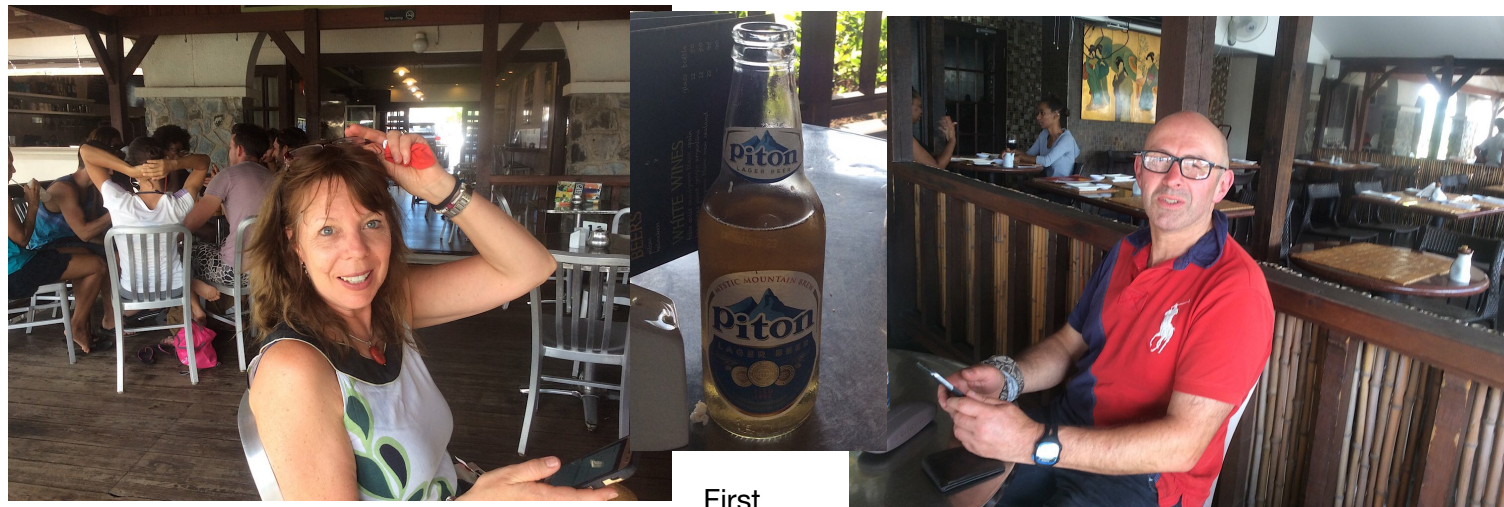


Claire and Warwick

21 May to 10 June 2018

After messing them around no end, our 'second lot' of guests, my sister Claire and Warwick, arrived on a beautiful swelteringly hot Sunday afternoon in Rodney bay, St Lucia.

We had just made it to St Lucia from Martinique that morning-



First
piton....s

We had intended to pick them up in Antigua but the increasingly profuse sargasse situation we witnessed whilst heading north made us decide to about turn and return southwards.



Later we added another reason to head for Martinique- at least 2 of our 5 batteries had died and the whole battery setup needed attention. The recently repaired fridge had to be turned off for lack of power.

We took advantage of being in Martinique to have the fridge system altered to minimise electricity consumption and maximise efficiency.

Well, that was the idea.

On Monday morning the weather was not looking too bright and the Captain wasn't looking too bright either as the new (infamous by now) desalinator refused to start. Needless to say, it wasn't the first time...or the second. More like the umpteenth. Mind you, sometimes it starts and then stops without apparent reason.

The upside of all this is that Jean-Luc has become an expert in all (touch wood, we hope-) possible hiccups a desalinator can suffer from. We have had, and are still having, a continuous trickle of desal parts arriving and departing to & from Martinique- we send the old ones back to the constructor. Luckily the constructor guy is very amiable and available to explain in detail, hours on the telephone, to the new expert repairman.

Claire, Warwick and I decided that the best move was to get out of the way & go to explore Rodney Bay.

In theory a good idea.

It started raining as soon as we got in the dinghy & with Warwick's dinghy driving we didn't just get soaked by the rain..

So, thoroughly wet through and with encouragement from a fellow sailor on blue yacht 'OohLaLa' that the rain 'C'est bien installé', we installed ourselves bien in the Cafe Olé.



