

**2nd Report: Cayo Algodón Grande**  
**21°05'.9N 78°44'.5W**  
**Havana**  
**23°05'.0N 82°30'.1W**  
**January 12 to March 12, 2014**

**Route Overview**



Cayo Algodón Grande - Cayo Cuervo - Alcatracito - Cienfuegos -Cayo  
Grano del Este - Cayo Largo - Canal del Rosario - Punta del Este -  
Caleta Puerto Francés - Maria la Gorda - Havana

**Tuesday, February 11.** We stay put in the wide bay of Cayo Algodón Grande and make a few phone calls about the apartment in Schinznach. Later on we want to explore the island. A dinghy canal is supposed to run to the northern beach. During breakfast we hear voices: the Corsicans. What a wonderful surprise! André, Stella and Michèle greet us joyously. They have arrived last night, but did not dare pass through the reef in the dark and dropped anchor just outside the entrance to the laguna.



Together we go looking for the dinghy canal to the beach. They search here, we search there and after a few futile attempts in very shallow water and dead mangroves, the canal opens before us; carefully both dinghies follow the deepest rut in the muddy seabed and finally reach the decrepit landing, a few sunken piles, some stone slabs.

We plod our way through the mud to firm ground among the trees. Vegetation like back home, Stella remarks, then an immense sandy beach, all to ourselves, not a soul far and wide.



A few scattered ruins of the abandoned construction site for a hotel stick out of the sand, decaying concrete walls already half covered with some growth, two rows of rotting piles in the water.

Stella, Michèle and I find all kinds of flotsam, corals in many shapes, shells, sea grass, even bottles. We collect with ardor.

Stella and Michèle compose still lives with their collection.

The men go swimming.

There is not enough water for Alex to swim!

The sand is full of the footprints of large iguanas. They are hiding among the palm trees and pines.



In the evening the three Corsicans come over on *Silmaril* for a drink before we move to their *Nilena-Vagabondu* where André serves a delicious barracuda and vegetable stew.

The sky is on fire.

**Wednesday, February 12.** Our friends are leaving today. They have to find provisions and get closer to civilization, since the women will soon return home.

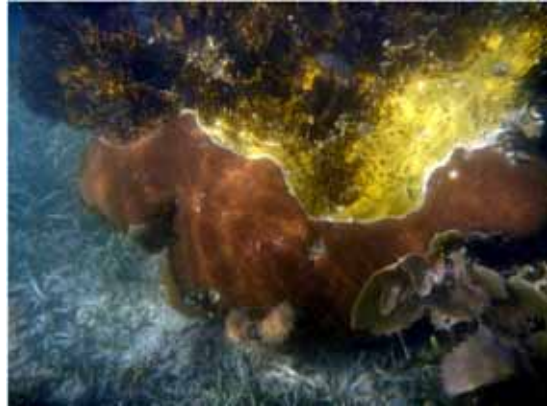
We stay here.

There is a coral head just outside the bay and Alex is anxious to catch lobsters.

We find the place, we think; but no luck, the beasts are just too well hidden.

However, the underwater pictures turn out very nicely.





What a feast for our eyes!

A small fishing boat arrives: get fish? get langustas? No, nada! The four men laugh.



One of them jumps in, dives and emerges with two huge lobsters.

With the second dive he presents a small shark!

We tell them with hands and feet that we will buy the lobsters.

Back on *Silmaril* we get the money and a few small gifts and chug over to their boat. They sell us two monsters and accept the bag of gifts, salt, pencils, nail polish for "los niños y mujeres" with great pleasure.

They remain for the night, make a fire on the tiny beach and prepare their meal. Late at night we see small lights where they probably put their mattresses and go to sleep.

Alex "dissects" the monsters and grills the tails. They are so big that we get two meals out of them.



**Thursday, February 13.** In a few days we will meet Gerda and Pé in Cienfuegos. But the weather does not allow us to start, fat grey clouds gather over the bay, thunder rumbles. We stay put. The squall passes beyond the bay, but drizzle obscures the view during the entire day, only a hole in the clouds here and there. The fishermen have all departed.

