

## 1st Report: Curaçao

**12°06.5'N 68°55.3'W**

**Algodón Grande, Cuba**

**21°05'.9N 78°44'.1W**

**January 19 to February 10, 2014**

## Route Overview



Curaçao-Port Antonio, Jamaica-Santiago de Cuba-  
Cabo Cruz-Algodón Grande

Back in Zelgli after our return trip on the cargo *Platon* to Rotterdam on November 11, very early cold weather enchanted us with lovely pictures of the little garden right outside our living room. The snow did not remain long. And so, in more clement weather we start looking for an apartment. The new project in Schinznach-Bad appeals to us.



There are four buildings with three stories, below the forest, next to the golf course and in front of a residential area with single-family homes built some decades ago.

The view will remain what it is for ever.

The train station and the thermal bath are close, easily reached on foot or bicycle within ten or fifteen minutes.

We check out the surroundings, Alex makes sure the view is what we may expect from the top floor. Looks O.K.

Before Christmas we decide to buy and pay the reservation fee for the apartment 5c5 on the top floor of the first building, which will be ready to move into by December 15, 2014.

The time until our departure for Curaçao with Renate and Mike on January 12, is full of tasks connected with deciding and choosing what is going to be built in and installed in the apartment, with birthdays, two Christmas celebrations, visits with friends and of course packing again.

I console myself with the certain knowledge that there will be no more of this next year.



On **January 12**, we leave Zelgli very early in the morning, drive to Effingen, put the car into the garage and wait for Edith and Rico, who take us together with Renate and Mike to the airport in Basel. We leave at 05:00 with two cars, since the dog Nox, Edith's and Rico's Gos d'Atura, wants to be along and needs the space in the back of their car.

At the airport we have coffee and croissants before we say goodbye to Edith and Rico.

We fly to Curaçao via Amsterdam. The trip is tiring. The flight from Amsterdam is delayed, the food disappointing, the plane is filled to capacity, the hours seem endless. In Curaçao, Hans waits with his spacious car and takes us and all our bags to his Iguana Inn, where Alex and I stayed before while working on *Silmaril* in August last summer. We drop our bags in the two-bedroom apartment and make the effort to go out to eat downtown. The "Catch of the Day" is open and their fish soup is delicious.

**Monday, January 13 to Saturday, January 18.** Breakfast on the first morning is simple, we go to the Danish bakery in the neighborhood and proceed to the marina. Alex and Mike immediately start polishing *Silmaril* to remove the milky film of the UV-resistant coating. Renate and I make a shopping list. *Silmaril* is taken to the water, we go shopping at Albert Heijn, list and stow food and drink, and move from Iguana Inn to *Silmaril* now at the dock in the marina. Slowly but surely the routine of preparing the boat for the voyage sets in.

We take the time to go to Willemstad, stroll through the old town, have a drink on the water front and observe the bustle on the pontoon bridge still in its Christmas illumination. At sundown Renate and Mike can see the gateway we are going to take



out to sea on our way to Jamaica. A huge cruiser is moored just outside the entrance to the harbor.

Soon we are ready. On Saturday evening we go out for dinner and turn in right after the meal. We want to get up early tomorrow morning.

**Sunday, 19 January.** Our excitement is palpable: very soon the four of us will again be on another voyage with *Silmaril*.

At 10:15 A.M. we cast off with the help of our neighbor, Reini. The maneuver is perfect. Our unapproachable other neighbor stands speechless with the boat hook at the ready. What a relief and satisfaction that he has to watch *Silmaril* leave the berth smoothly, a woman at the helm, with not an instant to use his hook. He never smiles



nor waves goodbye.

The trip to the gateway is easy, no waves, no current and we know the markers.

Out of the gateway and we are heading toward Jamaica.

The weather is not great. We will run along the coast northward and anchor in the Boka Santa Kruz in the northeast of Curaçao. It takes some time to find a good spot.



First we are too far away from the sheltering shoreline in too much wind, then we drop anchor too close to an unmarked wreck (Alex dives) and move a third time. Now we feel safe and enjoy the evening. An osprey flies to the cliff, lands, preens himself and can be watched at leisure.

