

Log of the *HILDE M²*



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THANKS TO EVERYONE FOR YOUR GREAT NOTES and good wishes which came along with Christmas cards and let us know you're "with us" on our Adventure... It's nice to hear from you, and Karl is glad too as I send them on.

AFTER A GREAT STAY IN THE CARRIBEE, the *Hilde M²* and her crew (Karl and Alice the aloe) left St. Croix on Wednesday January 7 on their way to Porvenir, San Blas, Panama. Around January 20-22 they'll pick up our cousin Jim Wall (currently of Costa Rica, normally of Burke, VA, truly of Cookeville, TN) for some cruising in the islands and then the Transit Of The Canal.

DATED JANUARY 4, written aboard the *HILDE M²* in Christiansted, St. Croix, USVI, the fourth Letter from the Captain begins "Dear Everybody, A happy and a healthy New Year to all from the crew of the *HILDE M²*, and the hope that you will be able to sail with Alice and me on a blue lagoon sometime in 1987! Incidentally, I finally managed to buy Alice some plant food yesterday, so maybe she'll survive long enough to greet you. Well, on with the saga. . .

"After a couple of nights at Gorda Sound, beautiful as it was, I was ready to move on so I hauled up the anchor Sunday morning and glided out the NW channel with a light breeze and headed almost due W along the N sides of Great Caminoe, Guana, and Tortola islands. My destination was Cane Garden Bay, the lovely place I had seen during my drive around Tortola. Helped along by nearly a knot of current we made good time despite a faint and fickle SE wind. A swell from the N made spectacular breakers on the cliffs of the headlands all along the coast, sending spray 70 feet into the air. A fine salt mist looked almost like smoke as it blew toward me and I was glad I didn't have this for a lee shore.

"The bay was nearly full of boats although conditions there were marginal due to the swell when I arrived. The day was lovely, though, with just enough breeze to keep us cool. I gambled that the swell would gradually diminish and powered through the short channel with waves breaking on the reefs on either side. Inside, only some small ones made it to the crescent shaped white sand beach. At anchor we rolled gently from side to side and I enjoyed sitting on deck watching the swimmers and sun-tanners along the beach and the surfers taking advantage of the action out by the shoals.

"My plan was to go ashore for supper. Rhymers, the small restaurant/hotel had advertised an island style pig roast Sunday evening with all you can eat for ten bucks. When the time came I dinghied in barefoot with only shorts and t-shirt because I figured I'd get wet. There's no landing pier or wharf - only the gently sloping coral sand with palm trees back a way, just like you would expect on some South Pacific island. The lack of sophistication is the charm of the place, but you can't get ashore dry shod. I beached the dink and pulled it up on the sand, burying the anchor to keep it from floating away if a big wave came in. I 'pigged out' (pardon the expression) and tried but couldn't finish all the barbeque I was served. There was not even any room for the offered desert.

"When the time came to push off for home I tried getting the dinghy off the beach during a lull but the waves came stronger and faster than I expected. Three stalwart Brits (judging by the accent) were helping people get out through the surf. Together we pushed the dink out and I hopped in. Before I could even get the oars in the rowlocks a big hairy one hit and flipped me right over, dink and all. Down underneath in the swirling water my only thought was 'oh shit, there goes my other watch'....

"Amazingly the 3 guys and I were able to collect everything that had been in the boat except a bailing sponge, and in the dark at that. We piled everything back in and ran it back out again, this time with the oars all set to go, and I made it out handily. Beyond the wave line the swell just created a gentle bobbing motion and I was back to the HM2 in a jiffy. The watch was no worse for the wear but sand was in everything - my pockets and wallet and ears - everywhere. I scooped about 40 or 50 pounds out of the bottom of the dink, then stripped and jumped into the water and swam around the boat to get it out of my hair and various small crevices. Days later I found that fine clinging coral sand in unexpected places. I slept better than you would expect, rocked in my cradle with the offshore bunk canvas rigged to keep me in bed.