**Friday, February 14.** Alex is up very early. The moon is still in the sky, passing clouds keep covering its face. But the weather has improved. Around 9 A.M. we weigh anchor and set course for Cayo Cuervo. The log is not working. Alex needs to dive. The wind drifts *Silmaril* so fast that I have to attach a line along the boat, so that he can hold on. Equipped with the toothbrush earmarked for the purpose, he jumps in, a procedure quite familiar. The tasks successfully completed, we sail west in good wind. The entrance to Cayo Cuervo lies in the West of the island, but as we approach from the East we already see from far away tall masts tower over the mangroves.





Before we get to the entrance, we understand what belongs to the tall masts. Large fishing boats appear, all of them of a similar build with trawl nets on long booms. Some of them are fishing, others are getting ready, still moored in the bay. We are not the only sailors. Three other boats lie at anchor. The moon rises early. Alex cooks the Valentine dinner. We enjoy a peaceful cozy evening with a game of Rummicup.



**Saturday, February 15.** Our next-boat neighbor is also up!

We are looking forward to a nice day, but the weather worsens rapidly. A massive dark cloud bank rolls over us. There is almost no wind, a bad sign.



But soon enough the sky clears up and we enjoy a very beautiful day.

Cayo Cuervo consists of a series of small islands and we decide to explore some of them by dinghy.

Tide and all-prevailing currents shape incessantly changing sandbanks, above and below water level. Dead corals are washed ashore . . .



. . . crabs shovel their holes free.

Alex takes many pictures. The underwater landscape under the dinghy is so close, the water so clear that I see colors and shapes perfectly from above.



There are fish as well, but only small ones in the shallow water.

We have drifted far away from *Silmaril* lured by the beauty of the million things to see and it takes quite a while until we are back "home" with our low-powered old outboard.

**Sunday, February 16.** We leave Cayo Cuervo at sunrise. The plan is to anchor in front of a small island after the passage through Canal Boca Grande and continue toward Cienfuegos in the evening.

The New Zealanders, whom we have met already in Santiago, will start in the afternoon and sail non-stop.

The log does not work again! and out of the bay the waves are too tall to risk diving. Alex dismantles the log

from inside and gets rid of hundreds of minuscule worms, while I take *Silmaril* on many rounds in the bay. We finally leave, set the sails and make good headway.

Approaching the Canal Boca Grande we take the sails down. *Silmaril* runs very close-hauled, so there is little space in the shallow passage for maneuvers. The reefs



all around us do impress us!

Alex catches another mackerel.



We reach our anchorage around midday and chug with great precaution toward a depth of about 5m. Many coral heads rise from the seabed almost to the surface way out in deep water.

Gently drifting at anchor, we eat the fish, go for a swim and relax.





At sundown we weigh anchor and are on our way to Cienfuegos. The wind freshens and soon we reef the main sail and shorten the genoa to about one quarter. The wind blows steadily with 18kts to 20kts until midnight; the waves roll on athwartship, a strenuous course.

**Monday, February 17.** At dawn I make porridge. The warm food in our stomachs revives are somewhat bruised spirits. The wind keeps dying, we reef and furl, shake out the reef and unfurl, over and over again in seemingly never-ending succession. We try hard to avoid starting the engine.

The southern coast is close now. In a few hours we will be in Cienfuegos. The lighthouse has been visible for some time. All of a sudden crackling on the radio and a voice: sailing vessel *Sark*! It's Elsa and Jaap, our Dutch friends. We have not herd from them in weeks and we meet again just by chance. What a pleasure!



The bay is wide and deep, the water shallow. A wreck warns us against negligence. Many pelicans fly or float around us.

As we sail into the bay of Cienfuegos, we pass the peninsula with its crazy buildings of old more prosperous times and follow the well marked waterway toward the Marina Merlin.



The marina is pretty large, many boats at the docks and at anchor. We moore *Silmaril* along the diesel dock right behind *Pussy Cat*, the catamaran of Ursi and Max Flury. They are away on a visit to Havana.



To meet Elsa and Jaap again is so wonderful. Jrmina and Erwin are also at anchor. We have not seen that many Swiss boats in one place in a long time.

**Tuesday, February 18.** Before we will be at anchor tomorrow, we tidy the boat and vacuum every nook and cranny. It is very hot and I don't feel well. With the expert help of Jrmina and Erwin, the situation is soon under control and in the evening the four of us go into town for dinner at the small restaurant Lobo.