He is so much larger through the binoculars!

**Monday, 20 January.** The osprey still sits on the cliff. We prepare *Silmaril* for the passage at hand, probably a pretty rough ride. We weigh anchor at 10 A.M. and head out of the bay.



As soon as we leave the protection of the island, the wind picks up and *Silmaril* rolls and pitches in 25kts to 28kts wind from ESE and 2.5m to 3m waves. At sundown the waves are still the same. The night is strenuous, *Silmaril* tumbles through the water like drunk, despite the try sail and the reefed genoa. But we make progress.

With up to 11kts over ground we approach Jamaica at great speed. In just 24 hours *Silmaril* covered over 180nm.

**Tuesday, 21 January.**

Another laborious day begins. We suffer the same conditions as yesterday, rolling, pitching and the hissing noise of wind and water.

Alex checks the weather and promises improvement for tomorrow.

Morale on board is pretty low. Renate feels queasy and I don't want to sail like that ever again! The feeling is familiar. The first and second day of a voyage in adverse conditions does not only give me the blues. Alex also knows the feeling.



But he considers this far more fascinating and worth experiencing than watching TV in Untersiggenthal (his words!). The rocking horse movements of *Silmaril* also afflict our guests. But we have no choice, just clench your teeth and endure.

The wind dies down toward evening and we expect a quiet night. The moon is half, but lights up the sky so much, that the stars in Orion and the Big Dipper only cast a fallow light.

During my watch the container ship *Conti Daphne* runs toward us on collision course. I call her up, she does not see us yet. When I shine the light at the sails, she can make us out and changes course to keep a safe distance, a very polite and obliging radio contact.

**Wednesday, 22 January.** The morning brings clement weather. We are looking for the oatmeal. Although definitely bought, stowed and marked in the list, it remains undiscoverable. We eat muesli. After breakfast a rather complicated maneuver comes up. Mike is at the wheel, Renate ready for action.



We want to set the main sail again. Alex has to unhook the halyard from the trysail and fasten it to the main. *Silmaril* still moves considerably and the shackle slips from his grasp. Laughing, shouting and performing a few capers, we succeed in catching the flying halyard and Alex can attach it.

Under full sails, the wind at 12kts, the waves below 3 feet, sailing is pure joy.

Around midnight the wind increases, Mike gives warning somewhat late and reefing in the dark becomes a debacle. *Silmaril*, the nose in the wind, hardly moves. Half naked and drowsy I grab the wheel, but without speed the rudder does not respond.

We turn about, Alex tries his luck without success. I finally manage to resume the old course and the maneuver is completed.

Alex grumbles. Such incidents embarrass him. A bit sulky, I go back to sleep. The rest of the night is peaceful.

**Thursday, January 23.** A wonderful day, great sailing. Toward evening we catch sight of Jamaica's coast. Alex hoists the curtesy flag and the yellow one for customs and immigration.

We will probably reach Port Antonio by night. The radio crackles and we hear: *Red Harlekin!* This is the Swiss boat of Jrmina and Erwin,



whom we briefly met at the Thursday sailors' dinner in The Pier in Curaçao. We call them and sure enough, they are at anchor in the harbor and give us detailed instructions how to reach a safe spot and drop anchor without mishap even in the dark. What a relief! Despite their help it is still pretty confusing to make out their points of reference. But with four pairs of eyes we manage to find an acceptable location, let the anchor run out and go to bed.

**Friday, January 24.** Customs requests us to haul to the dock for registration. We decide to stay in the Errol Flynn Marina and find a berth next to Jill's and Dug's huge *Compañera*. (the picture shows her at anchor just outside the marina). They are glaciologists from Alaska. Jill proudly shows Renate and me the boat and presents many a proof of their adventures in the entire world.

Registration is over and we start for a first stroll through the city.

Right outside the marina we meet a guy who convinces us that he belongs to the marina staff and that we need him as a guide. We follow his lead into the bustle of the place.

The sugar cane vendor has a number of customers; the woman across the street obviously doesn't feel well. Nobody cares.



Wishful thinking considering the smell!

