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Getting UnderWay

THE TRITON'S

TECHNICAL AND TRAVEL NEWS FOR CAPTAINS & CREWS

Section B

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August 2009

WELCOME TO BEQUIA



Admiralty Bay on the west coast is home of the main point of clearance, Port Elizabeth.

Island nation has sailing in its genes

By Capt. John Campbell

Bequia, (pronounced BECK-wee) is a sailor's island. Indeed, until relatively recently, the only way to reach Bequia was by boat; the island had no airport until 1992.

The island lies a few miles southwest of St. Vincent in the Windward Islands, and forms part of the nation of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. It is a small island, just seven square miles in total.

Sailing seems to be in the Bequian genes. You will often see kids sailing models made from segments of coconut husk. As they grow up, many of them progress to race the locally built, double-ended, so-called "two bowed" fishing boats.

If you are anywhere in the area around Easter time (early spring), try to visit the Bequia regatta. There are classes for various types of cruising and racing yachts, but for me, the highlight is always the race series for the traditional Bequia boats. The racing is usually very close, often with three or four big guys on trapeze wires trying to keep them upright.



Main street reflects the island's size: 7 square miles in total.

PHOTOS/CAPT. JOHN CAMPBELL

In the early 19th century, agriculture was of great importance to the island, with a total of nine sugar plantations at the peak of the sugar industry, but it was the fishing and whaling that really formed the basis of the wealth of the island. Yankee whalers frequently visited

Bequia and over time local crew were recruited.

The Bequian sailors learned the trade and about 1870, William Wallace returned home to Bequia and established the first local whaling

See **BEQUIA**, page B13

The history, importance of tonnage

Tonnage is an important topic in the maritime industry. It forms the basis for manning regulations, safety rules, registration fees, and the calculation of port dues.



RULES OF THE ROAD
JAKE DESVERGERS

The term derives from the taxation paid on "tuns" of wine. It was later used in reference to the weight of a ship's cargo. However, in modern maritime usage, *tonnage*

specifically refers to a calculation of the volume or cargo volume of a ship. It is a measure of the size or cargo capacity of a vessel. A common misconception by most people is that the tonnage calculated for the yacht is its actual weight. It is not.

For centuries, each seafaring nation calculated a vessel's tonnage by its own rules. Methods of calculating tonnage were not consistently applied and, because they were designed for sailing ships, could not be applied appropriately or fairly for the new steamships being launched in the middle of the 19th century.

Substantial portions of a steamship were required for boilers, machinery and coal, thus limiting the proportion of the ship's space available for cargo. In 1854, Admiral George Moorsom of the British Board of Trade was tasked with creating a system for measuring ships. The British system concluded that harbor and other vessel fees should be proportional to the earning capacity of the ship, whether for cargo or passengers.

While the Moorsom System became the baseline for the majority of tonnage measurement systems, there still was no standardized set of international

See **RULES**, page B12

Whaleboats, white cedar gave rise to boat building

BEQUIA, from page B1

station, based in Friendship Bay. The tradition of whaling survives to this day. The International Whaling Commission has agreed that local whalers can catch up to four whales a year; some years they catch the odd one or two, and other years they catch none.

Probably it was the building of whaleboats for local use, using the abundant local white cedar wood, that gave rise to the boat building industry for which Bequia became renowned. The small two-bowed fishing boats are still built today, but in years gone by, many large boats were built on the beaches scattered around the island. The biggest was the *Gloria Colita*, which was 165 feet overall. Indeed she is thought to be the biggest wooden boat ever built in the Caribbean.

One of the more famous boats was Bob Dylan's traditional schooner *Water Pearl*. My wife and I were lucky enough to sail her in 1982, before she was subsequently lost off the coast of Panama a few years later.

Three steel ferries in play

We first came to Bequia in 1973. Of course this was long before the airport was built, so everything and everybody had to come and go from the island by boat. For many years the schooner *Friendship Rose* operated a daily service to and from Kingstown in St Vincent. She had been built on the beach in Friendship Bay.

It was a great day out, to catch the ferry to St. Vincent together with all the folks taking their produce to market. As sailing time approached, the cabin would quickly fill with not only people, but also with boxes of fruit, vegetables and often a clutch of chickens or even the occasional goat. Everything and everybody was jammed tightly into the one cabin.

Friendship Rose always motored to windward to get to the harbor at Kingstown, but the real delight was in the evening when she sailed back. With a lot of huffing and puffing the two deck crew hoisted her sails, and the *Rose* sailed proudly back to Admiralty Bay for the night.

