements.

Fortunately, while we saw our fair share of bad weather over the next couple of days, we never experienced another squall like we had Wednesday night. We slowed the boat as much as we could, and managed to stay southwest of the worst of the storms.

By Saturday, May 16th, the weather had calmed, and we rounded Double Shot Cays headed for Florida. Just before sunset we had the Miami skyline in our sights. Saturday night brought more squalls, which we dodged with the help of another Salty Dawg vessel, SV Aladdin. By Sunday, we were moving along at such a good clip we decided to bypass Lake Worth, Florida and continue on to Fort Pierce. Finally, around 2pm on Monday, May 18th, thirteen days after we left St. Thomas, we arrived in Fort Pierce.



The sense of pride we felt as we stepped off the boat was incredible, second only to the overwhelming feeling of gratitude we had for all those who helped us along the way. I'm not sure you will find a better group of sailors than the SDSA, and we can't thank you all enough for your assistance and support. Can't wait to see you all again next season!





Carnival, Martinique—A Celebration

by Bob Osborn, SDSA Rally Management Team, SV Pandora

So much has changed in the last few months as the Covid-19 pandemic swept around the world. It seems like just yesterday when Brenda and I, aboard Pandora, were in Fort de France, Martinique for Carnival and life was easy going in the islands.

Over the last few seasons, we had gotten to know many in the close-knit Salty Dawg community. This season, we spent much of the winter buddy-boating from island to island, before Covid-19 began to take its toll in the islands. During Carnival, some eight member boats converged on Fort de France to enjoy the festivities, both ashore and aboard our boats for sundowners and evenings together. We all made sure that we arrived a few days before the official start in order to secure a good spot to anchor.

Carnival Martinique is one of the best carnival celebrations in the Caribbean. Held each February, this multi-day event brings out just about everyone from the island as well as visitors from all over the world, culminating for a final day of revelry on the Christian holiday, Ash Wednesday.

Visiting Fort de France offers a rare opportunity to anchor in a spacious anchorage, with good holding in 10-25'. You will find yourself flanked by a modern bustling city on one side and the beautifully restored 17th century, Fort Saint Louis on the other. This juxtaposition of the historic and modern offers a unique taste of France, and it's a great place to enjoy food that is a fusion of French and native Caribbean.



Preparation for the festivities begins months prior as participants organize elaborate parade themes and costumes, with many performers participating each day of the celebration with yet another amazing costume. Celebrations occur in many villages throughout the island but the largest happens in the capital city, Fort de France. Just about every business on the island closes down for the duration of the festivities with thousands descending on the city to join in the fun.

The action heats up on "Fat Sunday" the official first day of Carnival, featuring daytime parades with a wide range of costumed characters. One of the more memorable events is the parade of revelers marching through the streets, coated from head to toe in coal tar and cane syrup. "Fat Monday" brings "Mock Weddings," with men dressed as pregnant brides, and women serving as reluctant bridegrooms. It seems that every man on the island, young and old, welcomes the opportunity to cross dress. Mardi Gras (Tuesday), "Red Devils Day," is all about the kids, with glorious processions featuring hundreds of children dressed in brilliant red costumes, carrying tridents and wearing fright masks.

Ash Wednesday, the "Day of the She-Devils" is the climax of the celebration, with thousands of "mourners" gathering to mark the end of Carnival and the symbolic death of King Carnival, known as Vaval. Only two colors are worn – black and white. "She-Devils," their faces smeared with pale ash or white flour, wear embroidered waist petticoats and blouses, a black skirt and headscarf made with a damask white table napkin. In spite of enormous crowds, we felt perfectly safe during the celebrations with the very enthusiastic but well-behaved crowds. And, all of this kept in check with a minimum police presence. While Covid-19 was raging in China and just beginning to show up elsewhere, our group fortunately dodged infection and only a handful of cases ultimately counted on the island. Martinique, like the other islands in the eastern Caribbean took the looming threat of infection very seriously, and with aggressive action were able to avoid major outbreaks. Fortunately, the migration of the virus around the world was just getting started during the time of the festival so we were spared. I expect that things would have turned out very differently had the events been only a few weeks later.



While the shape of the next cruising season is still very much up in the air, you should put Martinique Carnival on your cruising "Bucket List." You will not be disappointed.



Coming Events

Rallies

[The Salty Dawg Rally to Maine](#)

Our Rally to Maine departs from two locations: the Chesapeake Bay on **July 10**, gathering in Hampton on July 8, or from Dutch Harbor, RI gathering July 13 with a planned departure on July 15. It will be a terrific Downeast Adventure! Please check our website regularly for updates on this Rally.



[The Salty Dawg Fall Rally to the Caribbean](#)

Pre-departure events will begin on **October 26** in Hampton, VA and departure is scheduled for Nov. 2. Choose your destination – Antigua or the Abacos in the Bahamas. The Fall Rally opens the door to new friends and experiences while cruising the Caribbean. Please check our website regularly for updates on this Rally.



Details will be forthcoming on how we plan to safely conduct these activities during this period of COVID-19

Rendezvous & Seminar

2020 Rendezvous

We normally schedule a series of Rendezvous events for sailors to get together through the year. With the issue of COVID-19 and difficulty in holding events with a large group of people, we are looking at some options and will post that as soon as we can on our website. Please check our [website](#) regularly.

The Tale End

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We invite you to join our organization and partake in the camaraderie and friendship shared among our family of sailors. We are a non-profit charitable and educational association that conducts rallies, rendezvous, seminars and charitable events for fellow cruisers and communities.



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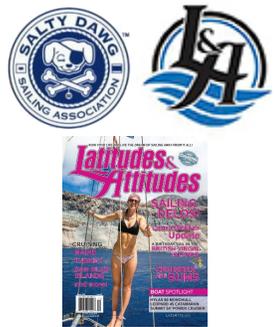


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Homeward Bound Flotilla

See Great Pics, Read Great Feedback

We are proud to share the wonderful [Feedback](#) and [Pics](#) from our Homeward Bound Flotilla. To submit more pics, please [Send Here](#).

Special Thanks to Homeward Bound Flotilla Participants

In closing, we desire to give thanks to everyone that made our Homeward Bound Flotilla a success!

Thank you to the captains and crew who made this possible. It was our pleasure to be of assistance and we are now family. Many thanks to the numerous islands, marinas and service providers who supported our vessels, and especially the USVI for providing sanctuary to the numerous boats in our fleet who awaited departure. Thank you Bahamas for providing right of innocent passage and refueling. Warmest thanks to Chris Parker who guides us to safety with his weather service.

And Greatest Thanks to our amazing team of Salty Dawg volunteers who supported this historic event:

Sheldon Stuchell, Tim Metcalf, Rick Palm, Jo Ella Barnes, Mindy Piuk, Dorothy Mammen, Lydia Strickland, Howard Cheetham, Ros Cheetham, Ken Gelao, Joan Conover, Brian Murray, Russ Owen, Linda Knowles, Bennett Kashdan, Lynn Hoenke, Dave McKay, Bob Osborn, Kathy Brandel, Nancy Magnine, Tatja Hopman, Barb Theisen and Hank George.

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