

Log of *S/V High Drama*



No. 3 El Salvador, Nicaragua and First Impressions of Costa Rica

In this log we complete the visit in El Salvador, describe brief stops in Nicaragua, and first impressions of Costa Rica.



Distant volcanoes.

We slowly and reluctantly left the jewel of a spot called Barillas Marina. The owners, Juan and Carolina Wright, extended us every

hospitality, vastly beyond what we ever imagined. First, Juan flew us to San Salvador in his twin engine plane, gave us a cell phone, and provided the use of a rental townhouse. When we and **LaRoja** indicated a desire to travel to Lago de Coatepecque, Juan said, "Oh, you must stay in our house." It was a beautiful summer home on an island in a crater lake. We spent four totally relaxing days swimming in mountain spring fresh water several times each day.



Lago de Coatepecque on shore side.

Ann and Margie (from **La Roja**) played London Bridges and other children's games with Teracita (8) and Angelita(5), the shy daughters of the care takers. Of course, the girls taught the gringo grandmas some Salvadorian games also.



Angelita & Teracita



Ann, Bob, Margie from **LaRoja**, Angelita, and Teracita.



Guided tour.

We traveled several more days in the country, which is actually no bigger than Massachusetts. In the capital city of San Salvador we found the humble gallery of Fernando Llort, an artist from La Palma. His art was a cross between Picasso and Calder with vivid colors presented with a sense of humor. While it was definitely oriented toward art of the peasants, Llort has a wonderful flair and sense of individuality.

We visited the University of Central America, the Jesuit university where 6 priests and two women were gunned down in November of 1989 by US trained militia, an event that prompted the US Congress to terminate military aid to the Salvadoran government. I mentioned to Juan Wright that we had visited there and he said that three of the priests had been his instructors when he attended a Jesuit High School. The University had set a room aside where respect was paid to all of the martyrs of the revolution. Ann and I bought some and read some books giving further perspective on the tragic civil war. Ironically, we learned more about US policy than we had ever known. What we read did not make us feel proud. Indeed, I continue to be amazed that the people we have met south of San Diego are still friendly toward us, even given the

somewhat uneven foreign policy the United States has pursued this area.

While staying at the Marriott in San Salvador for a luxurious two days we got a CNN fix, an Internet fix, and unlimited hot water. We also met two US Justice Department guys who were quite concerned that we had allowed Ann and Margie to travel unescorted on a public bus in Santa Ana. (They did meet two pretty scary guys, but there were no crimes committed.) The country is still armed and according to the Justice Dept guys, kidnapping for even \$2000 is a growth industry. Because the people who have nothing carry guns, the well to do people have body guards who also carry guns. There is apparently some risk to pedestrians because of occasional shoot outs. Except for the one experience with Ann and Margie, we have been treated extremely courteously by all of the Salvadorians we met. Most desperately want to put the horror of their civil war behind them. We noticed that Juan hired security people for the marina in Jiquilisco Bay. He indicated that he thought that a visible show of force was a good deterrent. Juan was dedicated to promoting tourism in the area, and I suspect he was keenly aware of the potential negative publicity that would flow from an incident.



Security

We met many of the fellows who provided security at the marina. They were delightful guys, many of whom we concluded had served on one side or the other during the conflict.

One day there was quite a bustle of activity ashore at the marina. The President of El Salvador came and put-putted around the estuary in his Boston Whaler. Ann met him; he introduced himself simply as "Francisco". Ann thought he was a charming young (39) man. (Kind of funny. We couldn't get into the U.S. Embassy to get information about El Salvador but yet we met the President.) I caught a flu and spent that day in bed all day. I managed to read **Tomcat in Love**, a novel by Tim O'Brien, a Minnesota writer, however. Very funny.

On a hike we passed several people who exemplified some of the charming aspects of El Salvador. First, we met Juan, who was the caretaker of a home on the island in Lago Coatepecque. He walked with us for a mile or so and pointed out with considerable pride all of the flora and fauna in the area. Of course, our ability to communicate was

hampered by our poor knowledge of Spanish, but he was quite patient. He carried his machete as he walked, as we had seen so many other workers do. The machete is at once a tool, a weapon, and a part of his identity. When I asked to take his picture, he promptly and proudly put the knife prominently in front of him.



Juan.

On the same hike we came upon two young women walking to the lake shore to do laundry. I asked to take their picture and was rewarded by two wonderful but embarrassed smiles that slipped out of the picture. How they can carry all of that laundry paraphenalia on their heads is beyond me!



