

## **Ciganka's High Adventure**

October 18, 2009 - December 23, 2009

Since our 9 year journey of building Ciganka and then 7 years of running charters in the Abacos, we had not gone "cruising". Cruising to us is sailing off without a timeline or schedule to where we choose. When we get to a "spot", we like to get in our dinghy to explore, hike the island/beaches, spear fish and dive the reefs. We'll decide how long we want to stay. Sometimes the wind is blowing perfectly to get us to the next "spot" and we will set sail.....or maybe not. In our cruising mode we tend to live off the sea by spear fishing and catching what we eat.

On this cruise our target has been the Jumento Cays and Ragged Islands. These are the most uninhabited set of islands in the Bahamas. In the chart book that we use to navigate it states "Self-reliance is essential in the Ragged Islands and Jumento Cays. Go with plenty of food, water, fuel, medicines, and weather reporting equipment. Be certain that your crew has the competence and navigation skills before you travel to this remote area." On this cruise Thomas and I were looking for our own piece of quiet beautiful paradise where the reefs are untouched and plentiful of fish, lobster and conch. We found exactly what we were looking for and then some!

I do have pictures posted on our websites so you can see what I write about.

[www.sailingshipcharter.com](http://www.sailingshipcharter.com) adult and family private charters

[www.sailingadventures.org](http://www.sailingadventures.org) youth group charters

**October 30 - Water Cay:** We sailed from the southern end of Great Exuma Island to the north end of the Jumento Cays. It was a sunny clear day. We had all our sails up with a 12-15 knot steady wind out of the ENE. Since we were heading south, this made a nice point of sail. We are sailing on the Bahamas Banks so most of the water is 25 to 12 ft. deep with a sprinkling of coral heads to watch out for. You do have to keep a watchful eye for those coral heads which you can see clearly as a dark brown spot surrounded by baby blue turquoise water. They are only about 10 to 30 yards in diameter so you just sail around one if it is in your path. But it is important to have good sunlight when doing a crossing through such an area. A nice uneventful sail got us to Water Cay about 4 PM. We didn't use our motor at all and sailed right to anchor. After getting all the sails down and tied up we put on snorkel gear on for a quick evening "stroll" to see on new backyard. For dinner I made one of Thomas' favorite meals called "Blue Topaz" named after the boat that first served us this delicious red clam sauce with A LOT of garlic over angel hair pasta. We toasted to our arrival in the Jumento Cays and looked forward to what lies ahead of us!

**October 31 - Water Cay:** A lot of people think this and a few people have asked us "*What do you do all day?*" Well, let's take a look at today. We got up in the morning ready to explore our new backyard. We got in our dinghy and landed it on a nice small beach right off of where we were anchored. Through small scrubby bushes we hiked on the fairly smooth coral rock to the ocean side of the island. This was only about 1 mile to the other side and we stood at an elevation of 150 ft. . We could see down the ocean side of the whole island. It was pretty spectacular. Tall shear white cliffs met the ocean water. I took pictures but I didn't think the pictures showed the elevation or how majestic the view really was. The Bahamas are usually low lying islands

with very porous rock. So the height of these cliffs shearing off into the water was impressive. We could hike only so far because the growth of palmetto trees and bushes got too thick to get through.

We then took the dinghy along the shoreline and around some of the smaller rocks looking for a good place to snorkel and hopefully get supper. We started our snorkel on a nice shallow coral head in protected water. Along with what seems to be the normal "tag a long" barracuda it was a pretty cool snorkel. Thomas speared a nice sized Nassau grouper. We always snorkel with an igloo cooler in the dinghy so when we spear something we can immediately get it out of the water and into the cooler for safe keeping. We want to get what we speared out of the water quickly so it doesn't bleed in the water and attract .....you know what.....those fish with big teeth! After we finished with this coral head we continued drifting in the current going over some shallow area with small coral and lots of colorful sea fans. Thomas speared a pretty good size Hogfish - this is a type of snapper and to us one of our favorites. Then the current carried over some deeper water where now 2 big barracudas came to check us out. I personally wish they were not so curious and they wanted to be part of our snorkeling group!

Now back to Ciganka and we decided to motor out of our anchorage and check out a "Blue Hole". On our chart it shows about 1 mile out from where we are anchored are 3 separate blue holes. A "blue hole" is found in fairly shallow water and is a sink hole or cavern that is very deep and is usually surrounded by shallow coral or sand. The wind was light and the waves were calm so it would be a good day to snorkel the "blue hole". Following the chart we went out to where it showed the blue hole but we couldn't find it! And our GPS instrument (Global

Positioning System - which via satellites will give your exact position) was not getting a signal. So we ended up motoring back in to the island to anchor for the evening.

While we still had good light we decided to do another snorkel and check out the edge of the island close to where we are anchored. The first piece of coral I dove on I see a beautiful lobster hiding in a hole. We hadn't brought our spear so I snorkel back to Ciganka to get our dinghy and spear. Sweet, we got a lobster. And then Thomas got another one. We gonna eat lobster tonight! After a scrumptious dinner of *fresh* lobster, plantains, and steamed broccoli, and a few adult beverages, we laid on the deck to watch the stars come out. Before night set in we saw a fire ball falling across the sky and burning up. This thing was unbelievably big and bright! I think this was the most brilliant "shooting star" I had ever seen. Wow, what a way to end the day!