There was also a weekly service from a converted landing craft called the *Grenadine Star*. She was able to carry the few cars that ventured across to Bequia from the mainland, but for most people, *Friendship Rose* was their link with the mainland.

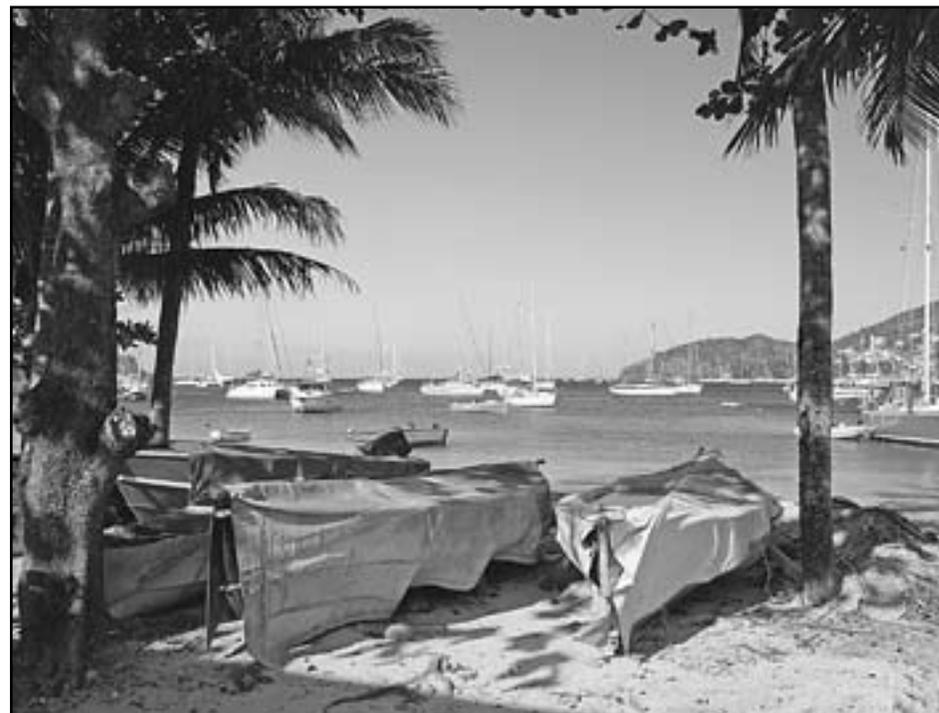
Now there are three big steel ferries vying with each other to carry ever more people and cars to and fro, and of course the airport allows people to fly in. Happily though, *Friendship Rose*

has survived. She has a mooring close to the beach at Port Elizabeth. The big cabin that we remember as being stuffed to bursting point with people and produce has gone, to be replaced by a more yacht-like cabin, but she is still the *Rose*. She is now employed in the charter trade, and often does day-trips to Mustique. Take the time to sail on her if you can; she is such a big part of the history of Bequia as we find her today.

Main town is Port Elizabeth

The main town, and clearance port on Bequia is Port Elizabeth. It is

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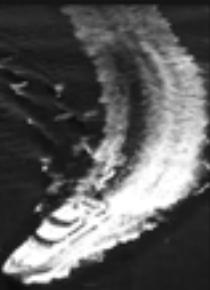


Bequia racing boats, covered for protection from the sun, sail to the forefront around Easter. PHOTO/CAPT. JOHN CAMPBELL

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Ruins in the town of Industry

PHOTOS/CAPT. JOHN CAMPBELL

Aggressive salesmen running the fruit and vegetable market

BEQUIA, from page B13

at the head of Admiralty Bay on the west coast, and this is by far the most popular anchorage.

Clearing in or out is relatively painless; officials there are well used to yachts and realize the importance of the yachts that visit the island.

Customs and Immigration are both in the relatively new government building, facing the ferry dock. Customs is open from 8:30 a.m. to 6 p.m., with overtime being charged after 4 p.m. On weekends the hours are a bit more flexible, however, the offices does usually open for a spell in the morning and again in the evening.

Immigration seems a bit less enthusiastic, and many times officers fail to appear at weekends. Usually customs officers will make the clearance for you and just tell you to return "later" to complete the forms for immigration. This can be the next day or Monday, if you are clearing on a weekend.

Port Elizabeth is a great little town; full of hustle and bustle. There is what appears to be a good fruit and vegetable market near the ferry dock, but it is controlled by a group of Rastafarians who are aggressive salesman. They refuse to take "no" for an answer.

