

**Your on the
Street Reporter**



Uyless Black

**Sailing the British Virgin Islands:
Indians Caves and Cigar Boats**

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Sailing the British Virgin Islands Report 4: Indians Caves and Cigar Boats

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We leave our two improbable sailors, Doug and Lanita---once again reposed in their Midland, Texas dry-land home---to continue our sailing of the British Virgin Islands (BVIs), shown in Figure 4.¹ Our itinerary for this report will highlight several places shown in this figure, including bays, harbors, surf, and turf.

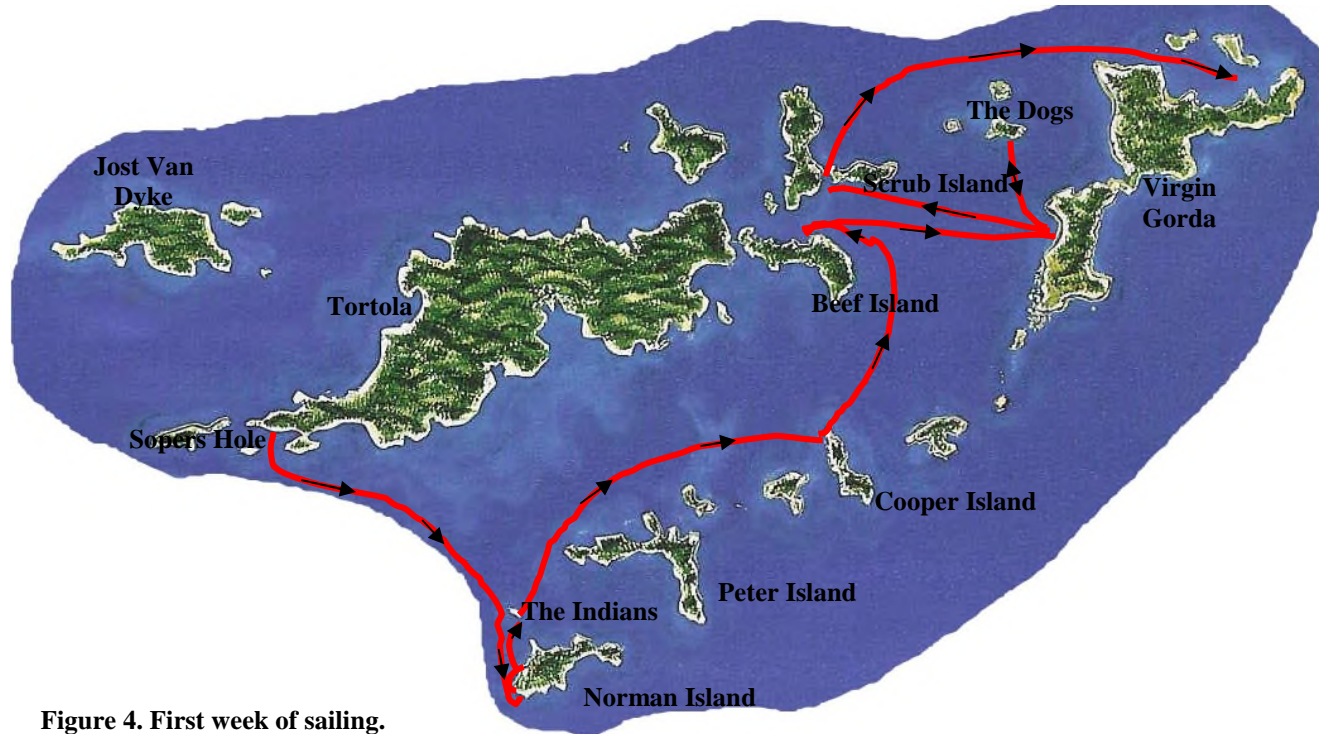


Figure 4. First week of sailing.

While visiting Norman Island and the Indians, we stopped off at seemingly out-of-this world swimming venues---but pleasantly part of Mother Earth. In between our swims, and during our rests on the boat, we heard the stock market was down by 500 points---on one day alone.

We were not concerned. If we were going to dwell on landlocked traumas, why bother going to sea? For the next two weeks, we tuned out media despairments. Out of sight, out of sound: out of mind.

One exception was our ship-to-shore radio. One of my tasks was to be the Radio Officer for the crew. (A fine selection on the part of Skipper, as I was a Radio Officer for one during my Navy tours.) This job consisted of (a) checking the weather each morning and (b) making a reservation for dinner each night. Tough job, but Skipperette took over most

¹ After six years of sailing, Doug and Lanita returned to dry land---their physical positions on earth. I've not asked them about their psychological positions about this matter.

of this work, because she has good hearing and could actually hear the radio operators' instructions.