In the streets full of pot holes, masses of pedestrians move among vehicles of all sorts, stinking ancient cars, motorcycles, carts of the most unusual design. Some characters just have to be in a picture.



The first impression is overwhelming, almost unsettling, such poverty, activity, colors, shapes, smells. A staggering wealth of images floods our minds.

We drink something in a bar. Our guide speaks briefly with the waitress. He will probably collect his slice of the deal later on. We certainly paid tourist prices.

He talks us into buying famous "Blue Mountain Coffee". How he pulls us over the barrel! We buy the absolutely most expensive coffee of our life! Explore and compare before paying would be good advice in such a foreign place. We could have found the actual price right there in the market, where various stands offer the stuff. In the evening we meet with Jrmina, Erwin and a bunch of other sailors in the bar and spend a few relaxing hours.

**Saturday, January 25.** Another walk to the market. Our guide has disappeared. Good for him, we were all four quite ready to give him a piece of our minds! People told us last night about his doings.

We buy spices and vegetables at Norma's stand, discuss his business with a giant of a man who calls himself Rock Bottom, admire his wood work and ask Nadja to sell us a



foldable coaster made of odorant wood. We feel good here, the people are friendly and courteous, although there is absolutely no mistaking us for locals!

Back on the boat Renate and I collect the laundry and with great relish use the nice washing machines and dryers in the well equipped marina.

Mike organizes a rental car for tomorrow. We will drive to the Blue Mountains and return to Port Antonio via Kingston.

**Sunday, January 26.** Expectations are high this morning. We pack our bathing suits and our hiking boots. The car is not ready yet. We wait. Finally it arrives in the small courtyard of the rental place. The tank is empty! So, we look for a gas station and start on our way to the Blue Lagoon, a world-famous location, according to our book.

People in holiday finery go to church.



As soon as we are out of town, rain pelts down with a vengeance. The curbs are like small river beds. The windshield wipers run at the highest speed, but the vision remains blurry.

We probably passed the entrance to the Blue Lagoon and continue in a steady drizzle toward the Blue Mountains. The maps are incredibly poor and street signs virtually nonexistent. We cannot find the famous garden, neither the water fall nor the coffee farm.

In one of the many "Jerk Centers" we have lunch. There is grilled chicken, beef or pork. The pieces are served in a sheet of tinfoil. The food is better than it looks.

Mike skillfully chauffeurs us up, up the steep and narrow streets toward the fog shrouded mountaintop.



A little fruit stand tempts us to stop. We buy coffee, spices and fruit. The farmer produces everything himself.

Here he is, brawny, energetic, and so happy with our many orders.

His small farm lies below the street stuck to the steep slope like a swallows nest.

He hurries down the foot path twice to fetch new bananas and mangoes.

The broad grin reveals his pleasure to have customers despite the rain.



We are equally pleased, his goods are fresh and he does not cheat. His prices are what we would pay in the market.

It is raining.

There is not much to see. We get out of the car once in a while and take foggy pictures of coffee cultivations on the terraced crags and small colorful clusters of houses in the profuse vegetation.



The trip back via Kingston turns out to be a torture; it is already night and the busy streets strewn with potholes.

The trip takes much longer than expected. After ten hours in the car we at last reach the marina. A glass of wine with lentil spaghetti and salad on *Silmaril* remedies the slightly marred mood about the weary journey a god deal.

**Monday, January 27.** Last preparations on the boat, shopping for the passage to Cuba and general farewells. We say goodbye to our new acquaintances Jill and Dug of the *Compañera*, Doris and Dennis, the American couple from Jackson Hole of the *Magic* and to our Swiss friends Jrmina and Erwin of the *Red Harlekin*.

Then we enjoy a sumptuous dinner à la Jamaica at the restaurant on the first floor in the marina.

**Tuesday, January 28.** Sailing day!

We leisurely get ready. A last brief visit to Charlie and his wife on the *Schwalbe* at the dock; they are on their way around the world. We had met them several times before and had fun talking to them exchanging experiences.



Renate and I pay a short visit to the Jamaican apple tree, a waxy fruit with little flavor but some juice.