**Wednesday, February 19.** Our friends Gerda and Pé will arrive tomorrow. There is work to do for their reception.

And there is another Swiss boat in the marina, the *Galatea II*. Nagels had told us about the owner, Georg Herzberg. He and his crew Heinz Schläfer accompany us to dinner in town in the evening. They are both medical doctors and we discuss heart problems, interesting and reassuring.

**Thursday, February 20.** Our guests are supposed to arrive around 5 P.M. with a rental car. We still work on preparing *Silmaril* for their visit, making the bed, emptying the cabinets.

At 4:30 P.M. we climb into the dinghy and head for the jetty. Gerda and Pé had arrived early, but we did not hear their shouts out on the water.

Gerda packs a bag with the basics for their first night on board at anchor. We will have a berth in the marina tomorrow,



where it will be easier to get the larger luggage on board.

We have dinner in the Lobo again.

The setting sun enchants the evening sky.



**Friday, February 21.** After a peaceful night, we move to the assigned berth and load the luggage. Gerda and Pé have the car for three more days and we will drive to Trinidad tomorrow.

Alex and Pé take our bikes to the mechanic in a private home to have him replace the broken spokes. I sort the laundry and bring it to the marina office. It will be ready when we get back. Then it is time for a stroll in town. On the way along the water we pass a number of old manor houses surrounded by large parks. Downtown people live in old buildings, decrepit but still impressive, hardly any modern houses in view.



The pedestrian zone is teeming with people.

Here, money can buy everything, but collecting cans, newspapers and plastic bags from the waste baskets seems a normal occupation.

"Recycling" à la Cubana?



The market offers a wide variety of vegetables and fruit. Prices are minimal and mostly marked. Tubers are on sale of various shapes, colors and sizes, but no potatoes. They are grown, but only sold on the black market. The entire crop is reserved for the hotels. They insist in spoiling their guests with French fries and mashed potatoes. The government obviously supports them.



The stroll through town was tiring and the walking distance to the marina is a bit long. We go back on two Bicitaxis. The nearby hotel offers piglet on a spit and a large buffet on Friday evenings in the garden. We enjoy a few peaceful hours with good food and great live music.



**Saturday, February 22.** We start around 10 A.M. heading for Trinidad. Outside Cienfuegos, old houses border the streets. Many of them are of similar style and rather well kept. Also apartment blocks



appear. The dwelling units must be tiny. Further away from the town in more rural areas, we come along small farms, often far between or in small groups.

Dwelling space is narrow here as well, but in Cuban climate people spend much time outside.

Means of transport are also different outside the city. Cars are scarce, people drive horse wagons . . .



. . . or ride.

We stop for a picnic and witness a weird story.



Two women and a small girl suddenly shout and gesticulate wildly by their car near us. We have no clue what is going on. A fisherman appears, they mention a "bolsa negra con piedras", a black bag with rocks. Our Spanish is very poor unfortunately. Too bad, we would have loved to understand the agitation.

We continue on our way and reach Trinidad toward midday. The town is very colorful, many houses renovated and neat. Tourists visit Trinidad in droves. A trip to Cuba without a stop in Trinidad is simply unimaginable.

Despite the outdoor museum impression of the place, we like it a lot.



We soon find a pleasant Casa Particular, die Casa Blue Media Luna. The owner, Toni, is genial and speaks good English. He has two rooms with a shower each and offers to cook our meals. We deposit our luggage and go for a walk through the market. The souvenirs are a bit different from those in Cienfuegos. Women work at many stands, they embroider table cloths and napkins, blouses and shirts, they crochet tops or make small purses using the oval metal openers of beer cans. Men offer their wood work or musical instruments. Jewelry made from a great variety of seeds and shells are on display and CDs of course. The market is huge and visited by large crowds. But the small lizards are not afraid of them.



And there is music everywhere, indoors and outside in streets and plazas. Tired after an energetic game of football, the two boys relax to the music of the old man.

Across the street, he reads and hopes for someone to buy his bananas or the one coconut.



After dinner at Toni's, we return to the city center and enjoy wonderful music.

**Sunday, February 23.** Alex and I saunter about the place. Leaning on a corner we observe what is going on in the narrow street.

A horse wagon is loaded with milk in plastic bottles. The farmer carries the full bottle into the house and returns with the empty bottle and a bucket full of pig food.



When I was a little girl, our milkman also arrived at our door, but he drove an electro cart and ladled the milk into our milk can. He did not collect pig food, we had a compost pile for the garden.