So in answer to the question "*What do you do all day?*" - LOTS!

**November 1 - Flamingo Cay:** We decided to head on down to the next island. There was not a puff of breeze so it would have to be a motor. Our GPS was working again so we wanted to snorkel the blue hole on our way out. We found it. There was quite a bit of current running so we anchored Ciganka down current of the blue hole then got in the dinghy and motored up current of what we wanted to see. Let me take a minute and explain about the currents. Because of the tide either carrying water off the Bahamas Banks to the ocean (the tide going down) or vice versus (the tide rising), you and your boat will be influence by this. The currents often run at 2 knots so you cannot swim against it. So you use it to your advantage and go upstream of what you want to see and let the current give you a free ride!

The Blue Hole dive was very cool. There was a shallow ring of coral about 200 yards in diameter with the center about 25-30 ft. deep with bigger coral heads, huge sea fans and a lot of fish. I held onto the dinghy as we drifted along. I like this because it is like my security blanket. If I see something that gets me "spooked" I have the dinghy right there to jump into! The shallow reef was well formed and full of all kinds of fish. The current was carrying us along fairly quickly. Then when we got to the deeper water the current flow must have dispersed because of the change in depth and we didn't have it moving us along. This was nice because it gave us time to see things at our own pace. As we snorkeled we picked up 7 conch. There were a lot of conch to be had but we only took what we needed for a couple meals. Of course we had the local curious big barracuda tagging along too. Thomas ended up spearing a lobster and a grouper. I love getting my groceries this way!

I am always keeping a sharp eye out. I spotted a shark in the distance and told Thomas about it. It just seemed to be cruising a long minding its own business so it didn't concern me...imagine that! Then a few minutes later I see it circling around the dinghy a bit closer. I told Thomas and he said not to worry it wasn't getting very close. As he says this and looks back in the water it was right in front of him only 10 ft. away. Holy you know what! In one leap I was in the dinghy! Thomas looked him in the eye and decided maybe he'd seen enough....time to get out of the water. Now I really don't think the shark was being aggressive, just too close for our comfort. Since this incident I have talked to some of the local fishermen. They are in the water 8 hours a day spearing lobster and fish. And they say the sharks won't bother you. None of them are missing any limbs so I have to believe that. I will say that the fish here are quite curious. There are no

people here except for a few fishermen. So we have found fish that are usually very timid and will hide in a hole if you get near, will follow you around like a little puppy dog. The trigger fish are the ones here that will follow you around like you are their new best friend. I love trigger fish (not to eat just as a beautiful fish) so I really enjoy that they like to hang out with us. I have to get use to the barracudas as snorkeling buddies because they are in the water with us every time we get in. But I still don't want to get cuddly close to a shark!

We pulled up anchor and motored to the next island which was only 10 miles away. We kept the throttle at a low RPM and enjoyed our 2 hour jaunt to Flamingo Cay, keeping our eyes peeled for shallow coral heads. Wow, what an incredible island!! The island is about 2 miles long with 2 separate "Bahamian Mountains" at about 300 ft. in elevation - trust me - that is a mountain in the Bahamas! It had several soft white sandy beaches, 2 salt water ponds, square rock cliffs with osprey nests, and a cave that you can enter from land or from your dinghy!

We anchored off a beach with 2 coconut trees, the only ones on the island. But there are thousands of the palmetto palms which are much smaller and don't produce coconuts. We took a quick dip in the water and then went to the beach for a nice stroll. We ate fresh grouper for dinner. Another great day. Thank you!

**November 2, 3, 4<sup>th</sup> - Flamingo Cay:** Pretty much spent the days exploring the island and snorkeling/fishing some of the reefs.

At low tide we took the dinghy inside the cave. I got a lot of pictures inside the cave that came out really nice. Check them out on the website. There was a shallow stone ledge to pull the dinghy up on. The floor of this ledge was rock with a lot of

fossilized conch shells imbedded in it. We also found a sea shell in this cave that we had never seen before. It was still alive so we took a picture and left it right where it was. There were small stalagmites forming on the ceiling that dripped fresh water. We climbed out of an opening on the other side of the cave that put us on a hilltop overlooking one of the salt ponds. This whole excursion was very cool!

We climbed to the top of one of the "mountains". There wasn't a path that led the way so we foraged through the bushes and small trees, watching out not to touch any poison wood trees. One neat find was that there are a lot of good sized lignum vitae trees. This is the national tree of the Bahamas and the wood is hard as rock - seriously. The wood is so dense it does not float. We bought some of this wood in the Dominican Republic and redid all of our wood blocks on Ciganka. There are not a lot of these trees left so seeing so many on the island was quite a find.....just don't tell anyone...we want them left alone! As we were getting to the top there were several kinds of cactus in bloom. At the top of the peak there was a stone slab built. It was only about 5 square feet and 5 ft. high. We have no idea what it was all about but climbing on top of it gave us a view of the whole island. Pretty stunning! Back down at sea level and hot and sweaty from the climb, so we dove right into the refreshing water off the beach. Oh did that feel good!