We finally left El Salvador feeling that we had successfully absorbed some of the wonderful diversity that the country has to offer. We had visited a rural Pentecostal Church and the quite urban Jesuit University of Central America. We toured the low lying Pacific beaches and the inland volcanoes. We met many people from all walks of life who talked very briefly about agrarian reform, economic recovery, and political stability. Naturally, some elements of the peace accords are yet to be realized. But the Salvadorians possess an intense pride and seem bent on building a stable government and economy . The UN supervised elections seemed to be perceived by many as working, in part because the balance of power actually has swung between the two formerly dominant opposition groups.



On to Nicaragua

We sailed for Costa Rica intending to by pass Nicaragua and the small area of Honduras accessible on the Pacific side. We were set by a tough current and heavy winds. We even had our first experience "dodging " thunder storms which were visible on our radar. We were not totally successful in this activity! After a day and a night we became convinced that we would not make it to Costa Rica during daylight hours. After a course alteration, we stopped at a beautiful little bay in Nicaragua. After a restful overnight we pressed on to San Juan Del Sur, the last small town in Nicaragua. The harbor had about thirty fishing boats resting at anchor. One in fact was sinking as we watched! Ashore the Port Captain allowed us "refugio" status which meant that we did not have to make two trips by bus to the nearest immigration office 15 miles away. Interestingly, he drove a Russian made jeep. The short stay in

Nicaragua did not permit us to research feelings about the US involvement with the Contras. But in several places, including in Costa Rica, people still point out beautiful areas where the CIA once trained Contras and Lt. Col. Oliver North supposedly surfed.



Orinoco Flow in the dinghy, and ***La Roja***, our traveling companions.

Finally Costa Rica

Costa Rica is a sailing destination because of its comparatively stable government, its many bays and secure anchorages, and its rich

rain forests, many of which are national parks. But there is one additional reason sailors visit here in the rainy season. Costa Rica lies south of the hurricane zone on the Caribbean and Pacific coasts. Hurricanes frequent the tropics from June through November. Many insurance carriers will not write coverage for boats located north of Costa Rica or south of San Diego during the summer months. We had decided that we would make it to Costa Rica before the official beginning of hurricane season this year. We beat the deadline by a day, landing in Bahia Santa Elena May 31st.

We had a beautiful sail from San Juan Del Sur to Bahia Santa Elena in Costa Rica. This protected bay is surrounded by a national park on land once owned by former Nicaraguan dictator Somoza. Yes, you guessed it. At one time this beautiful area housed training facilities for Nicaraguan Contras under the sponsorship of the US. Apparently Ronald Regan was the only person in the free world who didn't know that the US was supplying aid to the Contras back in the 1980s!

While in Bahia Santa Elena we watched the evening migration of parrots. Flying in pairs they chattered all of the way across the bay in the morning and then back home at night. What they chattered about we don't know, but the tone communicated some sort of interspousal misunderstandings. One evening a caracara perched on a branch high above **High Drama**. This wonderful cousin of the eagle has bright white and black stripes on his chest and some red in his face. He wears a feathered hat that looks like a cross between a bicycle helmet and a cheap slicked back toupee. He was quite a fisherman, however.

Around Punta Santa Elena and on to Bahia Culebra, named after the many snakes that live in the area. We came upon a beach, called Playa Panama, where there were several boats anchored. After we set our anchor, we got a visit from Bruce and Ginny Hilton from **Orinoco Flow**, the boat we had sailed with for almost two months until we stopped to go inland in El Salvador. Then up came Glenn and Linda from **Catmandu**, and then came the couple from **Paradise**, then **Kestrel**, then **Breathless**, and in a short time, all of the people in the anchorage were aboard **High Drama** enjoying Nicaraguan rum and swapping sea stories, some of which were true. We had not seen these folks for several weeks to a month or more and the it certainly was not a quiet reunion.

Playa Panama has a lot to offer. At last there is good swimming right off the boat. Schools of minnows take refuge in the shadow of the boat. Large dorado and sierra periodically charge headlong into the school in pursuit of a meal. Some cruisers have actually hooked dorado from their boats, but I remained skunked at anchor. We did, however, find an errant and very dead sierra in the dinghy this morning. We concluded that **La Roja** put it there. Ashore a Tico opened a small restaurant that caters to cruisers. He made a giant first step by installing a washer and dryer, which are luxury items where we have been since we left the US. (Ann has done most of our laundry in a bucket.) We will probably hang out here for a good while. Northern Costa Rica gets less rain this time of year than Southern Costa Rica. The country caters to tourists and we will take advantage of some more inland sight seeing.

As the Ticos say, "Pura Vida," or "The Good Life"!



Jeff & Ann Brooke

S/V High Drama

Playa Panama, Bahia Culebra

Costa Rica