After an hour or so, the rain let up a bit and the sky started to show itself. We skirted the Marina & headed along the beach northwards towards Pigeon island, now a promontory. To get to Pigeon Island we first pass the local beach in front of the Gros Islet village, which is rough and ready with lots of local bars sponsored by Guinness - or the local Piton beer (Guinness is brewed in the Caribbean too!) Families install themselves on the beach for the day or weekend or sometimes even longer with all the necessary, especially food, drink and Music. They are fun loving people and the key is 'enjoy'. This is true throughout the islands we've visited so far.

Further along the beach are two large top end beach resorts, first Landings and then the famous (well, Claire's heard of it) Sandals, not Flip-Flops...

'Exudes a sense of luxury & timeless elegance' as the blurb says. Pity I didn't get a photo of the elegant mauve & royal blue plastic sofas luxuriously decorating the beach...pure kitsch. Claire-photos? The loungers were pretty cool though & did look comfy.

We were kindly escorted through Landings by a uniformed guard. It was quite a maze & involved crossing a swinging bridge. These resorts have virtually cut off the beach for the local people and although I'm sure locals should be allowed to walk through as we did, they don't seem to do it. I guess hoards of locals walking along the luxurious & timelessly elegant seafront at Sandals would just ruin the ambiance.... as did a few tatty soaked through tourists today.

We made it into the Pigeon Island national park and had our boiled eggs for lunch. I forgot the cheese but remembered the chilli powder & salt... boiled eggs are about to become my trademark. I can't do them for Jean-Luc as he doesn't like them, so now I'm having a heyday!

Up to the ruins of Fort Rodney-



With quite a view over Rodney Bay (& Sandals resort!)



And a lovely view of this beautiful schooner which set sail soon after I took this photo-



Our first sailing day took us to Soufriere and the spectacular Pitons, a little hop of 17 nautical miles or so. Nice calm sailing if a bit hot. Crew are bearing up well, if a little bored- they're not used to the automatic pilot doing everything. We'll get them on the steering next time..



We reached Soufriere armed with the name and telephone number of a guide recommended in the Caribbean Compass. We didn't make the mistake of saying we were looking for John- Joseph this time and the limpet we picked up on the way in told us his name was Joseph. He looked nothing like the photo in the magazine, but then again, maybe John and Joseph are two different guys?

Meanwhile I called John, who said he'd be along to help us take a mooring buoy. At this point some confabulation must have gone on, because John called back and said to let limpet Joseph help us because they are partners. Hmmm.

Joseph helped us onto a Pitons National Park mooring buoy and after we'd confirmed we'd like to take a tour inland with him the following day, he admitted that we'd have to pay the mooring buoy (US \$20 I think) to the Park rangers. He also procured our first Amber jack fish, which was extremely good.

We'd told Joseph that we'd like a little hike, then to visit some waterfalls and whatever he may suggest. To his credit, he did offer to take us up Petit Piton, or even Gros Piton, but we didn't feel up to that- maybe next time.

We landed at Malgretoute beach where Joseph took great care anchoring and tying his beautiful wooden speedboat/ launch /fishing boat typical here in the Caribbean islands. They have enormous engines and virtually take off. I'm not sure how the turtles manage to survive, they have to be ever vigilant and real fast divers...

Our hike turned out to be a 1km walk up a small steep road to the Piton falls, the highlight being Joseph scaling this huge mango tree and collecting his weight in mangoes for us all.