We took a dinghy ride to the southern end of the island. A tall square hunk of rock guarded the west side of this shallow bay. On top of the rock was an osprey in its nest. Now I know they make pretty big nests but this one was huge. It had pieces of fishermen's netting, line, and clothes scraps woven into the twigs of the nest. I got some good pictures. As we motored further up the bay it got really shallow so that the outboard prop was hitting

the sand. We propped the motor up and used our paddle. The wind was carrying us toward some cliffs and the osprey nest. Another osprey came out of a hole in the cliff and a third osprey shows up with a fish it caught in its talons. They didn't seem to like we were in their territory as they loudly screeched and swooped down. Were we going to get pecked alive?? We couldn't do anything but to keep paddling and soon got beyond their nesting spot. Never a dull moment!

We took the dinghy to the north end of the island to snorkel along the edge in hopes to get some lobster. As soon as we got in the water 5 barracudas were snorkeling with us. We decided to call this "Cuda Cove". We didn't see any lobster but Thomas speared a grouper. A few minutes later here comes a medium sized reef shark. He may have just been curious but he came right up to us. Time to find another spot to snorkel. Later!

We cleaned the grouper on Ciganka but decided we didn't want to throw the fish carcass over board where we are anchored because we swim right off the boat. We would take it around to the next cove. But we stopped at the beach first and there is big curly tail lizard hanging out on a rock. Thomas cut off a piece of fish and fed it to the curly tail. He gobbled it right down. He sat there begging for more. Thomas fed him 2 more hunks of fish. We decided to leave the fish carcass on the rocks. Maybe more lizards would enjoy it and maybe the osprey would pick at it. It didn't take long for the flies to find it. Then the lizards came out and were leaping at lightening speed to catch the flies. It is neat to see nature at work and nothing goes to waste!

We had a couple Bahamian fishing boats come into "our" anchorage one night. Now these were small and very basic boats. One of the boats was a 26 ft. fiberglass motorboat with 3 men

that fish, eat, and sleep on this boat while out on a fishing trip. They had come from Long Island, Bahamas, which is 50 miles to the north. They go out for 4-5 days at a time and fish from sun up to sunset. As the sun rises up over the horizon they are motoring out on the Bahamas Banks to a coral head. Two of the guys, dressed in full wetsuits and snorkel gear drop over the boat with their Hawaiian sling and spears. They are looking for lobster and fish such as grouper and snapper. They use their Hawaiian sling to spear their fish or lobster. This is kind of like using a bow and arrow. (Thomas, since being out on his first sailboat at 17, fishes this way. He is really good at it!) So that the fishermen can stay down longer than just holding their breath, they use what is called a "hooka rig". They have a small compressor running in their boat pumping air through long rubber tubes. The divers put on a vest that has the end of the rubber tube clamped on and then attached to a regulator that they put in their mouth and get their air. This way they do not have to carry heavy dive tanks with them on the boats. There is always one guy that stays in the boat and keeps the boat on top of the divers. When the divers get a fish or lobster on their spear, they will surface, the guy in the boat will put the catch into their cooler, and immediately hand the spear back so he can keep hunting. When the divers have finished with that coral head they hop in the boat and motor over to the next coral head. They do this all day long! It wears me out just thinking about it! They carry enough ice to keep their catch cold for about 4-5 days.

I had gone on a baking spree that day and made 2 loaves of French Bread, 2 loaves of applesauce/coconut/pecan bread (a variation of my banana bread recipe), and cornbread. So when the 2 fishing boats came in that evening we went over and delivered some of the applesauce/coconut bread and said our hellos. These guys were "pooped out" from a hard day of fishing

but were as gracious and kind as can be. We said we would listen to the weather in the morning and give them a report on the VHF radio and wished them a pleasant evening. In the morning they stopped by our boat to thank us for the delicious bread. We wished them a successful day and with big smiles on their faces they were off.

**November 5, 6,7, 8th - Buena Vista Cay:** We had shared the weather forecast with the fishermen that a strong cold front was going to blow through the next day. The forecast was that it would blow 25-30 knots out of the NE for the next 3 days. And in squalls it could gust up to 40 knots. That is a lot of wind! So we decided to sail to the next big island down which would offer a good protected anchorage with that kind of wind. It is an island called Buena Vista which lies 30 miles south of us. We hoisted full sail and had a fast trip to our next anchorage. When we got there I had enough daylight to take a nice beach walk....Thomas took a nap! Later that evening I thought I heard a cat meowing. Now I am a cat person so I get the binoculars and scanned the island to find this cat. It ended up being a goat! The island has goats..... Lots of goats! More about this later.....

The next 2 days it blew hard. We were hoping to get a little rain with this front to fill our water tanks. When we know we are going to get rain we clean the deck and then catch the rainwater which we funnel through a filter and into the water tanks. The water tanks are built right into the hull of the boat. We can hold about 1,000 gallons of water. Right now we have about 500 gallons left and would love to catch some rainwater. We did get a little bit of rain but not much. The showers seemed to tease and pass on both sides of us!

But did it blow! We didn't even get off the boat for 2 days because it was blowing too hard. Luckily we were in a good anchorage with the wind out of this direction so we were safe and comfortable. The second day we even had 2 fishing boats, bigger than the ones in Flamingo Cay, take shelter in this spot too.