Everyone needs to earn a living. He rents himself . . .

. . . and his donkey for a souvenir picture.

Later on we drive to a famous waterfall. It takes a forty-minute walk through an impressive gorge to reach the fall where we can swim.



We pass a cliff full of nests of wild bees. Thousands of honeycombs cover the rock. A plate warns against aggressive bees when loud voices excites them! We converse in whispers and continue on our way.

I revel in the lush vegetation and observe small details, tree bark, snails on branches, butterflies and bugs. There are so many things to give me pleasure.

At the waterfall we change into our swimsuits.

Getting in and out is not exactly easy, but the refreshing water is perfect.



We take back roads to return to Trinidad. Some of them are rugged dirt roads. But Pé manages every difficulty with spirit.

Our plan to drive up to the antenna high up on the hill with a great view over the town is thwarted. The place is not accessible for private cars. No panorama picture of Trinidad!

After dinner, again at Toni's, we spend a delightful evening in a small bar, where the band Furia Latina is playing. We were carried away by those great musicians and talented dancers.



**Monday, February 24.**



We take leave of Toni and his helper. Pé hugs the lady who watched our car parked next to her window and we are on our way back to Cienfuegos.

At a beach we stop for lunch, walk along the water in white sand and delight in caught

fish or tiny hermit crabs among the washed up seagrass, according to ones inclination (guess whose!).



In Cienfuegos we go shopping, return the car and go for dinner at the Campesino.

**Tuesday, February 25.** Last preparations before the departure with Silmaril. Alex and Pé get the bicycles, Gerda and I complete the shopping. The boat needs to get ready.

**Wednesday, February 26.** We cast off at 8:15 A.M. The exit is treacherous. A large sandbank must be circumnavigated, then a tanker moves in our direction and the log does not function! Past the impediments I heave to and despite the waves close to the open water, Alex dives armed with the toothbrush. He succeeds, the log works and he climbs back onboard. After a wonderful day we reach the anchorage in front of the imposing lighthouse of Cayo Guano del Este. The maneuver takes some time before we drop anchor in a good spot.

Then we relax, enjoy a nice dinner . . .



. . . and our first sunset at anchor together.

**Thursday, February 27.** The anchor comes up around 9 A.M. and we aim at Cayo Largo. The weather is fine, no waves, but consequently little wind. The boys fish and watch the line.



Twice a barracuda swallows the hook, but both can free themselves. good riddance!

The third kind is welcome.



The entrance to the marina in Cayo Largo is dredged. We follow the markers extra carefully. To our left and right herons stand in the shallow water, its color suggests hidden dangers very close by.

I navigate slowly and with tense concentration. Such entrances still worry me. The mooring maneuver does not come off smoothly. The floating jetties are short and do not have cleats in the middle. Therefore, our tried and trusted method of driving into a line does not work. But after a while *Silmaril* is successfully moored and we start cooking our dinner.



**Friday, February 28.** Gerda and Pé will leave us here, so we wander to the airport to find out the possibilities for their flight. On the way we pass trees and bushes totally overgrown with yellow and withered brown growth that we have seen in many places. Unfortunately I still do not know its name.



Later we visit the turtle farm behind the marina.



There are several concrete basins for the turtles of various ages they raise here. The project is supposed to show gratifying results.

All the released animals are banded and the beaches where the females lay their eggs are constantly watched to prevent poachers to get them.

Despite their effort, the helpers of the project still find remains of butchered animals!



The stroll through the place is a bit depressing. The bar in the marina serves a selection of simple dishes. A bit further back we find a bungalow hotel with a restaurant. It is not really busy. The store for the sailors offers a very limited choice of goods. There is bread, a few cans, milk, water and alcohol. Next to the cashier lie a few tomatoes, the refrigerator contains a carton of butter portions and a huge sausage. At the back of the store stands a half-full shelf with toilet paper, a few bottles of shampoo and half a dozen bars of soap. The sanitary facilities are pitiful. Not one of the showers functions properly. Without the protection of plastic bags for the clothes and the toilet bag they inevitably get drenched. There are no lights and the drinking water on the jetties stinks like rotten eggs.