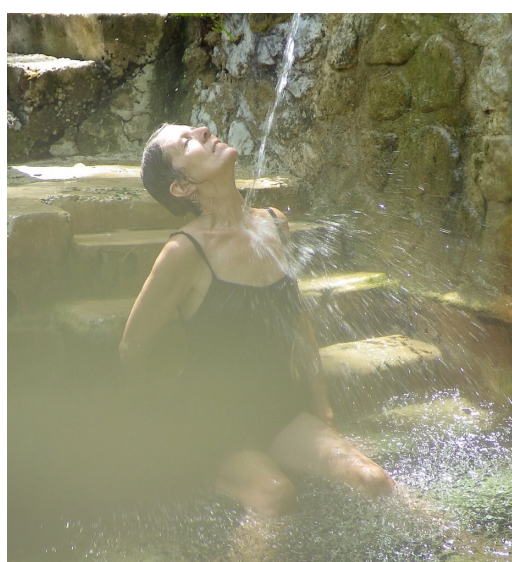
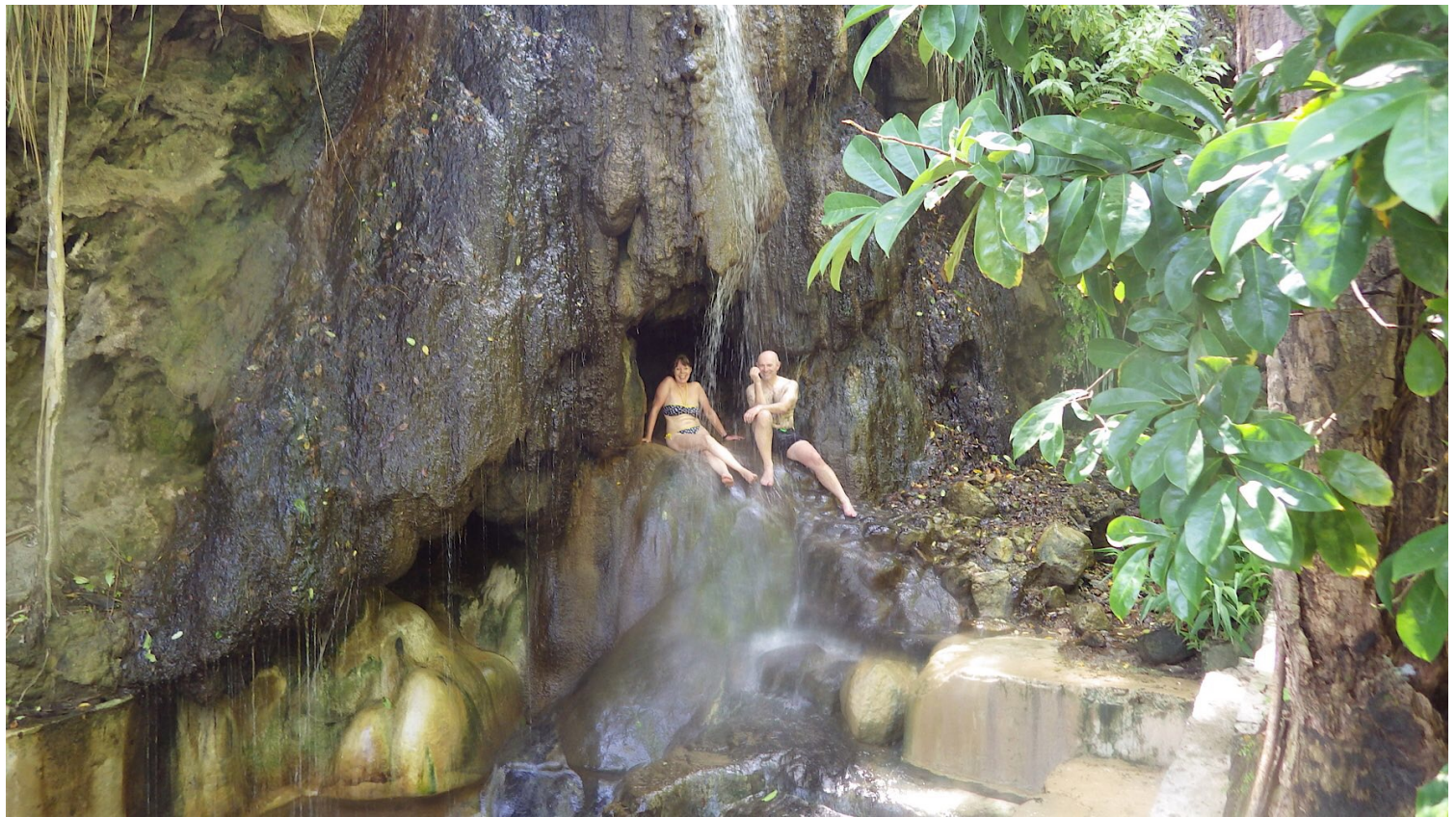
He's somewhere up there-



The falls are set in a luxuriant tropical forest garden and are hot sulphur baths, really rather special even though they've been organised to pass through a set of cement pools of varying temperatures. There's no cold pool though.