Alex disconnects the cable (typical Caribbean installation) and we cast off. It is 10:00 A.M.



Leaving the marina causes no problems, obstructions are well marked or quite conspicuous.



Out of the bay there is little wind, but it soon freshens; we set sails and set course for Cuba.



Once again we are offshore and enjoy a peaceful first sailing day. We reef the sails for the night.

All is well until midnight when huge rain clouds become visible on the plotter.

Alex and Mike reduce sail once more in pelting rain. Our sense of direction is affected in the dark; it is

not the first time we encounter this situation. But we finally manage, the maneuver done, on course again. The weather calms down and we have to start the engine.

**Wednesday, January 29.**

A magnificent morning, splendid cloud pictures.



Cuba emerges at dawn. Mike fights with the flag.

A reddish fume hovers over Santiago de Cuba. Two giant chimneys spit poison into the sky.



What are we going to see in the marina? Hurricane "Sandy" caused major damage in this area. The entire complex shows its marks. Concrete stairs lead nowhere, huge holes gape along the pier, whole docks have disappeared.

We make fast alongside around

2 P.M. and wait for the clearing and settlement of the customs procedures.

A jovial and very fat doctor arrives together with a quiet diligent skinny customs officer. Mike translates; he speaks good Spanish. Renate has to present her medication. He does not even ask us. If he knew about the bags of stuff stacked in the shower cabinet that we carry!

The bar is open, we have our first Cuban mojito accompanied by earsplitting music, and observe the activities on the three-masted bark *Regina Maris* across the pier. The ship carries



obviously spoiled Dutch youths, many girls, who learn sailing and at the same time go to school; maybe the other way around. In front of the ship lies the *Folly* of Kerry and John, an English couple; they built the 40 foot Vanderstad themselves and have lived on her for the past fourteen years. It is the third time they are on their way around the world.

A Corsican boat is moored behind *Silmaril*. Renate and Mike greet them enthusiastically. They own a house on Corsica and love the island and its inhabitants.

Fortunately the bar closes early and no music disturbs our sleep. The night is very quiet.

**Thursday, January 30.** We ask for a taxi. An ancient Moskvitch without shock absorbers arrives with two drivers. Mike squeezes onto the front seat, the three of us climb into the back. A thigh fit for everyone!



We need to change money and receive CUC's (Pesos Convertibles) linked to the US dollar and the "regular" Pesos at an exchange rate of 1:24!!

We visit an exhibit of Cuban artifacts and souvenirs, where we find a nice collection of woodwork, jewelry, sandals, handbags and musical instruments. Many items are made of or with colorful seeds.

It is hot and we need a drink. A group of six musicians plays for us with abandon. A small establishment serves lunch on the



first floor of an old building. Alberto entertains the few guests. There is music everywhere.

The vehicles in this place! Simply unbelievable what is about in great numbers and all possible and impossible colors and shapes, all of them leaving a stinking trail of smoke. Private business is booming. It is too hot to walk; everybody uses some kind



of transportation, bike taxis . . .

. . . motorcycle taxis . . .



. . . horse carriages . . .

. . . Cocotaxis or public transportation, converted trucks, crammed full and no schedule. People just wait, climb in and hope to be able to get out in time at their destination.

And there are tourist attractions, brightly



polished old-timers, would be worth a fortune on the European market!

It goes without saying that the most modest vehicles are painstakingly cared for and continuously repaired.



Helmets are mandatory, the regulation strictly enforced.  
The "head buckets" are all antediluvian.

Mike needs a haircut. He patiently waits, while Renate and I watch the traffic and the dealings in the Plaza Céspedes. Alex takes off with the camera to catch pictures away from the tourists.



It's Mike's turn now, the result is perfect.



We meet again in the plaza and wander through small streets and alleys to our taxi.

The police is very present. Tourists with their cameras are not unconditionally tolerated! Am I in trouble? Not really, just an indignant look over the shoulder. It has been a long and very full day. We turn in early.



