

Shelduck's Cruise to America: Cascais to Chesapeake 2013-2014

Neil Hegarty

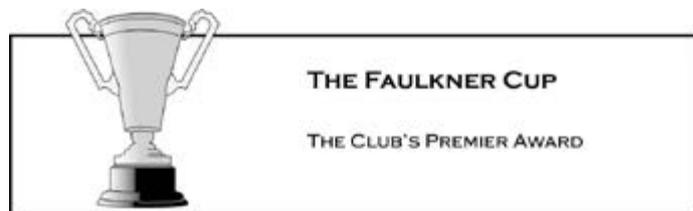
Anne Kenny and I recently enjoyed significant birthdays. To celebrate in a memorable way I invited Anne to cross the North Atlantic and cruise America. Because of our age, our families were not happy for us to do this alone, so I joined the Atlantic Rally for Cruisers 2013 (The ARC). *Shelduck* was laid up ashore at Belem, Lisbon in November 2012 to be prepared. She is a Dufour 34 built in La Rochelle in 2003 fitted with a standard rig and a deep racing lead keel which makes her quite stiff.

Our first task on a long list was to replace all standing and running rigging. While the mast was down, fold away steps were fitted to it and also an active radar reflector. We also fitted a roller reefing unit on the detachable inner forestay with an anti twist high tension halyard. This would allow us to roll away or reef sails from the cockpit and still be able to move the forestay out of the way when we want to tack the full genoa upwind. I put the headsail spinlock cleats on the mast to free up cockpit spinlocks for a second spinnaker pole. A second genoa was acquired which could be set with the existing one together on the twin foil. I planned to do most of the fresh downwind sailing with these two sails set on two poles and no mainsail. We also have a spinnaker for light wind. The next issue was the provision of energy and I considered a diesel generator, the engine, a wind generator, solar panels and a fuel cell as possible sources. I decided that the most suitable solution for a boat of *Shelduck's* size was a fuel cell and so fitted an Efoy Comfort 140. It would keep the batteries topped up without noise. Water makers can be troublesome and expensive so I decided to add a 100 litre flexible tank to the existing system and to carry one hundred litres on deck. All safety equipment was checked and serviced and a discharge plate fitted in case of a lightning strike. Among the final items were charts, courtesy flags and a satellite phone.

We flew from Cork to Cascais on 6th October and spent two nights in a hotel in Belem so that we could inspect *Shelduck's* hull, including her new folding propeller,



Anne and Neil at the ARC Skippers Dinner, Las Palmas

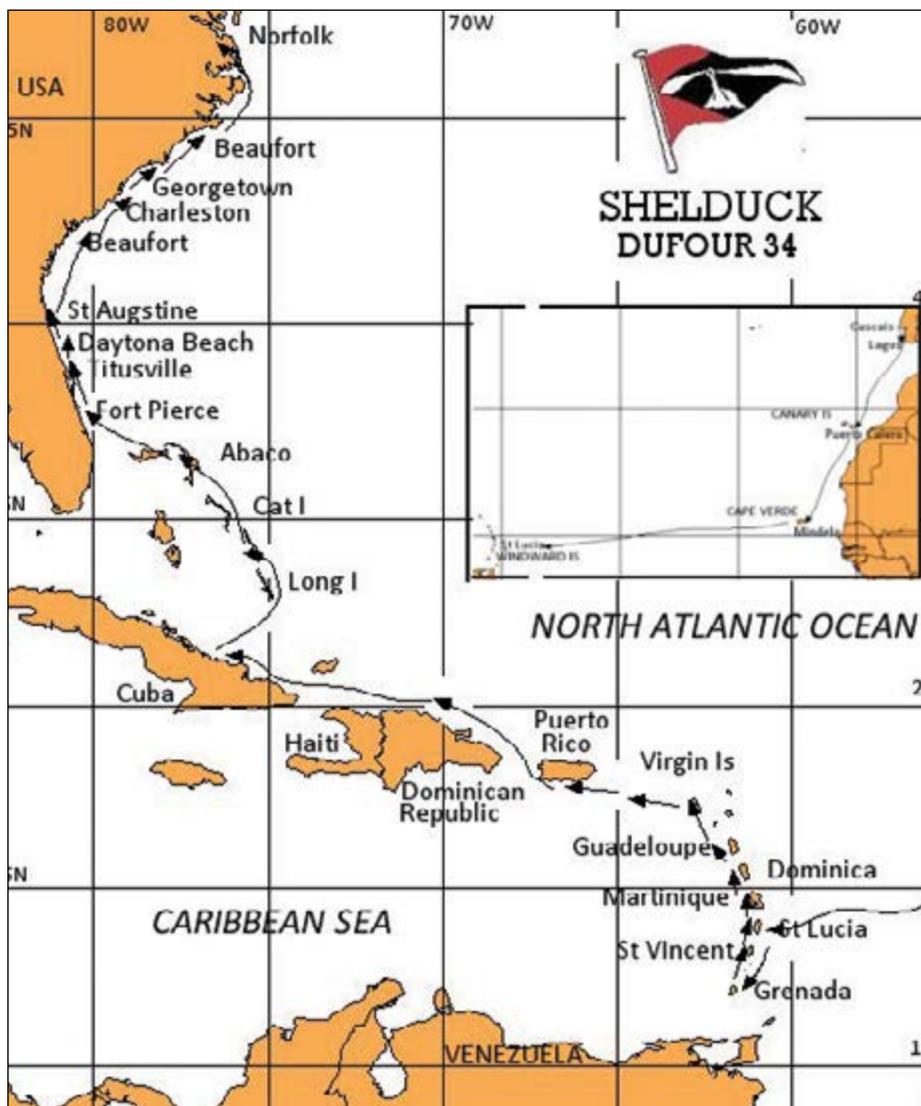


prior to launch. We joined her afloat on the 9th for what was to be almost eight months aboard and sailed immediately from Belem to nearby Cascais. Our crew for the passage to Las Palmas in the Canary Islands was Len Curtain ICC and Peter Clark, Howth Yacht Club. Both were a great help to us in the final preparation of *Shelduck* for the Atlantic crossing. We left Cascais on the 24th, starting with easy passages to overnight in Sesimbra and Sines before rounding Cape St. Vincent for Lagos where the crew spent three days cutting, fixing and cleaning before departing on the afternoon of the 31st for the passage to Lanzarote. This crossing was our first opportunity to sail with the new downwind twin-headsail rig. *Shelduck* averaged 140 miles a day while the wind held and we arrived into Puerto Calero on 4th November. We rested for a day and then headed out for Las Palmas and arrived having completed twelve days cruising while using just one five litre tank of methanol for the fuel cell. Peter left for a walking holiday with friends on Tenerife and Len departed to return home while Anne and I enjoyed a fantastic evening, said to be the best ARC Welcome Party in the twenty seven year history of the event. This party doubled as the welcome to the ARC 2013 fleet and a farewell to the ARC PLUS group of fifty yachts who are setting off one week ahead of the rest of us so that they could have a stop off at the Cape Verde Islands.