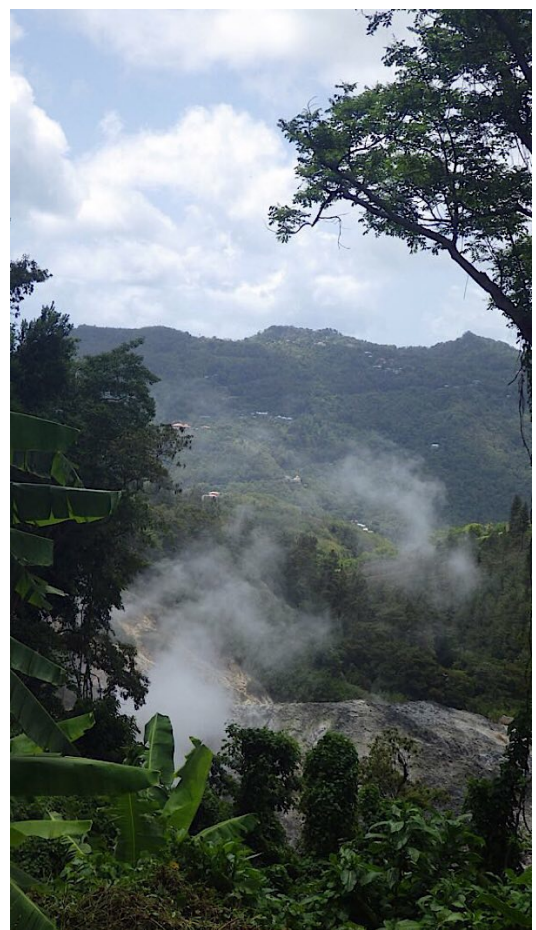
We took advantage of the falls and were lucky to be all alone there-
On the way out, Joseph presented me with one of my favourite soursop fruits- nobody else likes it!



Soufriere Mineral Mud Baths and Sulphur Springs

Joseph had organised a taxi for us from the falls to our other destination, 'The world's only drive-in volcano' (They haven't heard of La Solfatara in Pozzuoli, or the Flegrean fields...)

This is one enormous active crater or maybe combined craters and is very impressive. We actually spent the rest of the day here and had our (boiled eggs again-) picnic up at the top near the museum overlooking the bubbling and steaming calderas.



Now we have to get ourselves into the very hot muddy water and daube ourselves with the magic mineral mud to subsequently be made into graffiti art. It's all part of the fun and also good for the skin-



Our driver was getting worried about us by now and was happy to find us at the mud baths. He had been keeping himself occupied by shuttling people back and forth inside the crater. Time to get back to town for a Piton beer... or Guinness.

Claire and I were quite proud to have found some fish at this late hour, also they were amber jack fish, very small, so we envisaged a fry-up.

Joseph laughed his head off when we showed him.

Claire volunteered for fish cleaning duty, which turned out to be a difficult job.



We found out why Joseph laughed his head off. Small amber jacks are the boniest fish that exist....

We're sticking to big jacks from now on.

Next morning was a bit stressful for me, because the Captain decided to set sail directly from the mooring buoy without briefing the crew. As I am not a dab-hand at sail manoeuvring and especially when we are in La Soufriere bay, right under Petit Piton, with just the enormous mainsail hoisted and the wind comes gusting down erratically, the effect was PANIC. We were heading straight for Malgretoute beach via the rocks. I left the Captain to it.

The view of the Pitons is always magnificent - even with sargasse in the foreground



Next stop, St Vincent, Cumberland bay. Here we have to find another Joseph, recommended by Pascal and Barbara, who will help us to moor by tying a line to a tree/a pole on the beach. It is too deep to anchor but we must drop our anchor and then reverse towards the beach. This time another limpet catches us coming into the bay and won't say his name. Eventually he tells us he's Joseph (are they all called Joseph?) So of course he's our man. He is pretty efficient and we manage a satisfactory manoeuvre.

Then we get the floating market of trinkets and knickknacks, the menu from the restaurant, some very good (decent sized!) Amber jack fish from Joseph who is very chatty & tells us to walk up the hill to his Mum's place which has a fabulous view. The deal is that he will be back tomorrow morning to untie our line.



Joseph and friend

Unfortunately the fridge has given up the ghost- again. We need expert help, so the fridge has officially become an ice-box and we're getting used to warm beer...and wine....and Ti punch. In fact warm Ti Punch is pretty good... Especially with this view-



Well, next morning we decide to stay another night and relax, go snorkelling and exploring a bit, walk up to see the view from near Joseph's Mum's place.

So, Jean-Luc calls Joseph to tell him not to rush to untie us, the yellow boat, as we're staying. I think Joseph was still asleep at that point, because a bit later he came to introduce himself, obviously realising what had happened. Our Joseph's name is actually Bruther or Brother! Ahh, are we ever going to get the right guy?

Bruther probably realised it wouldn't take long to blow his cover and he came armed with gifts. Coconuts to drink and a huge bag of wax apples which were super-fresh.



On our way up to Joseph's Mum's.... the ever present cricket pitch in the ex British islands



Maybe Joseph - Bruther's motto up near his Mum's house?