**Friday, January 31.** Alex and Mike take the DuoGen apart. The generator started to make aggravating wailing noises during the last hours. Something must be amiss. A new bearing should mend it. In the afternoon we take the small ferry *Bucanero* to the nearby island Granma opposite the marina, where the self-appointed guide Leandro shows us around.

A woman sells fish right by the landing pier. Looks comfortable!



Out in the bay the fishermen leave to set their nets. They receive a fixed salary whether they catch lots of fish or none at all.



The hurricane Sandy destroyed a number of houses on the island. The government has not payed any money so far. The people feel cheated and speak up about it.

We visit the school. The children are excited, they laugh and shout and move around while we talk to the teachers and ask them about their

situation. They claim that contributions from visitors (they suggest 5 CUCs per couple) fetch more than what the government pays. And they have so little, their office is literally empty. Nevertheless, the school is productive, the kids' artwork is displayed in every corner, masks for the performance of plays, pictures, animals and monsters made of papier-mâché, costumes hand-sewn with rags; a touching collection.



The pupils' uniforms are spotless. What a job for the mothers! Each class wears a tie of a different color according to the children's age.



The church on the hill is closed. It looks abandoned. One of our escorts explains that there is no electricity up here, but that the cable feeds the light into the church. His knowledge certainly does not reflect the competence of the teachers. They seem well educated and devoted to there job.

The island has a store where the food rations are handed out, sugar, flour, bread, oil, rice, soap, detergent. We could not find out, what exactly and how much for what period is assigned per person. But we are told that there is always one or the other missing. Prices in pesos for additional goods are incredibly low.

People must have unbelievably modest cash money.

Next to the "large" government store, there are small privately run ones, like this one here. The notes on the pink board announce what is to be had at the moment.

Everything shows the lack of money; the lush vegetation profuse in colors and shapes hides much of the poverty.



Our guide, Leonardo, takes us back to the house, where we will have dinner. There are fish, langustas and mussels in the kitchen.

We order six meals in order to feed all of us, including some of the "family".

While we are waiting for the food, we drink mojitos and enjoy the music of Leandro and his "uncle".



Two boys with their dogs float on a self-made raft of styrofoam and wood in front of the house. Another one flies a kite . . .



. . . or lovingly gives his dog a bath. Night falls. The table is set, loaded plates appear and we share with the "family". The food is



excellent and plenty. All of us have our fill.



The afternoon tour including food, drinks and music cost us a small fortune!!

We board a tiny boat in the dark, two boys row us ashore at the marina. They ask for money. Well, they would probably end up empty-handed, if we don't pay them.

**Saturday, February 1.** Renate and Mike are leaving today. The four of us let Leandro, Oscar and his cousin drive us to town in the 1954 Chevy. Mike squeezes in with the three on the front seat, the rest of us ride in the back.

The driver hunkers the horn by elegantly pulling the small chain above his hand on the wheel with the little finger!

In town, Alex and I go to the market to buy vegetables and fruit with Leandro, Oscar and the cousin drive Renate and Mike to the bus station to get



the tickets. We will meet again for lunch.

The food is good; Oscar takes a plate to the cousin in the car. He does not want to leave his Chevy unattended.

It's time to say goodbye.

They take our picture behind the precious vehicle.

It is always sad when a great crew is leaving. We spent delightful and eventful weeks together.

Alex and I need to stock up on provisions, the three "drivers" will meet us shortly in the Plaza Céspedes.



We find quite a good supply in the CUCs store and sit at the curb with our cartons and wait. There is much to see, all sorts of passers-by and vehicles.

He peddles ice-cream.



She sells peanuts in tiny hand-crafted newspaper cornets mounted on a stick.



She will probably go out tonight and urgently needs something from the neighborhood store across the street. Everyday life all around us and we wait.

Once in a while we ask ourselves a bit worried, where the three "drivers" wait for us, if at all. And we are again fascinated by all those pictures, colors and smells.

They also wait.



She met a friend and talks at the top of her voice.



He is looking for reusable or sellable things, obviously pursuing a respectable occupation judging from his very clean clothes.



We wait while life passes by, stinking, foggy and loud.



After two hours, we worry how we will get back to the marina. And suddenly there is Oscar on a motorcycle taxi; he needs money to pay the driver!