Rather than face the hassle, I suggest going back one street and seeking out Doris Fresh Food. She has a great selection of fruit and vegetables and can get pretty much anything else you need. This is a much more pleasant way

to shop. There are several reasonable supermarkets and bakeries, so supplies are easy enough to find.

Everybody and his dog seem to offer wi-fi in Port Elizabeth. There are several Internet cafes ashore and many bars have free wi-fi. Several of the stronger signals can be accessed on board for a moderate charge.

Scattered around the bay are many other shops, bars and restaurants. There are three pretty good chandleries, a small sail-maker and a nice bookshop. Many of the restaurants have their own dinghy dock, and there is a path running along the waterfront on the southeast side of the bay, so it is easy to walk from one to the next.

There are three shops selling model boats. The favorite models are those of the whaleboats. They are priced according to the detail and size, and make a great souvenir or gift. Mauvin's is closest to town.

Sargeants, on the north side of town, was the original model boat builders and is still in business after 30 years or more. Lawson Sargeant has started a small museum on the north shore of the bay, a little way outside of town. This is worth a visit. He has a lot of photos of the old days of ships being built and launched. He also has several models on display, including a pair of models of the *Friendship Rose*, showing her both in her original working configuration and as she is now.

When we were visiting Bequia on

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Because so many visitors to Bequia never venture outside Admiralty Bay, you may find yourself alone on beaches such as this one in Industry.



The schooner *Friendship Rose* was the backbone of island transportation for years. She had been built on the beach in Friendship Bay.

Daffodil can be your connection to ice, laundry, fuel and more

BEQUIA, from page B14

an almost weekly basis with a charter boat in the early 1980s, there were two regular visitors. A woman named Melinda used to row out to us, always accompanied by her dog. She sold exquisite hand-painted T-shirts. Her dog was old and “visually challenged.” Melinda was known as the Guide with a Blind Dog. She is still in Bequia, but is now making mainly stained glass. Her work can be seen in several shops and is worth seeking out.

Our other regular visitor was a young Bequian girl called Daffodil. She would offer to take laundry or supply bags of ice. She, too, is still there, but her business has expanded. She can supply fuel (in reasonable quantities), water, ice, bread and can dispose of garbage for you. She also has a number of moorings available for smaller boats. Daffodil now has a fleet of bright yellow vessels under her command, and there is not much that she cannot organize. Call her on the VHF on Channel 67.

Outside Admiralty Bay

Many visitors never venture further than Port Elizabeth/Admiralty Bay, and with the plethora of restaurants and bars it is easy to understand why, but there is more to Bequia. A walk or even a taxi ride over the hill behind town will take you to the beaches at Industry. Despite the unpromising name, you will find archetypical palm-fringed beaches that you will most likely have to yourself.

The industry that used to be in that area was sugar. That finished many years ago, but when I first came here there was a bustling trade in copra, the dried “meat” of coconuts. That, too, seems to have finished, and now there is just a scattering of relics of the old mills and machines to remind us of this bygone era. Just to the north of Industry is a turtle sanctuary that is open to visits.

The other main anchorage on

Bequia is Friendship Bay, on the south of the island. Unless there is a big swell running, it is a good place to anchor. Although it lacks some of the amenities of Admiralty Bay, it has several restaurants and bars. There are several places offering wi-fi in Friendship Bay.

The west side of the bay is where the whaleboats live. It is worth a visit to see these traditional whaling boats. If they catch a whale, they now take it to the small islet at the western side of the bay. In the past they used a slip on the little island of Petit Nevis, but a change in ownership has denied them the use of that slip.

A final word of caution: Admiralty Bay has been a busy anchorage for many years, and the bottom has become well ploughed by thousands of anchors that have been dropped and dragged there, so sometimes the holding is not the greatest. Often at night there are strong squalls that whip over the hill behind town. Make sure the anchor is well dug in.

When we were running the charter boat, we did drag one night, at about 2 am in a hard rain squall. We lifted the anchor, motored over to the north side of the bay where there was a little more room and re-anchored.

In the midst of this, the head of a charterer appeared briefly in the hatch. It disappeared almost at once as the rain lashed down. At breakfast he asked what had been going on. I explained we had started to drag and had re-anchored.

His good wife asked why we had started the engine, which woke them up? Why had we not used the sails? Don't you love charter guests? Some things never change.

Capt. John Campbell has been yacht captain for more than 20 years and a sailor all his life and has recently settled ashore. For more, visit www.seascribe.eu. Comments on this story are welcome at editorial@the-triton.com.

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