"The next morning we motorsailed in the still-light SE wind around the west end of Tortola and back to Road Town, making the trip in 2.5 hours. There, I motored the dink across the harbor to Village Cay Marina with a bag full of laundry and Boatlet #3 all ready to mail to B. Those chores done and with more ice and perishable groceries on board I departed for Cooper Island, SE across Drake Channel, and arrived at dusk. The anchorage was at Haulover Bay at the base of a rocky cliff. Across a narrow isthmus you could hear the waves crashing on the windward side of the island. Where I was it was quite calm. A group of scuba divers on a large catamaran went down for a night dive that evening. It was fascinating to see the glow of their lamps move across the water. If I had known they would do this I would have liked to ask to go along. I don't go down at night alone.

"Tuesday morning I beachcombed the rocky shore and snorkeled along the reef, finding some fish that aren't shown in the little guidebook I have on board. They have 3-5 bright yellow spots at the base of their tails. In the process of rowing ashore I discovered that one of the row-locks had been damaged in our wipe-out on Sunday night. Back at the boat I mixed up some epoxy putty and repaired the area as well as I could. It won't-be as pretty but, I hope, just as strong as before. During the afternoon I cruised W to Salt Island and looked for a pass in the reef that protects a lagoon on the windward side. There's one there because a sailor told me he had gone in, but I couldn't see well enough from deck level to find it. That one will have to wait 'til I have some crew.

"I had a 4 pm date at Nannie Cay with Elbert, the sail-maker, to install the new cockpit dodger. My piloting was on the mark, because I walked into his shop 2 minutes late - to discover that he had gone to Road Town for a tool and left word that he would do the job 'first thing in the morning'. Not wanting to spend another night in the marina, I took off immediately for Little Harbour on Peter Island just across Drake Channel and had a quiet night in the pleasant anchorage just below the white-roofed house that reportedly belongs to Percy Chubb, the U.S. Insurance mogul. Christmas Eve morning I was back at the dock at Nannie Cay, waiting for Elbert.

"And I waited through the day, doing odd jobs. In mid-afternoon he came by the boat to say he was having a problem with his supplier of hardware in Road town due to the holiday and had to make another trip in but that he would be back as soon as possible to finish the job. By late afternoon Elbert hadn't reappeared. The marina said I owed them a full day's slip rent whether I spent the night or not, so I elected to stay over and return to Road Town in the morning. There was no telling when we'd get that dodger job completed.

"A series of tropical rain squalls passed through during the afternoon and evening and somehow it didn't feel like Christmas Eve. It seemed a little more Festive when I played a cassette of German Christmas music I had taped from a 1985 broadcast by Walter and Anna Camp on WGTS. I followed that with the rock opera CHESS on a tape Fritz had given me. Both cassettes were resuscitated from the Great Salt flood on the passage from North Carolina and were a little distorted, but they mellowed me out.

"Around 11 pm I couldn't wait any longer so I walked to the marina's public phone and rang up home - and blew my carefully rehearsed 'Christmas Eve Gift' family greeting when B answered. Not only that, but both Fritz and Hilde nailed me when they came on the line. Bah, humbug! It sounded like they were having a good time, and I had a good time too, just talking to them.



Elbert and his helper at Nanny Cay measure HM2 for her new spray dodger.

"Christmas morning I was sitting in the cockpit eating my granola and getting ready to cast off when Elbert rode up on his bicycle with the dodger under his arm. He took about an hour to attach the fastenings and made a quick trip back to the shop to restitch a seam. By 9:30 we were ready to depart with the new dodger and awning. When I paid Elbert I gave him one of the navy caps Dave Rosenberg had given me and he seemed very pleased with the unexpected Christmas gift.