The island is only meant for tourists to stay in the hotels at the beach far away. They are well equipped. We did not go there. All the employees, even the vendors of souvenirs at the entrance to the marina, live and work here for only one month, then go back to their homes and another job, a desolate arrangement and hard to believe for everyone who cares to understand their situation. Only the police, the customs people and the researchers of the turtle station are here for longer periods. They are probably government employees and considered more loyal than simple workers.

**Saturday, March 1.** We don't stay here any longer. Cayo Rosario is a few hours to the west, where we will spend two days at anchor.

We pass the *Star Flyer*, a beautiful four-master, riding at anchor in somewhat deeper water away from the shore. It has tourists on board.

We reach our destination around 5 P.M. and navigate with great care along the depth contours into the passage between Cayo Cantiles to the west and Cayo Rosario to the East. The water is very shallow; on and off the depth finder shows 2.5m under the keel of 2m! With patience and close observance of the display we arrive at the northeastern tip of Cayo Rosario, where we find good



anchorage in deeper water pretty close to the shore. The plotter shows the 2m line outside of *Silmaril*, but that does not matter, the depth finder cannot be wrong. We drop anchor, drive backwards into the chain and make sure that the boat does not drift.



Alex snorkels to make sure, where the silted shore actually starts its steep ascent.



Everything is O.K. *Silmaril* is about 30m away from the shallow bank and about 100m from the shore, plenty of water around us, even if the wind should shift in the night.

A scrumptious dinner and an enchanting nightfall guarantee a good sleep.



**Sunday, March 2.** We decide to visit the Microestación Biologica on Cayo Cantiles. The anchor comes up and we take *Silmaril* west, over toward the small beach

a bit north of the station, where we can comfortably land with the dinghy.

The station is manned to observe the population of endemic crocodiles and the non-native monkeys. It consists of a small hut, a few solar panels on the ground, an antenna and a row boat with an outboard engine moored in the tiny landing between craggy rocks.

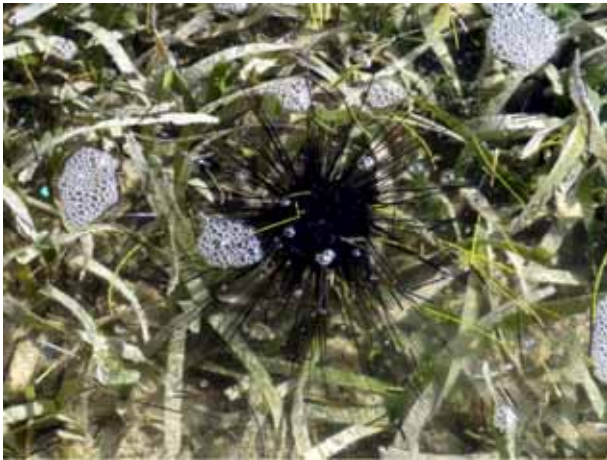
Three men live here, take care of the project's tasks, sell lobsters against government regulations and are relieved after a month on the island.

One of them seems to be the head of the group. He proposes to take us on a walk to the laguna in the interior of the cayo. The other two will go out with the boat and catch lobsters for us to buy.

The walk turns out to be pretty strenuous. We walk in a green tunnel on hardly overgrown volcanic rock to the shore on the west side of the cayo and continue along the water on very sharp washed-out cliffs and search for a passable path on the swampy ground to the lagoon.



There is so much to see! Our guide points out a multitude of creatures under and above the water level which we would never have noticed on our own: urchins and snails are familiar . . .



. . . but this beast? I can only guess: a sort of naked water snail?

And where are the crocodiles and the monkeys?

The lagoon has little water, the crocodiles "emigrated" to the western shore further north on the island.

We only see the foot marks of a crocodile in the desiccated muddy ground of the laguna.  
The monkeys live in the dense forest in the interior of the island. They are very shy and come to the station only at night, where they find food on a sort of table, special pellets, provided by the rangers. What is the purpose of the project? Our guide has no answer to our question.  
Jutias live on all the islands in the region. They are nocturnal rodents, which we don't see either, of course.



Excrements all over prove their presence. The small "beans" enhance many a natural still life!

After our walk we wait for the return of the two lobster catchers. The station has lately received two



pigs, a rooster and a hen. Pé makes friends with the bristly beasts. We assume that the animals are meant to enrich the men's fish and lobster diet. However, the present crew cannot profit yet, the animals are too young to reproduce!