The third day of this weather system was still pretty darn windy but we were going stir crazy. So we pulled up our anchor and motored over to an island called Nurse Cay just north of us. We had sailed passed it on our way to Buena Vista and it really caught our eye. It was pretty high in elevation (for the Bahamas) and we could see several caves in the cliffs. We anchored in the lee (protected) side of the island right where we could see some of the caves. We used our dinghy to get to the island and started our hike. It was fun and it felt good to be moving and exploring again. There were no real paths so we foraged through the scrubby trees and bushes. Once we got to the top of the island it was fairly flat and easy to walk on and the vegetation was not as dense. But now the caves were below us and it was a pretty steep walk down (or drop) to get to them. I found a nice comfortable spot in the shade overlooking the patchwork of turquoise blue water and Ciganka. I'd let Thomas tell me all about the caves. I found my spot! I got some good pictures from my perch. And this island was full of huge century plants. The biggest I had ever seen. You'll see them in the pictures on the website. These plants bloom grow for years and years before they grow a big stalk (kind of like Jack and the Bean Stalk's stalk). These stalks are like trees. Then they bloom a single big flower at the top of the stalk. As the flower seeds the stalk will die and fall over and the whole plant is finished. It has done its job!

As I sat there several different kinds of birds were flying in and out of the trees singing their little hearts out. I started

mimicking them. They must have thought I sounded pretty good because they would come and sit on a branch real close to me. They didn't seem to have any fear. This was great.

Thomas enjoyed his walk about. The caves didn't go in very deep but he had a good time checking them out. We slowly made our way back down to the dinghy and back to Ciganka. The ocean swell wrapped around the island too much to make it a comfortable anchorage. We hoisted anchor and decided to motor 5 miles south to Raccoon Cay.

**November 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15th - Raccoon Cay:** What an amazing island! It is approximately 3 miles long with numerous white sandy beaches, quiet coves, Bahamian "mountains", lots of flowering bushes and other vegetation, and an abundance of beautiful coral reefs and lots of goats!

We got in a routine of being up by 6:30 AM to listen to the weather report on our Single Sideband radio with a morning cup of "Joe". We'd eat a bit of breakfast then get suited up in our "climbing gear" (funny pictures) and were off hiking by 8:00 - 8:30. We climbed to the top of several of the Bahamian mountains, hiked on the sharp coral edge of the island to enjoy the scenic ocean view, and found our way to the several of the natural salt ponds in the interior of the island.

We explored some ruins which were small square houses built of concrete and conch shells. They seemed like they tried to withstand several strong hurricanes and sadly lost the battle. There were also a couple places where some pretty long stone walls were built. They built them 20 yards off of the coral rock coastline, 4 ft. high, and about  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile long. Not sure what they

were trying to keep in or out. But it was a heck of a lot of work to build these! I'll have to see what I can find out about this.

We saw quite a nice variety of bird life such as kingfishers, mocking birds, finches, several different types of hummingbirds, tiny yellow birds, osprey, blue herons, white egret, pigeons, turtle doves. It was nice because the birds were not fearful of us. They would sit on a branch right where we were and sing their little hearts out. I got pretty good at mimicking some of them and they would come closer to chat. There was always a nice fragrant scent in the air from flowering plants, bushes and trees.

Everywhere we hiked there is a lot - I mean a LOT- of goat droppings. We could hear them baaaaaahhhh-ing in the distance but they were very elusive and we didn't see them as we hiked. They must have really good hearing because they were always several steps ahead of us. One time while we were walking down a beach in the early morning there were 3 young goats eating on the edge of the foliage. They didn't see us right away. Then one of the youngsters made a short "bah" which got the other two's attention and off they ran. There is no fresh water on these islands so they get enough from eating the greens of the vegetation.

After our 2-3 hour sweaty hike we'd cool down in the water off the beach where we anchored the dinghy. I always felt like the water would steam around us as we plunged in. Oh did it feel stupendous! Having worked up an appetite we headed back to the boat for lunch. Then of course Thomas had to take his nap while he gave me a list of chores to get done.....ha ha!

Usually in the afternoon we'd go find a place to snorkel and get dinner. There was no problem in getting whatever we wanted to

eat. One of our drift dives (snorkel gear on, we drift with the current over coral. I always hold onto a line at the front of the dinghy so the dinghy is with us and Thomas is ready with his spear) Thomas speared 2 big hogfish and a grouper. I could have gotten 100 conch if I wanted. They were all over the place in only 12 feet of water. I got 7 which would be enough for a couple dinners. We are conscientious of not taking more than we can eat. One evening we dove on a shallow reef close to where we were anchored. As soon as Thomas got in the water he saw a big lobster under a ledge. As he is getting that one I see another one sticking out of a hole. After we get that one, Thomas spears another big'un. We were only in the water about 8 minutes! Ya got to love it! We cannot get over the size of lobsters. Most of them are about the size of Thomas' thigh and the meat is tender and sweet. Thomas speared one the other day that fed us for 3 meals. I am coming up with some good ways of fixing lobster. Last night we had lobster nachos. I make a creamy cheesy white sauce with the lobster in it and then put that over tortilla chips and top that with tomatoes, onion, and lettuce and salsa verde. Delicious!

We did have a cold front come through which clocked the wind to the S-SW-W-NW-N. Listening to our weather report we knew it was coming so we had to move to another anchorage that would protect us in this wind change. We motored over to Johnson Cay which would protect us as the wind blew out of the S-SW-W. This island was incredible. I know I keep saying how spectacular all these islands are...but they really are! Every one is unique and holds us captivated. As usual we are anxious to hike this island. As we motor to shore in our dinghy there are a herd of goats enjoying the shade under a stand of trees close to shore. They didn't seem to be so skittish. They watched us approach for a

while before they took off. There were about 15 of them and they look fat and healthy as can be!