"The trip back to Road Town was uneventful and we were anchored in our old spot by Fort Burt by midday. The afternoon was a quiet one. I did some house cleaning and worked on rehabilitating a couple more tape cassettes. My purpose in being there was to go by the electronics shop first thing in the morning to retrieve my ham radio and then to clear from the British Virgin Islands and head for St. John, USVI for a couple days.

"Hah! I didn't count on Boxing Day. The Islanders have borrowed the British custom of observing Christmas Second Day and just about all the shops were closed. 'Oh well', says I, 'I'll just do it all tomorrow'. (I'm catching the island~ spirit and wasn't even very frustrated.) I spent Friday mostly trying to improve on the dodger. On close examination I discovered what a crappy job Elbert and his crew had done. I was able to fix some things but it became obvious I would have to have some reinforcing stitching and some re-cutting done in a canvas shop somewhere. That was depressing.

"Saturday morning I walked back into town and damn! - about half of the shops, including the electronics shop, were firmly locked. My island education in holiday time patience was continuing but I was beginning to feel a bit off-put. The clerk at the shop had accepted without a murmur my statement on the phone last Tuesday that I would be in the shop on Friday to pick up the equipment. The problem with these people is that they just don't say anything they think you don't want to hear - and let you go on assuming that you have a firm agreement. That was the situation with Elbert and that was the situation here. Now I had another 48 hours of waiting to get my radio back. What a nice 3 day stay on another island I could have had if they had just said 'forget it until next Monday'.

"I refused to sit around the harbor any longer and took off for Norman Island as soon as I got back to the boat, heading for "The Bight", an anchorage I had enjoyed before. There I spent a pleasant day and a half swimming, snorkeling, sunbathing, and even some sightseeing ashore with a rainy hike to the top of the island.

"The views to the E, N, and S were tremendous. Even in the rainy overcast the mountains of St. Croix were visible on the horizon and the other British islands seemed to be spread at my feet. A dinghy side trip to Treasure Point was worthwhile. The water caves there are said to have given R. L. Stevenson his inspiration for *Treasure Island*. The snorkeling was magnificent along the 30' drop-offs outside the caves. You can row a dinghy into two of the caves and I got some people to snap my picture as I came out of one. I even did some reading - something I haven't done much of since I left home, except for guide books and navigation references. All in all it was a very satisfactory weekend and I was glad for the enforced delay.



Investigating Norman Cave

"Monday morning I headed back to Road Town and reclaimed my still un-repaired HF transmitter (just too busy in the holiday rush to get to it). Having adopted the island philosophy my blood pressure hardly went up at all. Just for the heck of it on the way to the Customs Office to clear I dropped by the Post Office and got two unexpected packages and a letter from B. They were mailed on December 8 and arrived on the 28th.

"With the mail and my official clearance in hand (cost me \$1.74) I headed back to the HM² and set sail for St. John, USVI. Arriving in Coral Bay on the E coast I made a beeline for what the cruising guide said was the U.S. Customs office - only to find that it had been discontinued. A sign said I would have to go to Cruz Bay on the W end of the island. In view of the situation I decided to stay on the boat and enter the U.S. in St. Croix the next day. Thus the St. John economy lost 3 or 4 dollars in ice sales to another yachtie.

"Since Coral Bay seemed kind of airless and buggy as well as crowded I decided to find a more private and comfortable anchorage in Round Bay just to the E. Pulling up the anchor for the third time that day I sailed around the point and found a sandy spot in the midst of coral heads for the hook in 12' of very clear water. Some of the picturesque rocky outcroppings, especially those on Taylor point, to the E of Hurricane Hole reminded me of Chinese prints I have seen.

"That evening I rigged some lights in the cockpit along the aft edge of the dodger using some truck side indicator fixtures I had bought in San Juan. Now there's light for evening eating and entertainment outside. The HM² will never be as comfortable for that as some of the charter boats with tables, cushions, and drink holders but at least we can see one another and the food.