Las Palmas:

Our crew for the Atlantic crossing was Gabby Perry and Brendan McGarvey, members of Baltimore Sailing Club. On 9th November Gabby flew in to join us and help with preparations. We had now officially registered and put up our number. It was attached on the starboard quarter as we were in the 'Cruising Division' whilst those who racing had theirs to port. Each evening we attended the ARC Sundowner, which is a good place to meet other participants. On Tuesday 12th, Bojan, a Dutchman of the ARC Team, called in to do our Safety Inspection. We passed with the caveat that food and water rations, flares and two thermal insulating blankets were added to the Grab Bag. Gabby spent a day in a series of seminars ranging from managing emergencies (loss of rudder/rig/power), rigging check, weather, to provisioning food and drink for three weeks at sea. Anne and I visited the City Market and ordered meat which will be deep-frozen to -18°C and delivered to the boat the day before we sail. We have no freezer but deep-frozen meat in the bottom of the fridge will keep cold enough to prevent our food from spoiling for the first two weeks. We would be down to tinned and dried food during the final week. Brendan arrived and then joined us at the Skippers' Dinner. He and I spent the next day at the ARC seminars.

I was given the honour of carrying the Irish Flag at the opening ceremony. We paraded around the port with the flags of each country participating. At least thirty different countries were represented. There were over two hundred



yachts and over five hundred crew there, with the remainder entered to arrive the next week. There were speeches from various Canarian dignitaries and Leo the Port Authority and Cultural Representative from St Lucia, provided us with a tantalising insight into the festivities and activities we could expect when we arrived at St. Lucia. On the next day Brendan set up Anne's 'SPOT' GPS locator device and sent out the first message to our friends and family. Brendan also set up the laptop to accept the Iridium Satellite Phone. After five days off wind sailing from Portugal we had worn the ends of our genoa sheets so I fitted blocks to the ends of the spinnaker poles. Anne, with help from Gabby, had been working hard planning our menus and then listing out how much we needed to buy. We had our in-depth rigging check from 'Jerry the Rigger' and were more than surprised to find that there was one split pin missing at the base of the forestay. The 23rd of November would arrive quickly and we were almost ready. To our delight Anne's son Ian and grandson Lucas flew in to see us off. We ate out in Las Palmas and went to bed in anticipation of the morning and setting off.

Atlantic Crossing East:

While motoring to the start we had a great send off from hundreds of people lining the walls of the harbour. The boat marking the line and controlling the start was a Spanish Naval Patrol vessel. *Shelduck* had fresh winds at the line and I had to continue to hand steer for a while as a

connection had become dislodged behind the autopilot control. She was doing seven knots with the No.4 jib and two reefs in the main. For much of the night we had breaking waves at the stern. We all admired the beautiful stars and quite a few meteors. Four days out and we were in 'cruising mode' and had taken one of the most easterly routes south to avoid a low further west. We were only one hundred miles from the African coast. We may have sailed an extra thirty to fifty miles to avoid the low, but at least it meant we stayed dry. There were amazing thunder storms to be seen to the west, especially in darkness. We were able to do some motor sailing through the night but mostly motored in force 1 directly on the nose. The wind freed at sunrise and followed the sun round to be on the nose again at dark. We topped up the diesel from the cans on deck, forty litres and she used 1.6 litres per hour at 2,000 rpm. When the moon rose last night it was very tropical looking, like a great crescent on its back and much bigger than you would expect, blush pink to start with and gradually turning to gentle yellow as it rose. We had a small dark white rumped bird following us for the past two days which appeared and disappeared through the day and we also saw a large mixed pod of dolphins and porpoises.

On Monday 2nd December we made a lightening stop for fuel at Mindelo Marina, Cape Verde. The wind had been incredibly light and variable in the last few days so *Shelduck* had to motor. We were just berthed when I heard from an approaching inflatable "Hello Mr Hegarty". Who was it but Dave Hennessy with whom, in my previous yacht the *Impala 'Beagle'*, I had had many a joust in the Royal Cork Yacht Club, some years back, and whom Anne and I last saw, when Dave entertained us with music and song in a pub on the Isle de Croix during the ICC Brittany Cruise in 2011. Dave was very helpful, first advising us not to check into the country as it was not necessary if we were not staying overnight and advised that I pay the marina fee, which I did. He also kindly took me in his inflatable onto a beach next to a fuel station where I purchased a replacement drum of gas.

On Sunday 8th December the wind was still light but *Shelduck* managed one hundred and twenty miles in twenty four hours. Anne and I kept one watch, Brendan and Gabby the other. I had the day split up into five watches. Two four hour watches from midnight followed by two six hour watches and finally a four hour watch from 20.00 to midnight. Dinner was cooked for all by the 14.00-20.00 watch. Next day *Shelduck* motored in a flat limp calm. The ocean surface had a slick oily look and the waves were just small humps and hollows. There was a colourful sunset of strong and various pinks and blues created in the combination of sky, sea and clouds approaching from the east.

Atlantic Crossing West:

On Tuesday December 10th the wind arrived at last and *Shelduck* sailed one hundred and sixty miles in twenty four hours; we'd been reaching steadily since. That morning we were half way from Cape Verde to St Lucia, Brendan and Gabby were on watch and Gabby prepared and served a five course dinner. To start we had habas fritas to nibble followed by a plate of cured Spanish meats to share and Ovedio cheese; then a dish of spicy chorizo risotto accompanied by boiled egg wedges and the last of the fresh tomatoes marinated in salt, sugar, pepper and thyme. Dessert was served in plastic champagne flutes and consisted of jewelled pomegranate seeds marinated in mango juice with a sprinkle of sugar and topped with a pair of medjool dates. Finally there was a selection of individually wrapped Spanish sweet biscuits in a variety of flavours.