I don't think I can verbalize the beauty of this island. I am sorry. I just can't put it into words. I did take some pictures from the boat so hopefully that will give you a taste. There were some high sand dunes on the west side of the beach that gave us a good vantage point to see the interior layout. We hiked on down through what Thomas termed as the "Garden of Eden". Trees and bushes we had never seen before flourish healthily in dark fertile soil. The soil had a rich smell to it. Most of the soil (which there is not much) in the Bahamas is light colored and is largely composed of sand. If I had a bag I would have taken a little bit. Next time! The beach is wide, soft, fine, blinding bright white sand which covers the bottom of the whole cove making the bluest turquoise water I have ever seen. And I have seen some beauties!

Johnson Cay was just a day stop for us because the wind kept clocking around to the NW. So we motored 2 miles to Man-O-War Bay to anchor down until the front blows through and the wind goes back to NE. There was a little bit of a swell that ran through this anchorage but it was good protection. It was a mild front. We got morning entertainment from the island of Nairn, off our starboard side, with a herd of 18 goats that would slowly eat their way along our side of this island. It was fun to watch. Cheap thrills huh? We enjoyed this spot for 3 days.

Oh here is one for you. You can be thankful your tax dollars are at work. We have had a DEA/Military helicopter fly over us twice. The first evening it was still light so we could see them. I gave them a nice friendly wave. Then 2 nights later at dark we

had another chopper fly over and circle us. You can't hide anymore!

**November 16, 17, 18, 19<sup>th</sup> - Ragged Island, Duncan Town:**

The wind finally came around and we decided to sail to the southern end of Ragged Island and go to the only settlement/town in this whole chain of islands called Duncan Town. Population is 60 people (many more goats and chickens than people) on a good day. We have not been able to check internet for 3 weeks. We hoped Duncan Town had internet service but truly did not think it would. Still, we keep our fingers crossed.

From where we anchored Ciganka, and tied up our dinghy, it was a mile walk into town. If you look at the chart picture on the website, we landed our dinghy right at the end of the airstrip. The airstrip is in good repair and is pretty darn long. Thomas thinks a small jet could land on it. We walked on their paved road to town. The first thing we are greeted with is their power plant and telephone station. The building is newly painted a nice soft yellow and the yard is well kept. We open the door to a brightly lit, clean, air conditioned room with 2 Bahamian young men sitting on chairs. I think we startled them because there are no tourists or white people in town. Their facial expressions said, "Where did they come from?" I smiled and said "Hi, we are the new people in town!" With wonderful big smiles on their faces they stood up to shake our hands and welcome us to Duncan Town. They made us feel right at home. One of the gentlemen, Kervin, is the assistant manager of the power and telephone station. Basically he does it all. We ask the almighty question as to whether they have internet service?? Why of course they do! You can use our computer or bring your own at a charge of \$5.00 per  $\frac{1}{2}$  hour. Yipee - Yahoo - we have made contact again!

We continued our walk to town on their nicely paved road. We first came to a nice white building that said "Sheila's Fishermen's Lounge" (see - they are all fishermen/women - this is a fishing community. That is where their income comes from.) But the restaurant was closed. As we walked a bit further there were 2 young men in homemade hammocks under a big shade tree. As soon as they saw us they called us over and wanted to know where we are from, how did we get here, where is our boat, how long do we stay, what kind of boat, do we like fish? It was fun. We asked about Sheila's restaurant and they yelled at the house across the street for Sheila. An older lady dressed in grey jogging pants and a flowered cotton housecoat with a big smile comes over to say hello. As we later find out she is like the "Mama of the island". She was born and raised here, married and had 11 children here, is on the town board, will tell you like it is, has great pride in her town and will cook you up a mean Bahamian meal! We make plans with her for lunch tomorrow at 1:00. After a bit of discussion we decide on having her cook steamed fish and gravy with plantains. Yummy, we are looking forward to this!

A bit further up the road we asked a young lady where the grocery store was. She pointed to a white building across the street called Maxine's. But Maxine was out fishing. But she had a key and could help us. The grocery store is one small room with about 15 shelves, mostly of which were empty. But what was on the shelves was neatly stacked with all the labels facing outward. My main item I needed was limes. I use a lot of lime when cooking seafood. Yeah, she did have limes. But they were in a different small room next to the grocery store in a refrigerator. Also got some of their wonderful Irish butter, some canned milk, and we eat got a cold soda. I wanted some flour but they were out of it. The young lady, Pauline, who helped us, is the nurse of the Island. There is a doctor that comes in once a month for a day or two.

She is originally from Nassau but has been the nurse on Duncan Town for 4 years. She is ready for them to find a permanent replacement and go back to Nassau. She is bored with nothing to do and she has 2 daughters that live and go to school in Nassau. She said it is good here because there is nothing to spend your money on so she has saved a lot. But she is ready to go back home. Hopefully that will happen soon for her.

Later that afternoon we walk back up to the town with our computer in hand to get online at the Power/Telephone station. The door is open but no one is in the office to get us hooked up. Thomas goes around to the back of the building to see if someone is working out back. No one is there either. We finally knock on the office door and out walks Kervin through a backdoor to the office with a big smile on his face and sleep in his eyes! He gets us hooked up and the Internet works great. Then we sat and really enjoyed talking with Kervin for about 1 ½ hours. We learned a lot about the island, him and his family, and fishing! Good day in Duncan Town!