We met Bruther's Aunty - and his Mum. They were very nice and the view is fabulous in all directions.



On the way down Claire made some new friends, Andrew and Dorita, with a great photo opportunity in front of Cumberland's hottest nightspot. The music was blaring all day too! (They also sell hog feed.)



This place is quite something, perched on the edge of the cliff. Look at that view!



The perilously steep road zigzags down and the Collective taxi drivers drive like maniacs. Luckily they announce their arrival with lots of noise, hooting like hell on the way down and revving like hell on the way up. You just about have time to jump onto the verge or flatten yourself against the cliff...

We survived the drivers but Claire touched an aggressive plant on the way down and her hand began to sting and swell up. (Luckily it wasn't manchineel which is highly toxic & burns- I know, I tried it!) We stopped by the local village community area to ask for advice and were reassured by locals that it would soon pass. Claire made another friend, Dian, who was very concerned about her well-being.

Claire was soon raring to go again & went to Live Up at sunset... Cumberland's second hottest nightspot.



Our short 18 mile sail to Bequia went without hitch, admiring the magnificent St Vincent scenery



We anchored in front of Princess Margaret's beach, Admiralty Bay, Bequia.



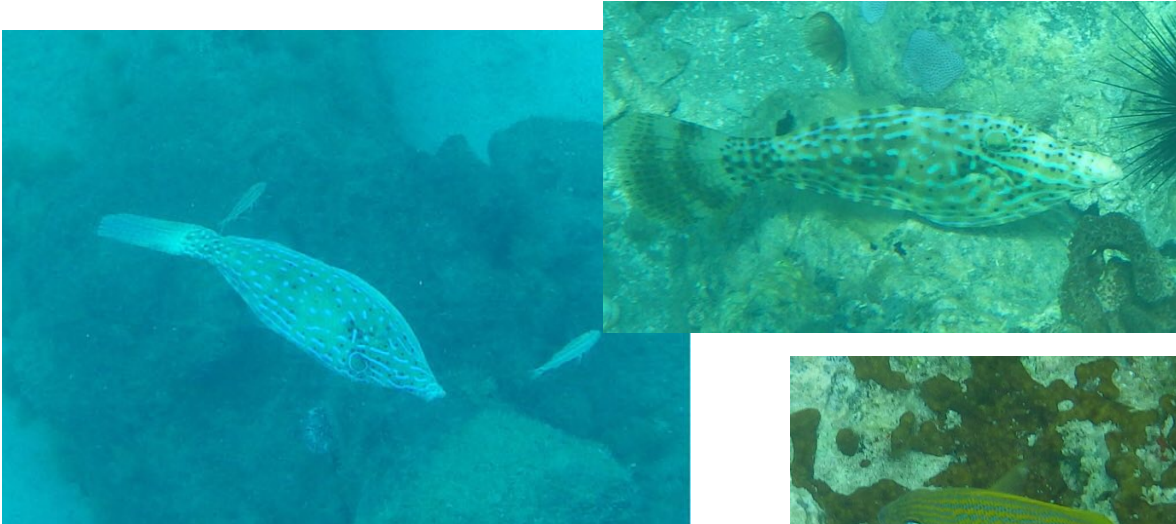
We spotted our first turtle on the dinghy trip into town, but never seem to spot them whilst in the water!

Time to try the local brew, Hairoun in St Vincent & The Grenadines. The Whaleboner Bar is a good choice-



Next day Claire and Warwick had a relaxing beach day.
Jean-Luc and I went snorkelling (and did some boat chores).
We didn't see many fish apart from this file fish and the French grunt (of course!) Luckily we've found a fisherman, well actually he found us, so we have a huge red snapper for dinner tonight

Scrawled filefish

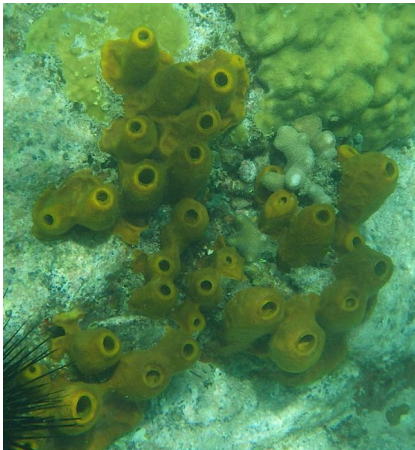


French grunt

Lots and lots of tiny fish hiding amongst the rocks and coral from predators and a large selection of underwater archaeology in the form of these amazing vase sponges-