We were now crossing a very shallow part of the Atlantic. There were huge mountain ranges beneath us, taller than Mount Everest, in an area called Researcher Ridge. We were well northwest of the Vema Fracture Zone, being carried by the North Equatorial Current as well as being pushed along by the Trade and non-Trade winds. The waves were enormous, maybe because we were travelling over an area which is only 550 metres deep rather than the usual 3000-5500 metres. The seas made life particularly difficult below decks. It was almost impossible to move around without using both hands. Saturday 14th: the wind had been blowing hard since Wednesday, with waves 5 to 6 metres. Many days had been overcast. The squalls were easy enough to see coming, dark shapes in the sky, and when they hit the wind usually increased to force 7 and backed 30 degrees. A few times it backed 50 degrees and increased to gale force. During one of these *Shelduck* lay down and water came over the cockpit coaming, engulfing me up to my armpits.

At about midday, as I was below and was moving to the chart table to download the weather forecast. I was caught off balance in a broach and was thrown across the boat and landed just to the left of my spine on the bar protecting the cooker. I decided I should not move from the floor for an hour and then arranged with the crew to pull me onto a blanket and under the table to protect me from any flying object. After a further hour I reported movement in all body parts and I had only superficial cuts and some bruising but was very sore. I was able to transfer to the bunk above from the floor and stayed there till midday next day when I returned to the watch system. During my time in the bunk I altered the watch times to 2 hours on and 4 hours off with just one person on deck-watch at a time. At midday today watches were changed to 4 hours on and 4 hours off in pairs. No long 6

hour watches during the day for now. The passage from Las Palmas to Rodney Bay was just over 3000 miles. Last night while we were on watch there was a squall of force 9 which flattened *Shelduck* on the starboard side and washed away the bottom supports of our official number. Both watches were soaked by breaking waves over the stern filling the cockpit.

The crew dropped the poles and rolled up the genoas five miles from the finish in a force 6 and our speed was 5 knots without sail. We then set the No.4 on the inner forestay and speed increased to over 7 knots and set the main when we gained some shelter from the land. We finished in Rodney Bay at 15.08.59 GMT, 11.08.59 local St. Lucia time. I had decided not to change time as we travelled west which resulted in our dinner time going from dark to light. *Shelduck* sailed 3026 miles from Las Palmas to Rodney Bay in almost twenty three days at an average speed of 5.49 knots.

Christmas in Grenada:

Gabby and Brendan returned home on December 22nd and my son John arrived to cruise with us over Christmas. *Shelduck* departed Rodney Bay for a passage to St. Georges Grenada and arrived at Port Louis Marina on Christmas Eve. There are excellent facilities including a beach where John and I had our first ever Christmas Day swim. Anne had often before gone swimming on Christmas Day. We had a traditional three course Christmas dinner aboard.



***Shelduck* at ARC finish, St.Lucia**

Shelduck was three days at St. Georges, where we visited the town and enjoyed an afternoon at the huge Grand Anse beach. On Sunday 29th December we rounded Prickley Point and sailed past Mount Hartman Bay and Clarkes Court Bay into Phare Bleu Bay. Access is narrow between two breaking reefs but worth the effort. The entrance is marked and we are beginning to get used to leaving red to starboard and green to port on the way in as is the custom here. We are now as far south as we plan to go, just seventy five miles north of Venezuela.

Kevin Dwyer ICC sent us the phone number of Diana which is so often



ARC crew at finish, Rodney Bay, St. Lucia.

Yohanan nee Thompson, originally from Cork, who has lived in St. Georges for twenty eight years and when we contacted her she immediately invited us up to her colonial house overlooking the harbour. It was Donal McClement ICC who suggested I go south from St. Lucia after the ARC. We are very pleased we did even though there has been much rain and with the wind forecast to be north east I fear a little windward work on the way back north having sailed 4000 miles off it from Cascais. On Tuesday 31st we were up at 06.00 for a fifty mile passage to Clifton at Union Island. As *Shelduck* rounded Point Saline I found she could not lay Clifton and therefore would not make the checking-in time there so we decided to stay in Grenada, the country, and head for Tyrrel Bay, Carriacou. As we got near we noticed it was packed with yachts so we pressed on to Hillsborough Bay which we had almost to ourselves. We swam off the boat and had a quiet New Year's Eve enjoying the pictures and some fun from the Hegarty family party in Baltimore by telephone.

On New Year's Day *Shelduck* weighed anchor at 11.00, arrived at Clifton at 13.30 and got a space on the pontoon at Anchorage Yacht Club. John was immediately involved in assisting a Swedish family whose chartered yacht had dragged from the weather side of the pontoon onto their son's yacht on the pontoon in a force 7 squall. Next day we walked the Main Street, had a light lunch and went swimming. The scale of this street and its buildings was my vision of the Caribbean. There we met so many nice people, selling without pressure on us to buy. There were no eggs available in Grenada or in the small supermarket in Clifton but we were able to buy them here from a small seller on the street. Union Island attracts you in with its beauty from the sea. The Yacht Club never really refused anyone on the pontoon so the yachts were like sardines in a tin.

Dream Comes True:

I had always dreamed of anchoring at Tobago Cays

featured in yachting magazines and cruising books. We had planned to be there on New Year's Eve but our enjoyment of other places had us a little behind schedule. This was the day for the dream to come true so we left Clifton at 10.45, having had to wait for a sixty five foot Oyster alongside to go out first, and entered Tobago Cays at noon. *Shelduck* was in a national park so I decided to take up one of the moorings provided and supervised by park rangers. We searched south of Baradel but all were occupied. After manoeuvring between tightly packed boats for thirty minutes we found a beautiful position as the most northerly yacht in the cut between Petit Rameau and Petit Bateau. With no other boat ahead of us we had an unrestricted view north east over Horseshoe Reef to the Atlantic. As we were securing *Shelduck* to the mooring we had a visit from Clem, a young business man, who suggested we go ashore to Petit

Bateau for a "Lobster dinner". We heard from an American couple in Grenada that they had one delivered aboard on Christmas Day so we asked Clem to deliver for the three of us at 17.00 on the following day. The rest of this day was spent swimming and snorkelling. We caught sight of a turtle in the water. The next day was spent swimming and snorkelling and we also had two checks from Clem to see if we were still on for the lobster dinner. At 17.00, on the dot, he arrived with his son delivering the feast which turned out to be what we would call Crayfish, four in all between the three of us. He also served fried rice, salad, vegetables and plantain. We all agreed it was the best takeaway we ever had. Clem lives with his family on Union Island and comes out each day by boat to his barbecue business on the tiny island of Petit Bateau.