The following day we walked to town excited about our lunch at Sheila's restaurant. What a nice neat and clean place. There is one big room with tables and chairs enough for 25 people (that is half the town!) and a nice bar area. Then off of that room is a smaller room with a pool table. Pauline is there talking with Sheila when we arrive so we got to say our hellos to her again. We were the only people eating at Sheila's today. We learned that you have to put in an order for Sheila to cook. She is not open just for people to walk in and order. With such a small community she cannot afford to do that. We waited patiently while Sheila did her thing in the kitchen as her and Pauline chatted away. We would have liked to have had a cold beer to sip on while we waited. But is sounded like her and Pauline where in a

bit of a heated discussion and we didn't want to interrupt. It is now around 2:00 and we get served delicious fried grouper, peas and rice, corn and plantain. Not sure what happened to the steamed fish and gravy we had discussed yesterday? But the food was wonderful. We did finally get our cold Kalik beer and asked Sheila to sit and join us. We wanted to hear her story. The house she was born in is right across the street from her restaurant. She was one of 11 children and she herself had 11 kids. Two of the kids, grown now, are still on the island, one had died of cancer, and the rest are in Nassau. She loves her island and has no desire to go anywhere else. The only thing she did say is she would like to visit more of the different islands in the Bahamas. We talked of the way they used to use the beautiful Bahamian "sailing smacks" to go fishing. Those were the days!

### **Chocolate Cake for Duncan Town**

We had not visited the school yet where the 9 children on the island attend. They go to school here until the 9<sup>th</sup> grade and then the family will send them to live with relatives in Nassau or Long Island so they can finish their schooling there. I decided to make a big chocolate sheet cake and surprise the kids.

We are now anchored where the second anchor shows on Hog Cay. So to get over to Duncan Town it is a bit of a ride in the dinghy. As we are making our way through the dredged channel to the town dock we see Harry and Alfez cleaning conch in their skiff from the morning's catch. We slowed down to say our hellos and I ask them if they would like some chocolate cake. Harry nearly jumped out of his skin with delight. He said "Oh I loves cake!" As we passed over some cake Alfez asked me what is my name. I told him Linda. "Oh my goodness that is my dog's name. That will be easy to remember!" His dog, all of about 1 pound (half of

which is shaggy dirty fur) barked at me nicely from the top of their conch pile.

We stopped to share a piece of cake with Pauline, the town nurse. Then over to the Town Hall building to share with some of the people there and see if it was ok to stop by the school. Miss Angie, the post mistress was in her office and right wanted to know what was in the pan?? Oh boy was she "eyeing" the cake. She said her husband was over in Nassau but she could keep a piece for him too. As soon as I gave Angie some cake she gobbled up a big piece. "Oh that is the best cake I have ever eaten", she exclaimed. I told her she better not eat it all because half of it is for her husband. I truly did not hold much hope for that happening!

As we were walking down to the school an elderly lady came out of her house to say hello. She introduced herself proudly and let us know she is 81 years old, almost 82! What a beautiful regal lady. I asked her if she would like a piece of chocolate cake and of course you know the answer by now. She invited us inside as she got a plate to put the cake on. Then she showed us all her hand woven mats and purses she makes from palm fronds. It is called platting. You get palm fronds from the cabbage palm tree, then tear the fronds into about  $\frac{1}{2}$ " strips and then weave with 6 strips at a time. You keep adding another strip as you get to the end of one so it is a continuous weave. "Grammy", as she is known on the island, has probably platted since she was 6 years old.

Finally we make our way on down to the school before all the cake is gone. There are several buildings on the school grounds all painted bright tropical colors with big wooden turquoise colored shutters propped open with wooden boards to let in the cool ocean breeze. The first building we went in was the main school

house which was one big room divided into 2 spaces by a movable wooden divider. Mr. Robert was teaching the 3 older kids mathematics and his wife, Ophelia was teaching the rest of the kids (11 and younger) grammar. We spoke with Mr. Robert and told him we had cake for the kids. He was delighted with our surprise and said they would be having a break in about  $\frac{1}{2}$  hour. And while we waited we were welcome to use the WIFI Internet service. Great! The school room was very impressive. It was bright, clean, organized, with the walls covered in various homework assignments and projects. I loved that the whole room was open to let all the fresh air in. The two doors on each far end of the building were open and then the long sides of the building consisted mostly of big windows all of which the shutters were propped open. The kids were nicely dressed in uniforms. The girls wore white shirts with plaid skirts. And the boys wore white shirts with a navy blue tie and long navy blue pants.

For the cake surprise we went into a second building that was their lunch room. They stay at school all day and lunch is fixed by Ophelia. The lunch room was spacious, clean, and organized. We introduced ourselves, told a bit about us, our boat, and what we do with having kids on board our ship for a week at a time in the Abacos, Bahamas. They thought that was pretty cool but was even more cool was a big piece of chocolate cake! They were all so well mannered and ate their cake slowly to really savor it. I got several good pictures of this whole event that you can see on the website. The teacher was smart then to let the kids run some of the sugar rush off with recess. Everyone came and said their personal thank you to us.