Behind the cottage a cage with a messenger pigeon hangs in the tree. The poor bird has little space. When the radio connection fails, what we assume to happen often, it is freed, flies to the next larger island with better facilities and delivers a letter. The head ranger told us the story with an unsmiling face.



The two lobster catchers are back, we buy lobster tails, hand over a plastic bag with small gifts, shower gel, pencils, erasers, sharpeners and three cans of beer. They accept with pleasure, but refuse to have pictures taken with the lobster tails in view.

*Silmaril* sways gently in the wind and waits for our return.

Gerda navigates back to the anchorage. Pé and Alex grill the lobster tails and I prepare the side dishes.



**Tuesday, March 3.** An adventure is in store for us: we chug along the shore toward the southern tip of the island in the dinghy. A large white beach stretches along the eastern side, which we want to visit.

We have difficulties to round the southern tip in the dinghy, the water is shallow, the seabed rocky, so we land at a tiny beach among the mangroves.



The place is not ideal; a group of rays lies on the muddy and almost bottomless ground and seems to begrudge us our landing. They advance on our naked feet. But a few jerky movements put them to flight.

Our walk toward the beach is fascinating, expanses of white sand among the mangroves sprinkled with clusters of small bushes and a great variety of collectibles: shells, corals, twigs. A network of iguanas' foot prints cover the ground. Many conchs move slowly in the shallow water, a slow-motion spectacle to behold.



We cannot reach the large sandy beach, but the obstructing rocks in front of it offer a good place to swim and snorkel and to enjoy the colorful underwater world.

Just behind our resting place we catch a glimpse of a small iguana taking a sun bath on the warm rocks.



On our way back in the dinghy we discover the *Sark*. Elsa and Jaap had announced their intention to sail to Cayo Rosario. And they just turned into the entrance to the canal. We are so happy to introduce our dear friends from Holland to Gerda and Pé.



**Tuesday, March 4.** Before we leave to return to Cayo Largo we drink coffee with Elsa and Jaap on their *Sark*, just like in the good old days in Curaçao, about 10:30 A.M. according to time-honored Dutch custom!

Our Dutch friends are on their way to Havana. We will follow them, when Gerda and Pé have left us.



Pé takes the helm for the return trip, full concentration, cigar included. Unfortunately the wind is not in our favor. Tacking all the way back is tedious business.

Outside the marina in Cayo Largo we drop anchor for the last time with Gerda and Pé on board. The *Rafiki* is close to us. Her owners, Marlene and Lud and their crew are friends of Elsa's and Jaap's. We know them by hearsay. Lud swims over and drinks a beer with us. He is interested in my yogurt production he has heard of. I promise to deliver a portion of ferment and the step-by-step instruction.



**Wednesday, March 5.** During breakfast, Pé declares to make a deal with Lud, yogurt ferment for a pack of cigarettes. And sure enough, he packs his offer from my stock into a watertight plastic container, ties it around his waist and swims over.



Transport and transaction are successful, everybody is happy.

After Pé's expedition to the *Rafiki*, we board the dinghy and head to the reef for a last snorkeling experience before their departure tomorrow.

What an underwater seascape! The globefish on the right is almost perfectly camouflaged.



But the school of small silver fish sparkles in the sunlight.



There is still much to do before the departure of the two. We return to the boat, weigh anchor and proceed to the marina. Gerda does the packing, we eat in the restaurant, the fish is dry, the wine ice cold and sour. Our last evening together is not really a culinary highlight. Too bad.

**Thursday, March 6.** We get up before 6 A.M. The bus to the airport will leave in half an hour. Gerda and Pé plan to stay in Havana for a few days, but we will hardly be able to arrive with *Silmaril* before they return to

Switzerland. So, this is goodbye at the bus stop.

Alex and I are just back on the boat when Gerda comes running, where is her camera? We search everywhere to no avail. She takes off running again and Alex starts to get the boat ready to leave. And what lies there on deck, drenched by the rain during the night? Fortunately the camera is tucked into a case. We run, catch a bus by chance and find Pé in the deserted entrance hall - all the passengers are at the gate already - where he has to hand in his pocket knife for the crew to keep safe during the flight. What a coincidence, what luck!

Later on we hear that the camera survived the wet night on deck unharmed.

We had planned to leave today and follow Elsa and Jaap as soon as possible. But the weather forecast for the night announces rain and lots of wind. We stay till tomorrow.