On January 5th *Shelduck* reluctantly departed Tobago Cays for the short passage to Admiralty Bay, Bequia. The wind was blowing force 4 with gusts of force 5. We had two reefs in the main and with the dinghy on the foredeck we had no possibility of setting the No.4. We set up the genoa with two sheets on the port side coming to two separate leads so that we could reef in and out moving from one sheet to the other. We arrived in Admiralty Bay without incident and anchored. The bay was full of yachts. I hailed a water taxi who delivered me to the Customs and Immigration in Port Elizabeth where I checked out of St Vincent and the Grenadines. I was surprised to be told we had to leave the country in twenty four hours as our experience to date in other countries was forty eight hours. We were awake at 05.00 for the sixty mile passage to Marigot Bay and immediately set the main, weighed anchor at 05.50 and were first out of Admiralty Bay. Wind was easterly force 4 so we made very good time, though the seas between St. Vincent and St. Lucia were sometimes three metres high. *Shelduck* arrived there well before darkness. We spent the next two days on the beach swimming and sometimes staying in the sea during heavy showers. John had been

with us for eighteen days and cruised three hundred and five miles with us. It was great for Anne and I to have his company over Christmas.

Cat Land:

11th January was *Shelduck's* first passage on the wind since leaving Cascais on the 24th of October and also the first time since that date that Anne and I were alone together sailing *Shelduck*. It was a long and then a short tack of thirty five miles from Marigot Bay to Marin, Martinique and as we entered the narrow channel I had to put the helm hard over to avoid a practising Yole, which is a local racing boat that requires all hands to be outboard, balancing on long poles. We anchored for the night off the beach and next morning were asked to move because *Shelduck* was obstructing the route from the beach for the Yole fleet to their racing area outside the harbour mouth. During the afternoon race we went to the fuel berth and filled with diesel and water and as racing was over we now had plenty of room to anchor. The huge marina is full of catamarans for charter and also people living permanently aboard so there is little room for visitors. On Tuesday the 14th we breakfasted on the last of the eggs from Union Island and then went by dinghy into the marina. I checked into Martinique Customs and Immigration which you can do yourself on computer and booked a marina berth. On returning to *Shelduck* we stowed the dinghy on deck and as we were raising the anchor, with a catamaran almost on top of it, we tripped it too soon, dragged and were lucky to avoid two other yachts nearby. We noticed that the French anchor very close together. We got away and safely into a berth and later that day walked to a ship chandler to have the hand held radio serviced. Friday the 17th was a relaxing morning and in the afternoon we went to the Capitainerie to hire a taxi to Carrefour for provisions to be told they would collect and return us to the marina, a great service.

Chikungunya Virus:

Diana Yohannan e-mailed me an article from the newspaper "Caribbean 300" about the arrival from South

America of the Chikungunya Virus to St. Martin and Dominica. We read that it was discovered first in Dominica at a small fishing village called Good Hope. The virus, spread by mosquitoes, can be a danger to the life of older people. This is the first time it had been seen in the Caribbean.

Shelduck enjoyed a dead run out of Marin and then a beautiful reach in the shelter of Martinique. We anchored near the beach in St. Pierre for the night. Space to anchor is a little restricted because of the water's depth and a large area where sunken ships are preserved. Mount Pelee, above the town, was covered in cloud. This mountain erupted in 1658 and again in May 1902 when 30,000 people died. Many ships caught fire in the bay and sank. Just one managed to get away and they are now a preserved archaeological site. That evening Anne's son Ian sent her a text about a yachting couple being attacked and stabbed in St. Lucia, at Vieux Fort, and the man died. I had asked the St. Lucian Minister of Tourism, whom we met at the skippers dinner in Grand Canaria, about safety in Marigot Bay, a place you would expect to be safe. I had read in the yachting press about a stabbing and death there earlier on an anchored yacht. His answer was "I can't say it does not happen." Anne and I were taking good care in always anchoring near other boats and always lifting the dinghy and locking *Shelduck* up at night.

I had imagined the wind strength we could expect in the Caribbean would be force 4-5. Our experience to date is force 5-6. We weighed anchor in St. Pierre at 08.00. *Shelduck* experienced an acceleration of wind as she approached the north of Martinique, where it blew force 6 for about two hours of sailing and later a steady force 5 for the twenty miles of open water to the shelter of Dominica. When in Marin I had checked my courtesy flags and noticed I had none for Dominica and so purchased one. Later I remembered it was missing because I had decided back in Cork not to go there because of one pilot's warning of thefts from boats and unruly behaviour among some of the young. However I read in a recent pilot that things have improved in that the Indian River Guides with other businesses

formed the Portsmouth Association of Yacht Security (PAYS). They run regular patrols at night in the anchorage area and since they have been active there have been no problems in Prince Rupert Bay. Sailing up the coast I first picked Salisbury as a place to anchor for the night but when we reached the bay found that it was very exposed in the strong wind blowing. *Shelduck* pressed on to Prince Rupert Bay and as she approached the harbour at the end of a fifty five mile passage we were met by Eric Spaghetti, one of the ten PAYS members who share the work of helping approaching yachts. Seeing our ensign he immediately knew we were from Ireland and welcomed us to Dominica. He offered to assist us find a place to anchor but because of the strong wind still blowing Anne asked him for a mooring which he helped us tie to. The cost of the mooring was the equivalent of seven euro for the night. Not only will



Yole, Cat Land

PAYS provide security but they maintain the dinghy dock, will take your laundry for cleaning, act as water taxis and help you get fruit, bread and ice. Eric asked us if we would like to take the Indian River trip, which is PAYS main business, and we were sad to tell him that we had decided to leave early in the morning.