Some tube sponges



Branching coral



Brain corals



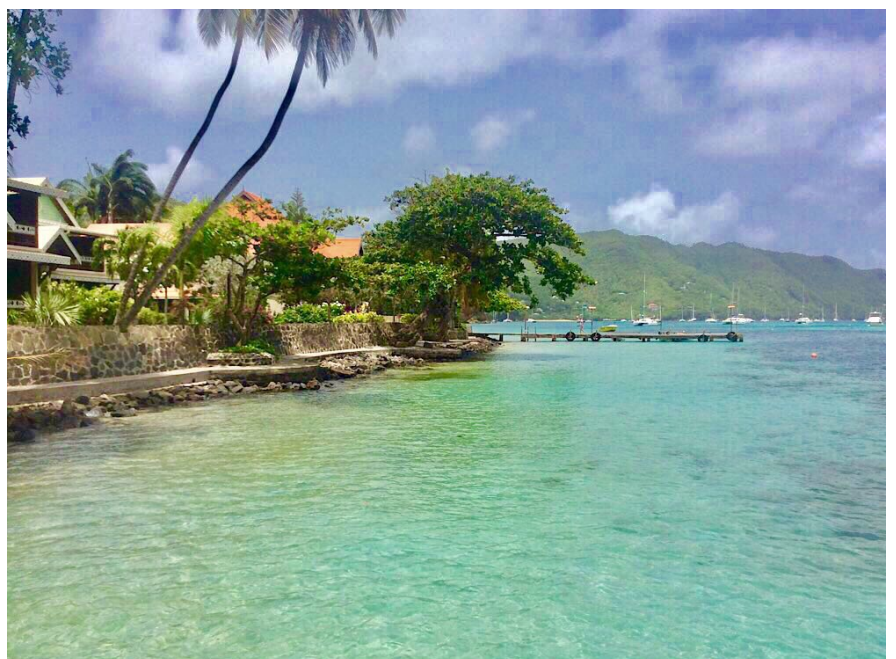
Encrusted with gems- actually Christmas tree worms



Anemones



Ok, so you're bored with my underwater photos, back to the view from the Whalebone



Claire's pics: Princess Margaret's beach-

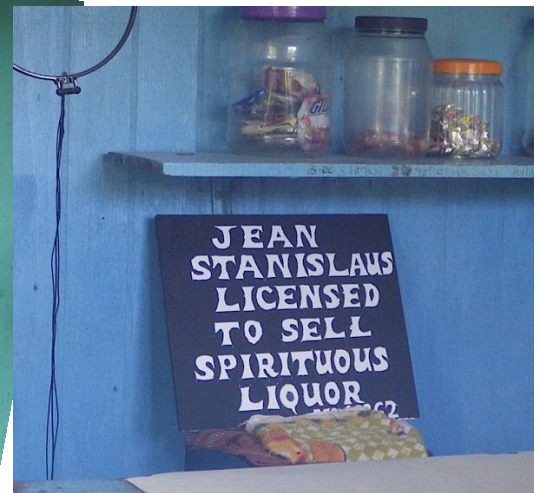


We are all set for the Mount Peggy hike, a modest 6 kilometres or so, some of it rather steep. Mount Peggy is the highest point on Bequia at 270 metres. The problem is the humidity and the heat...

We headed for Friendship bay on the road, picking up three four legged friends along the way.



In Friendship bay Kallick is 'licen to sell intoxicated liquire' which reminded me that they sell that in Canouan too- We must try some!



In Carriacou they've got their act together, but I've seen spiritual liquor too....interesting!

Back to Mount Peggy, the dogs knew where to go but we missed the turning. Follow the dogs- That's it, past the Private Property No Trespassing sign, where else?



The view over Friendship bay to Mustique (R) and Baliceaux (L) is beautiful-



Up and up we go, it's sooo hot.... and getting hotter. Even the dogs are fading fast- disappearing under the rare trees.

We made it!
One of the dogs is admiring the view, right over the precipice-



The airport is on the southern side of Big Cay



The view over Admiralty Bay is breathtaking



Ok boys and girls- time to go down.
They look a bit hot & bothered but you should see us! (No evidence available)



The climb down is much steeper and through the forest.
You'd expect it to be cooler but I can assure you- it isn't. The humid heat seems to gather in the forest and envelop you, it's airless.
Will we ever get used to this heat?
The remedy is soon to be found at Lower bay with a passion fruit juice and a cooling swim.



Nearly there!