**Friday, March 7.** At 8 A.M. we cast off. The sun is not out yet.

We want to leave the waterway and get close to *Rafiki* at anchor to say goodbye. But Marlene is already in the dinghy and speeds toward us, throws a USB stick in a plastic bag in the cockpit loaded with the tracks of their routes, a very welcome thank you present for the yogurt ferment.



The log is not working again! The well rehearsed maneuver with the rope and the toothbrush works well despite the choppy waves.

After many hours we reach Cayo Rosario, the first anchorage on our voyage to Havana. The wind on the nose has forced us to sail long tacks away from the direct route and back again.

The little fishing boat of the Microestación is out catching lobsters. I navigate close to it and drop anchor.

The diver is already at work. Alex swims over and observes what happens under water. A large crate stands upside down on the ground; it is raised on



short legs. The diver lifts it up and dozens of lobsters fly in all directions or try at least. They obviously are attracted by leftovers the men put under the crate and gorge themselves until the diver catches them.

Before the second dive, Alex climbs into their boat and "talks" to them.



We return to our old anchorage and soon the two lobster catchers arrive. We buy two tails and hand over a bag with three small knives and three caps with the money. They accept happily grinning. Their unconcealed pleasure is nice but also mortifying.

In the diminishing light of the spectacular sunset, Alex grills the tails while we sip a sundowner to Raymond's recipe: orange juice, rum and a slight veil of grated nutmeg from Grenada. We enjoy the peace and quiet of a perfect evening.

Elsa and Jaap are at Punta del Este at anchor. We follow after them tomorrow.



**Saturday, March 8.** The wind veered to northeast during the night, we take up the anchor and sail in calm water along the Archipelago de los Canarreos to Punta del Este, the anchorage is wide open to the south behind the reef at the southern tip of the Isla de la Juventud. The approach makes me nervous, reef all around, but the entrance proves to be wider than feared. We drop anchor in about 6m depth facing a radar dome on the shore. Night is falling already. Before we go to sleep for a few hours, I study the location of the white waves that indicate the reef. I want to be able to recognize the bearing without the plotter in the small hours tomorrow.

**Sunday, March 9.** We rise at 3 A.M., weigh anchor at 4. I deeply dislike such exercises. But the exit between the white strips in the light of the star-bright sky lies clearly ahead. With our four eyes, the bearing compass and last night's track on the plotter we find the exit without mishap and my poor heart slows down to a normal beat.

We are too lazy to hoist the parasailor, set the sails butterfly fashion, main to starboard, genoa to port, and head for Maria la Gorda, gently pitching and tossing before the wind.

In the wide bay of Caleta Puerto Francés, almost at the end of the southwestern coast of the Isla



de la Juventud, we find a perfect anchorage. Snorkeling is not very exciting, although the water looks great, beautiful shades of turquoise, but it is murky below.

A cruiser disembarks its passengers for a dive somewhat outside the bay.

They might see more.

We hear on the radio that Elsa and Jaap experienced aggravating days in the harbor of Siguanea in the bay northwest of us. They will tell us later. Now they are on their way to Maria la Gorda, where they will wait for us.



The wind does not die down in the afternoon as forecast and we decide to leave around 4 P.M. and set course for Maria la Gorda.

During the night the wind dies down after all and *Silmaril* chugs on with or without the engine running. We both sleep in the cockpit. The Southern Cross hovers above the horizon marvelously bright. All of a sudden a flying fish plops on my chest, I cry out panic-stricken! The little guy is no longer than my hand and of a gorgeous blue. I quickly toss him back into the water.

**Monday, March 10.** At 7 A.M. the sun is up. I cook porridge yet again. It tastes wonderful after a night with little sleep.



Soon enough the sun is scorching. Alex needs a shade reading in the cockpit. We hang up the coverlet from the aft cabin, an improvised sunscreen.

We arrive in the bay of Maria la Gorda toward 11 A.M. *Sark* is moored at a buoy. We take one close to them and greet Elsa and Jaap waving wildly. Alex and Jaap take the dinghy and go ashore to take care of the ever recurrent paperwork.



A bit later than the customary Dutch hour we drink coffee at 11:30 A.M. on *Sark* after the guys have returned.