At our age we were nervous of a dangerous mosquito bite in the river giving us the Chikungunya virus. Anne and I were sorry to have missed Dominica. *Shelduck* weighed anchor in Prince Rupert Bay at dawn and headed for Iles Des Saintes. We could see the islands in the early morning haze even though they were twenty miles away. *Shelduck* got another hammering in strong winds and breaking seas and we were both very wet as we entered the shelter of the Isles. Not a problem in the Caribbean as you dry off and heat up so quickly. We headed for Bourg des Saintes where moorings are provided and picked one up. They are well laid out and maintained with plenty of room to swing. The Isles consist of four islands, two small and two larger with a few rocky outcrops and all the islands have anchoring places and some wonderful beaches. On the passage across from Dominica we saw two "sailing" cruise liners one with five masts and one with four. The four masted one, *Star Clipper of Valetta*, came into the harbour after us and anchored nearby. We had last seen her in the Baltic when cruising *Tam O'Shanter* there in 2012.

Obstacle Course:

Next morning Anne had a swim off *Shelduck* as I prepared for an overnight passage. I had decided that after three weeks of force 5-6 winds and big seas ahead and on the beam that we would put the wind and seas on *Shelduck's* aft quarter, miss a hard passage to Antigua, and head for Nevis and St. Kitts. I tried to get information about the state of the volcano at Montserrat but no one could be sure that we would not get ash on deck if we took the direct westerly course to Basseterre, so I decided to sail along the east coast of Montserrat and round the north of the island taking the obstacle course. *Shelduck* left the mooring at Terre-de-Haut at 13.30 and had a run to the south west corner of Guadeloupe, then a broad reach along the west coast. As we approached the south east corner of Montserrat, in darkness, we could see no lights. After an hour, suddenly, we saw a small number of lights towards the northern end of the island. The volcano had a huge dusty cloud over it which we could see by the light of a half moon. An exclusion zone stretches about five miles out to sea around the volcano and the next obstacle was a huge uncharted area to the north of the island. We had to sail on for two hours to pass it but enjoyed seeing the many lights on the western side. We then turned forty degrees to port to pass to the south of the large three hundred metre high unlit rock, Redonda and the associated coral bank and then turned south at a large shallow area off the south of Nevis where the sea can be very rough. Finally *Shelduck* sailed on to Basseterre the capital of Nevis and St. Kitts, completing a passage of one hundred and nineteen miles. On entering the small harbour for yachts, north of the liner terminal, we thought we were back in the Baltic. There were timber piles to moor to and a difficult approach, but with help from a yachtsman berthed nearby and the marina manager we managed it. The economy of St. Kitts is now based on tourism. They have reclaimed a large area to the south of the old town

of Basseterre and built a pier with two liner berths and a small yacht harbour. There is an area called Irishtown but the marina manager ruled it out as a safe place for us to visit. I noticed that the name on the small truck delivering oil to a boat in the harbour was Buckley. Next morning at 11.10 we released *Shelduck* from the marina piles and headed for the British Virgin Islands. We had planned to visit St. Martin and St. Barts but decided against it because of the outbreak of the Chikungunya virus in St. Martin. Our departure time allowed us to be past Saba by sundown at 18.00 and give us an obstacle free passage through the night. In Basseterre I had some difficulty with the slave chart plotter at the wheel and had somehow managed to remove GPS and AIS from the screen of both plotters. I was back to basic navigation by waypoint only on the separate GPS. We had a beautiful sail through the night to Tortola with very little traffic. As we reached the entry to the Sir Francis Drake Channel I thought that Fallen Jerusalem was Ginger Island because of the colour. With the help of the GPS and the paper charts we realised it was the plan shape on the chart that gave Ginger Island the name. I found the correct gap between it and Round Rock and entered Road Harbour to a berth at Wickhams Cay Marina and checked into the British Virgin Islands. Next morning I phoned Colm of Dunmast in Cork and had the chart plotter back in order in a few minutes.

On arrival in the BVI we immediately began to enjoy the feeling of safety, the cooler air and the lack of mosquitoes at this time of year. *Shelduck* spent three days provisioning in Road Harbour then moved on the 29th to Nanny Cay where I got advice and bought most of the material to connect *Shelduck* to US electrical power. Next day we sailed to Jost Van Dyke where I first searched White Bay for a mooring but there were none free. We moved to Little Harbour which was empty, possibly because there is no beach. I had decided to use moorings in the Virgin Islands to limit the damage to the seabed and so that we could enjoy a good night's sleep. The wind was still blowing force 4-5 day and night. On Friday 31st January we sailed a short passage to Cane garden Bay, so beautiful, and next day to Marina Cay which is not a marina but a wonderful small island made famous by the 1953 book *Our Virgin Island*. On Sunday we got up early for the sixteen mile passage to Anegada. The entry to Setting Point through the coral heads is tricky but well marked. *Shelduck* was met by Barry who collected the mooring fee and suggested we have dinner in his restaurant. Barry was a sixty year old with an Irish great grandmother. I gave him a Tricolour to hang outside the restaurant. Next day we went to see the north of the island by taxi and saw the coral and limestone composition. At the highest point Anegada is only twenty eight feet above sea level. These two days turned out to be the highlight of our BVI cruise. On Tuesday 24th we sailed on to Bitter End where the marina was full and the squalls kept coming so we retreated to Vixen Point and then on Thursday we went back to Road Harbour.

U.S. Islands & Dominican Republic:

We departed Road Harbour in the BVI for the short passage to Cruz Bay, St John, US Virgin Islands where we checked in on Monday the 10th February. Thank goodness we had the ten year B1, U.S. visa allowing us to stay for 6 months after each entry. After the check in we sailed to the

nearest anchorage in Caneel Bay and picked up an available mooring at the far edge of the bay. We were soon visited by two Park volunteers in a rib who explained the mooring system. You can stay for up to seven nights and only pay for the hours of 17.00 to 07.00 at a cost of fifteen dollars per night. They gave us special envelopes to pay in a secure box on a small floating pontoon. We enjoyed six days of reading, swimming and watching turtles and people. I booked into Crown Bay Marina where we could check out of the USVI in nearby Charlotte Amalie. On Wednesday 19th we hailed a Safari taxi on a nearby street to take us to the Seaplane Base to check out. Some of the nicest people we have met on this cruise have been in the USVI. As people boarded the Safari most said good morning or good afternoon to all aboard. The Safari can carry 25 people, is open sided with benches and any length of journey costs two dollars per person. They travel very fast, come very often and will stop almost anywhere on the route by request. It is an excellent service.