The school has another smaller building that is their computer lab and it is air conditioned. They also just put up a greenhouse (an arch covered tent) to start growing their own vegetables. They

are having the kids go to the beach and collect seaweed which they use to put on top of the soil and seed to keep the moisture in. The seaweed also is full of wonderful nutrients. This project is just getting underway so they have not planted anything yet. But everyone is excited about it! They don't grow any of their own vegetables on the island so hopefully this will go well and more people will start planting their own gardens.

As recess ended we went back the schoolhouse for a bit and had fun trading some good riddles with the kids. Here is a good one they told us. "What do you put down when you want to use it and pick up when you don't need it any more?" They did stump us on this one but I'll give you a hint. Every boat has at least one of these. (Answer: an anchor)

The school is run by a husband and wife team, Robert and Ophelia that are originally from British Guiana. Their beautiful 12 year old daughter goes to school there and their 2 year old son, Renner, jumps from lap to lap of the other kids and is loved by all. It all just feels so natural and you can tell this is a very healthy, happy, productive environment. Ophelia was telling me when their oldest daughter is ready for high school they will all move to Long Island, Bahamas so she can go to high school and Robert will teach at that school.

We made our way back to Ciganka holding a pan with just a few crumbs, feeling very pleased and content. Back on Ciganka we thought we should run the generator to charge the batteries. As we cranked up the generator it made a strange sound so Thomas went to the engine room to find the whole thing smoking. What!?

Another chapter in our journey.....

## **Broken Damper Plates on the Generator**

These plates transmit the power from the main engine to the generator. Well they literally broke in pieces. So now we cannot use our generator which keeps our batteries charged. The ship's batteries run our refrigeration unit, the lights, the water pumps, the toilets, VHF radio and a few other odds and ends. We can put some power in the batteries using the main engine but it only will put out 25 amps versus 125 amps that the generator will put out. Now how are we going to get this particular type of damper plates specifically for our generator to us way out in the boondocks??

The next day we make our way back to Duncan Town with computer in hand to find these damper plates somewhere in the US and figure how to get them to us. To make a (sort of) long story short, with help from many people on the island, we ordered the damper plates from Connecticut, had them flown to Miami, then flown to Nassau, then put on the mail boat under the school master's name and account. They got to us the following Thursday, the day the mail boat makes its deliveries to Duncan Town every week. Slick and smooth as can be! We were back up and running! Thank you to all those that helped us.

**Hog Cay:** On the website you can see a chart of the island and some nice pictures.

We anchored off of this spectacular island for quite a while. The island and surrounding water had so much to offer. We had a long white beach right in front of the boat which I did a power walk on every day. There were many small coral heads near our boat in shallow water where we got lobster and fish. There were a lot of conch in the shallow water near the boat. I would just put on my snorkel gear and go pick up as many as I wanted for dinner!

There were several trails that took us through the island to the ocean side. We dove on the bigger reefs that run through the openings on each end of the island. Of course there were goats that would walk the cliffs by the beach and plenty of bird life to enjoy. It was also close to Duncan Town so we could run over there in the dinghy to see our friends and the school kids, get supplies, and use the internet at the school. We hunkered in here for a few weeks and enjoyed it all!

### **Double Breasted Cays**

This looked like a spot to explore before we had to leave. We had a nice sail from Hog Cay to a calm anchorage behind Double Breasted Cays. We tucked ourselves up as far as the draft of Ciganka would allow us. It was all white sandy bottom and was fun to snorkel and find some beautiful small seashells. The next day we took the dinghy over to a small nearby island to snorkel and fish. It was full of fish and lobster and of course Thomas did a great job of spearing a plentiful catch. Back at Ciganka with plenty of an afternoon sun shining bright, I decided I still had some snorkeling energy in me. So off I went pretty far away from the boat seeing some cool "stuff". I personally prefer to snorkel pulling the dinghy with me so in case I see something with big teeth smiling at me I can jump in the dinghy right next to me. But looking at this serene bay I decided to venture alone. And what a quiet calm uneventful snorkel I had.....until.....I got back on the boat happy as a lark and then I see a 10 ft. shark swimming right near the boat! Oh my gosh, was that out there with me?? I am thankful I did not see it when I was in the water far away from the boat. I would have had a conniption fit. And it would not have been pretty!

**Duncan Town:** We fell in love with the people of this small and wonderful town. There are pictures on the website.

The people of Duncan Town are very welcoming, kind, helpful, and proud. They were curious to hear our story and made us feel right at home. They always lent a happy smile and hello our way as we walked down the street. They are industrious, organized and take great pride in their community. The roads are nicely paved, the lawns are manicured, the houses are painted bright Caribbean colors, and it is very clean. They don't even let their dogs run loose (unheard of on any of the other islands we have been). If you are not walking them, they have to be chained in your yard. Now the goats and chickens are a different story. They are free to roam where ever they want!

This town is a fishing village. The surrounding area is still plentiful in lobster, fish, and conch. They clean, freeze, and ship their catch to Nassau on the mail boat that comes every Thursday. Especially during lobster season they are up and out early in their boats. And they work hard all day heading home as the sun sets. This is their time to make a very handsome income if work hard. And these people do! We also learned how to dry conch. We had never seen or heard of it. But Miss Maxine showed us how to do it. This way we can eat conch when we are not in the Bahamas!