Back in the marina, they again need money, this time for the little daughter who wants milk. That's enough. I'm sure Mike and Renate paid them the trip to the bus station and we just did the same and they have the guts to ask for more. I give them a piece of my mind. Oh no, no money, they exclaim horrified. Just canned goods or soap. There are three little bottles of shampoo in my handbag. I give them to Leonardo to share. He puts them quickly in his pocket with an impertinent grin. That makes me sad. My bad conscience about our great wealth compared with what they have renders me helpless and all too ready to give money. That I can accept; it is my problem. But selfishness gets my hackles up. Leonardo will not get the used phone from us as promised, someone else will have it, when we are back from Switzerland.

Later in the evening Alex and I go get the laundry at Rosa's, although we will only leave on Monday and not tomorrow as planned. She thanks us profusely and declares that she will directly go out to buy oil and rice for the girls.

**Sunday, February 2.** We get *Silmaril* ready for departure tomorrow, which means rearranging our living quarters for just the two of us.

We stroll over to Kerry and John, talk a bit and decide to go for a walk through the village in the evening and eat in the local eatery.

As we pass Rosa's house later on, we find her husband roasting an entire pig.



How must I understand the story of oil and rice? Was this again a sentimental exaggeration?

It's conceivable if they get the better of tourists, but they could at least spare me the heart-rending lies.

In the nearby park the view over the entire bay is great. We enjoy the spectacular sunset and look forward to a simple meal among locals.

**Monday, February 3.** We cast off. The DuoGen makes very funny noises. We slow down, bob up and down a bit in the bay and discuss the situation. It's a grinding sound, ominous, it's too risky to leave. Back at the pier, Alex takes the generator apart and sure enough a cable is almost worn through. After a somewhat lengthy exercise requiring two strong hands and a few nimble fingers in a very awkward posture the damage is repaired.



**Tuesday, February 4.**

We say again goodbye to Kerry and John. The Corsicans intend to cast off shortly. We will see them later on.

The weather is great and with good wind we pass the island Granma and head out of the bay to the open water.

We hoist the parasailor and make rapid progress. During the evening and early night we sail again under main and genoa. Then the wind dies and we have to start the engine. The diesel fumes in the cockpit are aggravating, the noise nerve wracking. We both sleep little.

Thank goodness the sky is a soothing sight. The Southern Cross hovers over the horizon, Venus spills its bright light on the sparkling water, the moon, although only in its first quarter, fades out many stars, but Orion and the Greater Bear move clearly visible along their celestial path.

In the morning of **Wednesday, February 5**, we were beat. And there is no wind, the motor although usually considered rather quiet is roaring in our tired ears!

The coast is bleak, hardly any homes.

Just a short stretch away from the coast, the ocean floor drops to 7000m; it's supposed to be the steepest coast in the world.

What a feeling!

In the vicinity of Baya Portillo and Cabo Purgatorio a large school of dolphins accompanies us.

They perform a real ballet. One very bulky one swims right in front of the bow and slaps its tail on the water!

The motor runs all morning. Finally we get a glimpse of the Lighthouse of Cabo Cruz. The entrance through the reef into calm water in front of the village is a bit tricky. We have to sail a wide circle to the first marker. Inside we approach the village to about 3m depth and drop the anchor between the reef and the mangroves around 5 P.M. We are glad to have arrived safely. There are no waves in here, the water crystal clear, a beautiful anchorage.

We sleep like logs.

### **Thursday, February 6.**

We wake up to the boom of fishing boats, rusty affairs heading out to sea.

Our guide book suggests a visit to the friendly village. Alex inflates the dinghy and we start. Where can we tie up?

Fishermen on shore just wave us away. We reach a small wooden jetty; it looks stable enough to land.



Many boats are in the water close to the shore or rest on wooden structures.

We look forward to a pleasant stroll. Carrying two trash bags, 2 diesel cans and our papers at the ready, we walk to the Guardia Frontera.

With disdainful gestures we are led to understand that there is nothing to have here, no garbage disposal, no diesel, no stamp for our papers. They just keep repeating Cienfuegos!