We set sail for the Spanish Virgin Islands to check into Puerto Rico at Culebra where *Shelduck* arrived just before sunset. When we arrived at Customs and Homeland Security at the Airport we had an unwelcome reception as they discovered that we had not phoned head office on arrival on the 19th. I had been informed that the phone call is a requirement by the lady in Charlotte Amalie on checkout but the significance of the instruction had not registered. Every time a boat arrives at eight listed ports around the coast of Puerto Rico the crew must check in by phone as soon as the boat is anchored. We were also sold a twelve month cruising permit for the US for \$37. *Shelduck* weighed anchor at 13.30 and set sail for Sun Bay on the southern coast of Isla de Vieques, arriving just before dark after a lumpy passage. The anchor winch would not work and I discovered that the engine was not charging the batteries and so the alternator was probably in trouble. I decided to sail for the nearest boatyard at Palmas del Mar, arriving there at 22.15, looked at the breaking waves at the entrance and turned back to sea. We sailed up and down through the night and made our approach to the entrance again at 07.00 and tied up at the fuel berth. On Saturday 22nd the engineer Steve Larosso arrived and soon had the batteries charging. Next morning shortly after departure the alternator failed. Again we were saved by having the fuel cell aboard which allowed us continued use of the chart plotter and we had a beautiful fifty mile passage to Ponce Yacht Club on the south. The club arranged for an engineer to come to *Shelduck* and he took the alternator away and had it refurbished. I checked out of Puerto Rico on the phone from the club and Homeland Security emailed the papers to me which the club then printed. On Thursday the 27th we left Ponce at daybreak for a three hundred mile, two and a half day passage which included sailing through the Mona Passage. I had heard much about the dangers of the Mona Passage. *Shelduck* ran in a force 4 easterly under mainsail. The wind veered to the south as we sailed into the sixty mile wide Passage between Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. It's most dangerous feature is the Hourglass Shoal. The shoal stretches out twenty three miles from the DR eastern shore and is directly on the course from southern Puerto Rico to northern DR. Strong tide rips and heavy swells caused by a meeting of contrary currents are, in daylight, quite visible and mark

the position of the bank well. We passed at night and it looked like a group of islands on the radar. While I was on watch, at 06.15, a split pin in the gooseneck sheared and a bolt fell to the deck freeing the boom from the mast. I started the engine, called Anne, and we both went on deck to lower the mainsail and secure the boom with rope. It was difficult in the rough water. The remainder of the passage was sailed with the genoa only. At midday on Saturday *Shelduck* entered the Bahia La Maimon and took a berth at the marina. Sunday 2nd was an opportunity to repair the gooseneck. On Monday we went into Puerto Plata to an excellent well stocked and inexpensive supermarket. The security man outside the door had a two bore gun with ammunition wrapped around his waist.

Cuba:

On Tuesday 4th of March the wind was force 4 as we exited the harbour for another three hundred mile passage. We had a beautiful sail averaging 6.4 knots for the first day. *Shelduck* passed a large fishing float in water a mile deep with another three miles further on, off Bahia Isabela and then saw the outline of Haiti in the last of the sunlight, when we were thirty two miles to the south of it. We were out again in the North Atlantic Ocean and the larger size of the waves was noticeable. One particularly large one broke over the transom into the cockpit on Anne's watch. This was only the third to do so since *Shelduck* left Portugal. We had a busy night with shipping heading for the Windward Passage. Thursday was another beautiful day as we sailed along the Cuban coast. On berthing in Puerto de Vita, we were checked by a doctor to see if it was safe to let Cuban officials aboard. With his all clear, officials came from Customs, Immigration and the Department of Agriculture.



Street Cleaner, Cuba

Agriculture insisted that we immediately fit protection to our ropes ashore to ensure that any rats that might be aboard did not enter Cuba. We then had a visit from Janet, the marina boss and an army member who spoke perfect English and asked me to call to her office the following morning. I called early and she arranged for a taxi to take me twenty kilometres to a bank to change Euro for Cuban CUC's. Euro is the best currency to bring to Cuba as the rate of exchange is far better than the U.S. dollar. Sterling is not accepted.

To visit Cuba I came to Puerto de Vita on the north east coast to make it easy to enter the Bahamas. We decided to tour for two weeks by bus so we would not have the pressure of driving around in a country with almost no road signs and with no satellite route facility. I was able to pre-buy the bus tickets on the internet. Tourists travel in buses separate from Cubans. Our first journey took twelve hours to Havana.

The renewal of the buildings there, starting in the squares and financed and directed by UNESCO, is amazing. We dined at the Bodeguita del Medio, a favourite of Hemingway. We also visited Santa Clara, home of the wonderful Spanish designed monument to Che Guevara, Trinidad de Cuba, Camague, Santiago de Cuba and Baraco. All in all we had a very enjoyable time and were very impressed by Cubans and Cuba and in particular Havana and Trinidad, which are both World Heritage Sites. People seemed happy and content and did express worry about the future after the death of Chavez. Average take home pay is twenty two euro per month. In Havana people are living as in the 1950's and in the countryside farmers carts are still often pulled by oxen.