Duncan Town has a natural salt pond right on the ocean side of the town. (You see it on the chart posted on the website) It is naturally fed by the ocean and as the water evaporates they harvest the salt by hand. They rake the salt in big piles that look like snow. The flavor of this salt is above any thing I have ever tasted. Besides it being full of the minerals and elements our body needs, it does add great flavor to your food. If you have

only ever eaten processed salt this is truly a treat. We bought enough to last us 2 years! Ya think we like it??

As with any place you visit, it is really the people that make the place. Many of these people I mention are pictured on the website.

Charlene was a Nassau girl who fell in love with a Duncan Town "boy". So Duncan Town has been home to her for about 18 years. Charlene is the town greeter, tourist director, community organizer and helper, town clerk, and town planner all rolled up into one big smile. She was fun to get to know.

Angie is in charge of the Post Office, she has a small store where I could buy some fruit every week after the mail boat came in, and her family owns a piece of the salt pond so we bought our salt from her. We had some nice talks. She has a good heart.

Maxine and her husband have the main grocery store. Usually it is locked because they are out fishing. They love to fish! Someone in town will have the key to unlock the door to the grocery store. She gave us some of her dried conch to try and explained how she dries it. There is a lady in Nassau who has a restaurant will buy all the dried conch Maxine can give her. Maxine has an easy going way about her and is a very giving person.

Alfez is the man about town. You would almost think he has a twin brother because we would see him coming in with his fishing boat, then soon thereafter we'd see him fixing someone's golf cart (that is what they drive on the island), then we would see him helping someone paint their house. He was always doing something productive. He wore coke bottle glasses and was a man

of few words. When we first met and I introduced myself he said, "Oh, I'll remember your name because that is my dog's name." I asked why he named his dog Linda. He said because there was a lady on the island named Linda that irritated him so to get back at her he named his dog Linda!! You got to love it! Alfez's brother, Harry, loved -no, I mean really went nuts- over the chocolate cake I made. I guess he has a sweet tooth that doesn't get satisfied enough. Every time I saw him he asked if I had any more chocolate cake. So before we left I made him a whole chocolate cake. You'd think he won the lottery!

Then there was Sam, the town drunk. Everyone kind of watched out for him. He was a nice guy and always wanted to give us some conch. The only catch was he never had any to give. I wish I would have gotten a picture of him because he was a wild looking thing. He often had his beard braided and if he did not have a hat on all of his hair stuck straight out about 6 inches from his head. He was missing several teeth and had a scar down one side of his face from a bar fight. Next time we go there I will get a picture of Sam.

Robert and Ophelia are the school teachers. They moved from British Guiana to teach at the school in Duncan Town. They wanted their 2 kids to experience different cultures and see a bit of the world. They will move on "somewhere" different at some point in time. They run a very fun yet disciplined school and you can tell they have the respect and love of their students and the whole community. They were extremely helpful to us in many ways. We ended up making a nice connection and still keep in touch via email.

I could go on and on about the people. But as you can tell they all have a bit of our heart. And we will go back to see everyone again.

### **Sailing to Luperon, Dominican Republic**

Our path to get to Luperon is east-southeast which is the direction from which the trade winds blow. Our goal is to wait for a cold front to pass through giving us a northwest-north wind which will make a comfortable and fast point of sail. So we can either beat into the wind and seas to get there (BIG YUCK!) or time our departure with weather for a nice trip. We waited about a week and got the perfect weather window. We took off at 6:00 AM on December 21<sup>st</sup> from the south cut of Raccoon Cay. The sky still had some dark cloud cover from the passing cold front during the night. But there was no rain and the wind blew a steady 18 knots out of the NW as we headed due east. As for you non-sailors, that is good!! The seas were a little high but Ciganka didn't mind a bit as she plowed through under full sail at 7-9 knots. As for you non-sailors again, that is a good thing! We could see the back edge of the cold front cloud line. We seemed to be moving the same speed as the weather system in front of us because we kept the same distance from the cloud line with the same wind direction and velocity. Again, that is a good thing!

We had a sweet sweet 2 day sail. The wind direction stayed where we wanted it and we buzzed along between 7 and 10.2 knots. For the most part there was little boat traffic, just a couple cruise ships that were lit up like Christmas trees. You can't miss those. The second night we had some light showers pass through but the winds remained steady.

This was the best sail passage (out at sea for a couple days) we have ever had on Ciganka. The wind direction, the steady velocity

of the wind, the ocean waves gently going comfortably with us, and making good speed under full sail - it was "THE" sail.

At 6:00 AM on December 23<sup>rd</sup> we are right off of the entrance to Luperon Harbor but we cannot see a thing. We cannot even see the island. This is a mountainous tropical island. But we are in a thick fog and all we see is white around us. Our GPS coordinates and our timing tells us we are in the right spot. There is reef on both sides of the entrance so you have to position yourself correctly as you go in the cut between the mountains. We take down our sails to get ready to enter the harbor. And like turning a light switch on, the clouds lift and we can see "our" beautiful island of the Dominican Republic. This place feels like home and it is good to be back!

### **Dominican Republic**

We hope you have enjoyed reading about our cruise through the Jumento Cays and the pictures posted on the websites.

I have decided to photograph pictures of our time here in the Dominican Republic. They will be put on the website before we leave here in a month or so. I will let you know when they are up.

**Thank you!**