"Speaking of eating and partying in the cockpit, I have noticed that the groups aboard charter boats seem to fall into two categories - the quiet and the loud. This evening, of four boats in the anchorage, one with two couples aboard split the tranquility of the place with loud laughs, shouts, whistles, coughs, singing, and clapping far into the night. I'm not sure it's just the liquor, although this bunch was feeling no pain, because others drink as well. Some people just seem to be naturally loud. An intimate tete-a-tete would be unknown to such as these, I believe. When I got tired of the noisy show outside I descended to the galley area and fixed the leaky drinking water pump.

"The next morning I was underway at 7:30 am, motor-sailing due S in a light SSE breeze on the 35 mile passage to St. Croix. Seven hours later we motored into Christiansted harbor and found a place to lie just SW of Protestant Cay. The Danish architecture of the waterfront reminded me, somehow of Bergen although it's hard to imagine a more different climate and flora. You don't see too many women in short shorts and sun tops there either, even in the summer! As quickly as possible I rowed ashore and searched out the Customs office. I first found their original office, now their headquarters, and was redirected to their field office down on the commercial pier about a half mile E. Once I found that the formalities were over in a few minutes. The agent didn't even want to check out the boat and didn't challenge my declaration which listed only 'broken stores'.



Another perfect day in Christiansted Harbour, St. Croix

"From there I made a fast hike to the Post Office only to be told that all general delivery is handled in the suburb of Richmond about a mile and a half to the W of town. With 20 minutes to go before closing time I practically ran all the way and huffed into that office with two minutes to spare. The lady piled 6 envelopes and 5 good sized packages on the counter. I was overwhelmed until a customer saw my predicament and offered to drive me back to the public wharf in town. She helped me with the boxes to her car and we filled the back seat with the goodies. 'Santa was sure good to you', she said - and I agreed.

"The pile looked impressive in the dinghy, too, but I was too excited to get the camera when I got to the boat. Instead, I had an orgy of package opening. There were good things from Barb, Fritz, Jan, Janet, and Hilde including 20 cassette tapes, a dozen paperbacks, several shirts, a photo album, waterproof storage bags (can't imagine why I got those), and replacement radio gear from the shack at home to get me back on the amateur bands again. I called home in the evening to let B know I'd arrived and gotten everything.

"New Year's Eve and New Year's Day I did a number of jobs aboard HM², mostly getting the ham rig operational. It turned out that I had to replace the coaxial cable to the whip antenna before I could transmit with any power. With a temporary coaxial borrowed from an inverted vee emergency antenna I was able to contact Roy, W2AVM, in New York state. He in turn called collect and set up a phone

patch. I heard Barb very clearly but she had some trouble understanding me. At any rate we made contact by ham radio for the first time on this trip and I think I later cleared up the over-modulation that muddied up my signal, so next time should be better.

'Wednesday I called Jim Wall, B's cousin in San Jose, Costa Rica, and set up details of our rendezvous on Porvenir, San Blas around January 20. Colin Gould, a Fellow Cruising Assn member, dinghied over from *CRUZAN LADY* to say hello and to invite me to join them for happy hour at King's Alley on the waterfront and to mention that Art and Debbie Francis on *BADGER*, another Southern Cross 31, are in the harbor. Colin and Carol have been chartering their 41' Islander out of St. Thomas for the past couple of years. He says it's a tough way to make a living. I passed on the drink invitation because I was literally up to my knees in boxes with all the gifties and some new boat stores to find homes for on the HM² and desperately needed to get some writing done on this. I was also anxious to listen to some of the new tapes. What a stick-in-the-mud!

"Friday I marked the new cockpit dodger, pulled it off, and took it to the (only) sail-maker in town for reinforcing and trimming of excess material. About an hour's work, I'd say. He promised it for Monday afternoon so it looks like my departure for Panama will be Tuesday the 6th if he doesn't do an island number on me. With any luck I can keep my date with Jim but he knows the ETA can change.