Bahamas:

On Friday 21st at Puerto de Vita we prepared *Shelduck* for her next passage. In changing the chart card I seemed to have damaged the guides in the plotter at the chart table and so put the card into the plotter at the wheel and made it the master. As we exited the harbour mouth I decided to make for Ragged Island and our first foray into the Grand Bahama Bank. Wanting to make the crossing of the Bank in daylight we reduced sail for a speed of 3 to 4 knots however the autopilot was not happy with its new master so we steered one hour on and one hour off. *Shelduck* crossed the edge of the Bank shortly after dawn near the Two Brothers rocks and anchored off the South East point of Little Ragged Island. On Monday 24th we were welcomed by a beautiful morning at Little Ragged Island. We weighed anchor at 07.30 and headed to check into the Bahamas at Stella Maris. The sea was glassy calm so we had to motor and decided to anchor for the night off South Point, Long Island, having motored sixty eight miles. Next day, unusually, the wind was south west which gave a wonderful sail as we reached along Long Island. At the north end it was a beat round the corner but *Shelduck* went aground on soft shifting sand near Dove Cay at 20.00 with less than a mile to go to the harbour entrance. She refloated at 03.00 then we anchored to wait for daylight at 07.00 and entered the harbour. Long Island is poorer than we expected. We hired a car to get diesel and some provisions. On Tuesday 1st April we left the harbour an hour before high water but went aground again in calm, near the first of the channel markers. Tides at night here are usually about



Hard Work in the Bahamas

0.14 metres higher than day tides, so Anne and I settled down for the twelve hour wait and the hope of floating off at 22.00. At 21.00 I started the engine and *Shelduck* was quickly free. We had to be careful not to go aground again in the shifting sands off Dove Cay. Anne's eyes were glued to the depth sounder in the darkness. Anyone having 0.1 metres under their keel in the Bahamas is considered to be in plenty of water. I decided to head for Cat Island at Hawk's Nest Creek and we arrived after a gentle sail at 08.00. Later we saw our first Manatee behind the boat near us. It was much larger than either of us had expected. On Thursday we went to the beach to the north of Hawk's Nest Point for a swim. There was only one other couple there who told us later that they had watched out for sharks for us while we swam. We did not know there were sharks in the area but had heard about them being off Sand Point to the north of the island. It seems they are often seen in Hawk's Nest Creek.

On Friday we set sail for Arthurs Town where *Shelduck* anchored off for the night. We woke at 06.30 the next morning and headed for Marsh Harbour, Great Abaco Island where *Shelduck* would shelter from an approaching low. The following morning the weather was kind so we were able to enter Marsh Harbour through the reefs at North Man of War Channel at 10.00 and then moved on to Harbour View Marina for fuel. Wednesday brought an active low with heavy rain and force 6-7 winds. Friday 11th brought high pressure again so we sailed out of Marsh Harbour to anchor for the night off Green Turtle Cay before sundown then got up early for the sixty mile passage to Great Sale Cay. It was a beautiful day with a fresh run past the Centre of the World Rock and then to north west

harbour, Great Sale, where *Shelduck* dropped anchor at 17.00. Next day we rested and had dinner at 17.00 ready to leave for Florida at 19.00. We really enjoyed the Bahamas.

US East Coast:

On Sunday 13th we weighed anchor at 19.00 as planned. Soon after heading out in a force 4 easterly, a full moon rose to give us great light throughout the night. The passage was uneventful until *Shelduck* got to the maelstrom that was the entry to Fort Pierce. She was thrown around as the Easterly Atlantic Trades met the coast and the flow to the sea of the Indian River. We had finally fully crossed the North Atlantic Ocean and having sailed 119 miles on this passage we were very, very tired because *Shelduck* was still without an auto helm. In fact we had sailed 667 miles from Cuba without one, which was very hard work, particularly at night.

The journey to Chesapeake from here would be partly at sea and partly through the Intracoastal Waterway, which is a 3000-mile inland waterway along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts of the United States. Some sections consist of natural inlets, saltwater rivers, bays and sounds, while others are artificial canals. We would always have to helm *Shelduck* in the Intra Coastal Waterway because of the narrowness of the channel, our draft, and the amount of traffic, so we decided to live without the auto helm and swap the chart plotter at the chart table with the one at the wheel when *Shelduck* arrived at Atlantic Yacht Basin in Chesapeake where she was to be stored for winter. Anne and I were afraid to let anyone work on the plotters for fear we could lose the digital charts with nearly 1000 miles to go. *Shelduck* stayed in Fort Pierce for a week because of unsettled weather and then moved along the ICW to Titusville from where we visited the Kennedy Space Centre, which is well worth a visit. Each time we moved location I had to remember to telephone Homeland Security to report our position. They gave me what they call a Delta number to confirm that we had called in if we were stopped by an officer at sea. On Wednesday 23rd *Shelduck* had an easy passage to Daytona, where we anchored for the night in very quiet conditions and next day started early for the forty eight mile passage to St. Augustine. The second half was difficult as we rounded bends in the Matanzas River and touched bottom a couple of times while following the Magenta line on the chart plotter. I had difficulty finding the Rivers Edge marina in the San Sebastian River and momentarily went aground again while trying. St Augustine is a beautiful city which claims to be the first city in the USA. Many advised us not to take *Shelduck* through Georgia ICW because, though beautiful, it is poorly maintained. The storm which I had been watching develop in the Gulf of Mexico on IGRIB looked menacing but with a window until April 29th I decided to sail for Beaufort, South Carolina for fear of being trapped in Georgia. On Saturday 26th *Shelduck* left the San Sebastian River, St Augustine at 10.00 so that she would arrive at the channel to the Beaufort River at low tide next day. It is almost impossible for *Shelduck* to motor up or down these river entrances against a strong tide combined with the river flow. On Sunday 27th we arrived at the entrance for the twenty mile passage upriver. With the storm getting closer and the strong current near the town I decided to take a marina berth. *Shelduck* was now in an area of 7 to 8 foot tides rather than the minimal tides

we had been used to. We were now in The Low Country, which includes the beautiful cities of Savannah, Georgia and Beaufort and Charlestown, South Carolina. On Monday 28th we enjoyed a horse drawn tour of Beaufort with its streets in a grid pattern, which was founded by the Duke of the same name in 1711. I had to see Savannah which was founded in 1733, so on Tuesday 29th, with the storm one day away, we hired a car and drove the eighty mile round trip. On Wednesday 30th the storm arrived. We had rarely seen such heavy rain and such strong wind.