That is indeed our destination. But the unfriendliness is shocking. Our guide book praises the village for its friendly and open-minded inhabitants. We see nothing of the kind. Nobody greets us, the restaurant is open, but all we hear is nada, nada! We cannot even buy a drink. What is the matter? Behind our backs we

hear: Americanos! It is such a pity that we do not speak Spanish. We might have received answers to our many questions.



Despite the chilly reception, we enjoy watching the rooster and his well-camouflaged hen.

We return to the boat disappointed and a bit depressed.

Where are the Corsicans? We expected to meet them here.

**Friday, February 7.** We get up early; our next anchorage is about eight hours sailing away. Dennis had informed us over the radio of a good entrance into the reef at Cayo Vela.

On the way, there is a barracuda on the fishing line twice. They both free themselves. The beasts have impressive teeth and fight vigorously. We are glad not to be tempted to haul them on board. The third one on the hook is a bonito. We bring it in with great pleasure, a scrumptious dinner.

The entrance to the reef at Cayo Vela is indeed easy to find and wide. We drop the anchor, but notice soon that we are far too close to the reef. The anchor is weighed and dropped once more in the middle of the laguna at about 13m depth. With 50m of chain out we feel perfectly safe.

Dinner is delicious, pelicans swim close to the boat . . .



. . . and another delightful sunset!



**Saturday, February 8.** Up and away to Cayo Grande. Among the many Cayos, small uninhabited islands surrounded by mangroves, the water lies before us like on a lake, no swell, only little wind waves. Around 3 P.M. we drop anchor, we had managed the entrance without difficulty.



The color of the water indicates the shallow spots . . .

. . . and the truly dangerous obstacle is perfectly marked thanks to the birds.

Entering reefs and anchoring inside in such shallow surroundings becomes routine after a while and we enjoy being a team of one opinion! We relax, eat and enjoy the fantastic evening sky. I can never get enough of such cloudscapes.



**Sunday, February 9.** Resting day. We do little chores. Alex needs to reattach the antenna at the backstay. The cable ties have become brittle and fly off each time the dynema bridle is under tension. The task is easily performed with little wind and no waves.

I crank up the boom with Alex sitting on it and he can do the job.

Meanwhile I do the washing. The water maker and the engine run for three hours and I can rid a collection of t-shirts and underwear from salt water and sweat.

Chores completed, we take a tour in the dinghy along the mangroves and out to the small part of the chimney of a wreck that emerges from the water.



*Silmaril* peacefully rides at anchor.

**Monday, February 10.** The wind blows steadily in the morning and dies later on according to prognosis, so we get up early.



At 7 A.M. Alex takes up the anchor. It is full of grey mud, a pretty shell embedded in it. That one comes along for sure. As soon as we are out of the reef we set sails and off we go. Again conditions are lake-like, average speed of 7kts under a sky spoiling us with bizarre cloud pictures.



Things are cozy on board. But suddenly we both run, a fish is on the hook, get the bucket and the net, and Alex heaves a choice dinner on board.



We take bearings of Cayo Algodón Grande.

The entrance to the reef is not simple. With our 2m draft we need to approach the silted areas extra carefully. Alex has downloaded GoogleEarth files, they show the shallow spots very nicely, so we encounter no problems. The anchor hits the muddy ground and we are perfectly situated in about 4m depth.



Just before sunset two fishing boats sail into the bay. They drop anchor close together. The fishermen cook and sleep on their boats. We quite like a bit of "company", although they do not pay attention to us at all.

Dinner is soon on the table, mackerel filets on Swiss chard (or something like it) and malanga, a kind of yam.



The tuber is somewhat slimy, requires long slow cooking and its taste is different from potatoes. I like to experiment with local vegetables, but the results are not always overwhelming.

Peace and quiet all around us. The fishermen are very discrete, just an unintelligible word reaches our ears once in a while. Deep silence enhances the wonderful solitude.



Where are the Corsicans? We cannot reach them by radio and feel a little uneasy.

I continue my tale in the second report on our trip from Algodón Grande to Havana.