"I'm feeling the pinch that a schedule creates. New chores keep popping up and I can't seem to get things done very efficiently. Time just flies by. The afternoon, for instance, was taken up trying to invent a way to keep the dinghy from self-destructing against the sides of the HM² when the tide runs contrary to the wind in an anchorage. Normally the dink just lies nicely off the stern of the boat but sometimes the HM² will swing with the tide and the dink will bash around following the wind. Several hours of trial and error produced a rope harness arrangement along with fenders over the side of HM². The problem is solved for now, and there went the afternoon.

"Saturday I had set aside to tour the island and to get heavy provisions for the next passage. After rowing over to *BADGER* and meeting Art Francis (his S.C. hull is #51 and they're from Connecticut) I went into town, picked up a Chevy Sprite (read Suzuki) and struck out in the general direction of Frederiksted on the W end of the island. After my jaunt on Tortola the left handed driving was a piece of cake. The little 3 cylinder car handled nicely with its automatic shift and the air conditioning was nice too.

"My first stop was at Estate Whim, an old sugar plantation and great house that had been restored by the Landmarks Society. Here I again became the victim of the holidays because the house and some of the exhibits were locked up. The 18th century windmill and the 19th century steam cane crushing and evaporating equipment were interesting to see, though.

Frederiksted is smaller and more Victorian in appearance than C'sted. Unfortunately I wasn't able to contact our Folk Dance Camp friends, Fred and Louisa Haskins. They usually winter here. I don't know if they were out of town or just out. A short drive through the mahogany rain forest on the W end of the island was interesting. The arial roots hung like drapes over the road and the effect was kind of eerie, I thought. Views of some of the old sugar estates along the N coast were most picturesque.

"Back at mid-island I looked for an electronics store in the several shopping centers for some coaxial cable. I found one and it was closed for the long weekend. Out toward the E end of the island (the eastern-most point of the USA, I'm told) are a number of nice real estate developments: lots of a half acre or less selling for \$30,000 and up. Many of them have great views and they seem to be selling well.

"Most of the provisioning was done at a huge Pueblo supermarket in one of the shopping centers. There's nothing like that anywhere close to either C'sted or F'sted. The prices were not nearly as good as those at the Pueblo in San Juan but I picked more than \$100 worth of food, mostly canned goods. Had a very nice dinner at a Ponderosa steak house. Haven't been in one of those for years. At just under \$10, including the beverage, it was the cheapest evening meal out that I have had since San Juan.

"Coming back into C'sted in the dark with lots of opposing traffic I got lost somehow and ended up on the S side of the island. Altogether it was an interesting if expensive day. Of course the car would have cost the same if there had been 3 or 4 of us.

"I had hoped to spend Sunday out at Puck Island, a protected park area where there's a well-thought-of underwater snorkeling trail but I decided I had to get this letter written and edited in time to get it off in mail before I depart for Panama. If I'd been more efficient I could have done both but as I believe I've said, I don't use my evening time very efficiently. After cooking, eating, and cleaning up I'm struggling to keep my eyes open. Tomorrow, Monday, I'll berth the boat at the local marina to take on fuel and tank water and to refit the dodger. Then Tuesday morning I'll head WSW, weather permitting.

"Speaking of weather, I've heard on the radio about the perfectly horrid weather along the E coast the last few days, and now on the W coast too. Sorry to know of the troubles for so many people. There's so much trouble in the world today. As Jean Flynn said in her Christmas letter, we have to remember that the only really important thing thing is love. Please love one another, because . . .

. . . "I love you all. Karl, Dad, Unka Karl, etc.."

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OUR GOOD FRIENDS, Alice and Billy Knights of Landover Hills, and Sandra Olansky of Maine Folk Dance Camp, and others, have asked for more information about the *Hilde M²*. So we'll include an item or two when there's a little room now and then. For starters, she is a cutter-rigged double-ended sloop (that means one stick and three sails, two in front of the stick and one in back of it). More tidbits next time!

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