We go out for dinner and hear the incredible story of their adventure in Siguaneya: running aground in the dredged entrance to the harbor with a guaranteed depth, an uncomfortable night in the heeling boat, at first no help the next day, then an unspeakably complicated maneuver with a diving boat and exorbitant charges. Thanks to Jaap's tough bargaining with the head of the hotel and a few hints at publishing the miserable organization and the wrong statements of the depth, they can leave on the third day without paying a cent.



We finally discuss the remaining miles of the trip to Havana.

The departure is planned for 4 A.M. in order to sail round notorious Cabo San Antonio in favorable weather and to arrive in Havana on Wednesday. The forecast for Thursday is bad. A northerly

with lots of wind and rain storms is heading for Havana.

Shortly after sundown we return to our boats and get ready for the early start.

**Tuesday, March 11.** Jaap unties the line from the buoy at 4 A.M. sharp, we follow suit and leave the bay by moonlight.

At 7 A.M. we set sails. The water is calm around Cabo San Antonio, wind and current run in the same direction, no crazy waves from all sides as it could well be in this spot.



*Sark* runs ahead of us up to the Cabo, where we change course somewhat further offshore than they are sailing.

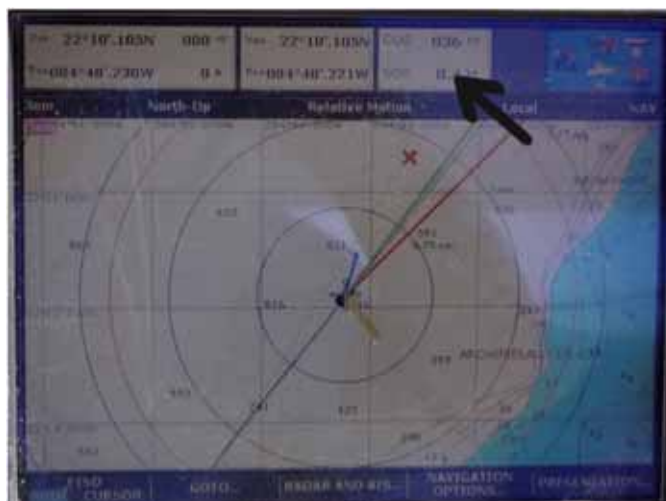


The wind seems more stable out there. *Silmaril* is fast, we will probably reach Havana ahead of *Sark*.

Cuba has changed to daylight savings time; so we actually started at 3 A.M. We both need a rest once in a while behind the suspended sheet, another improvised sunscreen.



The passage goes according to plan. During the day, *Silmaril* often makes around 8kts. The display shows 8.4kts just now. At night, the wind diminishes as forecast, but with the help of the engine we still navigate at an acceptable average of 5kts, hopefully arriving in Havana tomorrow in the late afternoon before the storm breaks.



**Wednesday, March 12.** It is still very dark, not a cloud in the sky, just ripples on the water. Far behind us the sails of *Sark* shine against the horizon. They certainly



calculate their time of arrival in order to get to the Marina Hemingway in time.

We will say good morning by radio a bit later.



An hour after sunrise I serve pancakes in the cockpit to celebrate the last day offshore.



In total calm we turn off the engine and take a bath in our birthday suits, wonderfully refreshing after a short night.



We need to be patient; the roar of the engine will still last for hours before we arrive at the Marina Hemingway in Havana.

The northern coast of Cuba in the vicinity of Havana is not a feast for the eyes.



Fires and stinking chimneys pollute the air.

We pass an industrial port with huge cranes.

We hope that the city itself will surprise us, we read and heard much of its beauty, its music and bustling life.



At 3:05 P.M. we tie up at the concrete pier of the customs office. Two men and a dog come on board, the paperwork is done; the officers ask for money with a sad face. This is a new experience! We are too stupid to say no and hand over 5 CUCs for each man, not for the dog, though!

At 4:30 P.M. we reach the pier in the marina, but large pieces of concrete from the damaged pier are too close to the keel in this spot and Alex asks for another place. Farther back in the canal we find a good slip to moor *Silmaril* where we can safely leave her for the time we are in Switzerland.

Elsa and Jaap have also arrived. We have a drink together and are happy to be here. the sky is dark now, the wind increases steadily. At nightfall a boisterous thunderstorm breaks over the marina. It is so good to be here!

The 3rd report 2014 will tell about the city.