The next stop for sightseeing was to be Charlestown, which was seventy five miles away on the ICW. I made it a two day passage with an overnight in Bowhicket Creek. It was an interesting and challenging passage on the Beaufort and Coosaw Rivers, the South Edisto River, Dawho River and North Edisto River. Next day on the 2nd, *Shelduck* traversed the Wadnalaw and the Stono rivers which washed us into Charlestown, sometimes at nearly eight knots in a cut. I decided to head for Charlestown Harbour marina which had a free trolley bus to the city centre. *Shelduck* left the marina and The Low Country on the 5th just in time to pass through the Ben Sawyer Bridge at 09.00. We had read complaints in the local press of shoaling and lack of maintenance in this part of the ICW and sure enough *Shelduck* touched bottom twice. We anchored for the night in Five Fathom Creek, a beautiful place full of wildlife in the water, on the land and in the air. The passage from Five Fathom Creek to Georgetown was much easier with plenty of water. *Shelduck* took a berth at Georgetown Landing. Georgetown is South Carolina's third oldest city founded in 1732.

On Thursday 8th May *Shelduck* left Georgetown at 06.30 for the one hundred and eighty mile passage round Cape Fear to Beaufort, North Carolina. I set a waypoint thirty five miles east north east of Cape Fear to clear the Frying Pan Shoals. *Shelduck* had a wonderful sail across Long Bay in a force 4 southerly and was assisted by a current to the waypoint where she arrived in darkness to be greeted by many ships also making the turning. We gybed round the buoy marking an unlit abandoned exploration platform and reached on to Beaufort where we arrived on Friday at 13.00. It was a fast passage averaging over 6 knots. On Monday 12th at 10.30 we went through the Beaufort Bridge and had a beautiful thirty nine mile passage motor sailing in the North Carolina wetlands to Bear Creek, which is so remote that there was no phone signal. The creek also had many bird watching hides on land and in the water. Next day *Shelduck* had a twenty seven mile passage to Bath in the Bath River off the Pamlico River. We sailed sixteen miles west of the ICW and docked at the town's Free Dock. At midday *Shelduck* departed the dock, sailed south out of Bath Creek, east along the Pamlico River and north up the Pungo River to anchor for the night in Pungo Creek, a beautiful wide easy anchorage. On Thursday 15th we left Pungo Creek early for the long motor sail down Pungo River and Alligator River Canal and anchored for the night inside Catfish Point. This was a difficult winding entry between sandbanks marked by tree branches stuck in the sand. Although conditions were poor next morning I decided to go back out into the Alligator River where we joined two other yachts through the River Bridge and into the Alligator River Marina near the bridge, in torrential

rain. On Saturday 17th, with the weather improved, *Shelduck* left the marina at 07.00 and had a great close reach across Albemarle Sound to turn up the Alligator River to Elizabeth City, where she docked at another free dock in the city centre at midday, having sailed thirty miles in five hours. This may have been the last sail of the cruise as *Shelduck's* next passage was through Dismal Swamp.

Dismal Swamp:

On coming to Elizabeth City I had decided to take the Dismal Swamp route to Atlantic Yacht Basin where *Shelduck* was to be stored for ten months. The name alone attracted us and *Shelduck* was just within the maximum draft allowed. Everything from birds and slithering reptiles, to winged insects and bears, including a few scattered people inhabits this unique primeval forest. Once owned by George Washington, the swamp holding was donated in 1973 by the Union Camp Company to create the Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge. On Monday 19th of May *Shelduck* left the Mariners Wharf Free Dock in Elizabeth City at 08.30 to catch the Bascule highway bridge, opening at 09.00 and then proceeded up the winding, narrow, unmarked headwaters of the Pasquotank River. Here you have some of the most undisturbed and natural cruising grounds anywhere. *Shelduck* went through an open manually operated railway bridge to South Mills Lock where she arrived at 13.15 for the 13.30 opening. I decided to moor for the night between the lock and the adjacent bridge which are worked together by one person who drives between the two. Here on a grassy bank we folded and bagged *Shelduck's* sails in the late afternoon sunshine. Next day *Shelduck* went through the bridge. We had entered the Dismal Swamp Canal and as we reached the Welcome Centre, the floating bridge that gives access to the Dismal Swamp itself opened for us. While the depth was showing a minimum of half a meter under the keel in the Canal *Shelduck* rolled over logs on the bottom a few times. Next morning I timed *Shelduck's* leaving to get to the Deep Creek lock at 13.30 which she exited at 14.15., then on through the winding, marked Deep Creek and into the ICW at Virginia Cut to the Steel Bridge, into the Great Bridge lock, through the Great Bridge which opens every hour, at 16.00. I immediately called the dock master at Atlantic Yacht Basin and secured alongside at 16.30. *Shelduck* came here because her insurance company insisted she was north of Cape Hatteras before the start of the hurricane season. Our seven month cruise was over and almost eight months away from home. *Shelduck* had logged 7013 miles. Anne and I had sailed 3026 miles on our own in the Caribbean and east coast of the U.S. and 3987 miles with friends and family including the ARC and the passage from Cascais to Grand Canaria.

Items that helped our comfort:

1. The Active Radar Reflector. We observed many ships altering course to avoid *Shelduck*, including a tanker as we exited the Mona Passage.
2. The Hella Fan in our cabin. We would have expired in the heat of the southern Caribbean without it.
3. The Fuel Cell, which kept the autopilot, fridge and GPS going without noise and with only two half hour noisy periods a day running the engine to assist



***Shelduck* ready for Winter storage**

the cell. It was also very useful while at anchor or on a mooring as we rarely had to run the engine in neutral to charge the batteries.

4. Having no mainsail, just the two poled out genoas for much of the fresh passages from Lagos to St. Lucia.

5. The Satellite Phone used for our blog, <http://blog.mailasail.com/shelduck> and for weather routing with my son Tom at home in Cork.

6. "SPOT" which is a satellite GPS messenger which sends an email from anywhere on earth to selected people.

Best tips for us at the ARC briefings before the start:

1. Have a block at the outer end of any spinnaker pole to run sheets through. *Shelduck* did not damage any rope through chafe during the cruise.
2. Just before you leave as the frozen food is being put in the fridge fill any space left with water bottles and don't open the door for three days. We had fresh meat for two weeks.

There was little trouble from customs and immigration. Our U.S. Islands-Dominican Republic-Cuba-Bahamas-U.S. East Coast route seemed to please all of those countries. Anne and I enjoyed our welcome from many who noticed our Irish flag. People are friendly, helpful, interested and seem delighted to see us wherever *Shelduck* takes us. *Shelduck* will not be rushing back across the Atlantic. Her draft opens up most places on these coasts.