The Caves at the Indians

If you happen to be passing by the BVIs on your way to Africa, don't miss the Indians, several small islands shown in the lower part of the map in Figure 4. This part of the two-week sail was one of my favorites. We spent several hours here, swimming around isles and into caves. Holly and I ventured into one of them, shown on the left photo in Figure 5.



Figure 5. One of the caves.

The photo on the right shows a view inside the grotto and a back entrance to the cave. Outside the back of the cave is a small pond bordered with trees and rocks that make up this section of the island.

With the exception of those who cannot swim, I imagine most people think swimming is a pleasant way to spend one's time. For myself, I find swimming (especially swimming underwater) to be one of the greatest pleasures on earth. I don't know why I have a love for the activity. Whatever the reason, this particular swim was special.

The current was swift inside the cave. As I swam toward the back of the grotto, the waves took me sideways. I kept up my kick to prevent the water from pushing my body against the walls. As I made my way through the passage, I could hear the water splashing. Nothing else. No stock quotes from depressed pundits. No diatribes from news commentators. Only water, a dreamlike blue, yet clear as the Caribbean air.

Holly stayed in the main chamber as I swam into the back part of the grotto. For a few moments, I found myself transcended into another world. Crystalline streams of water surrounded my body. Silent sounds of surf played in the background. If only I could stay here, a vicarious return to a salt water womb. But I could not. None of us can. Mother Nature pushes us from our uterine sanctuary, never to return.

Nonetheless, this swim was a remembrance I will hold dear---especially during my soon-to-come days in a local (non-aquatic) Senior Citizens Center.

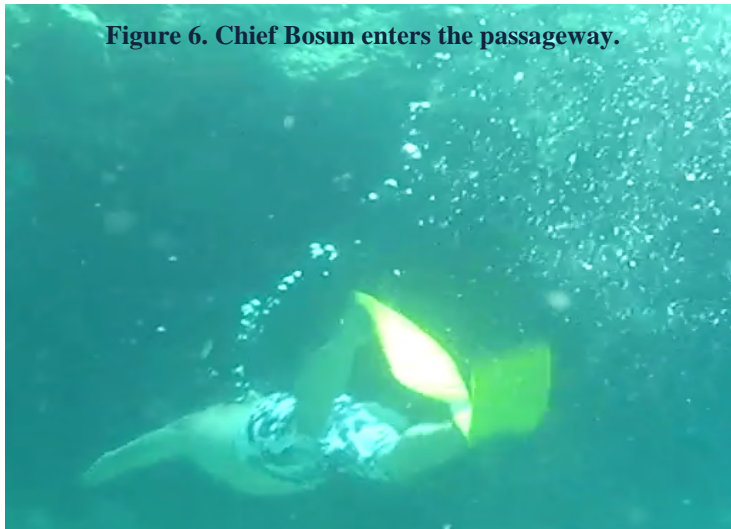


Figure 6. Chief Bosun enters the passageway.

Nearby, the younger crew members were involved in a more adventuresome activity. They swam through an underwater passage. As shown in Figure 6, Chief Bosun is descending into the passage.

The open-ended cave was about 10 feet under the surface of the water and about 15 feet in length. Piece of cake. I had done that many times in my youth. I held records for underwater swims.

Sure. But I was no longer younger. So, I took pictures of the youngsters doing their dives, and let it go. That part of my life was over. Adventure is one thing. Stupidity is another.

Hanging out with Cigars, Cigar Boats, and Cigar Dudes

Later in the day, Skipper sailed our boat into a harbor at Cooper Island. We moored to a local buoy. After a short rest from the rigors of sailing a few miles, we jumped in the dingy and headed to shore for dinner. Not the shore itself. We tied-up to a ship that had been outfitted as a bar and café. It was called the *Willie T*. Here we feasted on beer and ribs.

The *Willie T* was surrounded by other boats from customers who had come in for company and refreshment. As we settled in, we began to notice some of these boats had kept their engines running. But not just running. Rive-up those motors, dude! The rock music on the *Willie T*. stereo, admittedly a challenging competitor, was drowned out by the cigar boats' solos.

I walked toward the stern of the boat where the bar was located. The place was packed and I was the only white man amongst the black population. During another quick survey, I discovered I was also the only person over 40 in this section of the *Willie T*. I edged my way toward the bar. "Excuse me, sir." "Sorry." "Thanks very much." As I navigated a tight course to a Cuba Libre, the crowd lent silent acceptance to my presence.

Why make this observation? What difference did it make if I were meandering around, and in-between black dudes, all young, who were piloting cigar boats in the Caribbean?

The truth is, I harbored thoughts of drug runners. Cigar boats full of dope, built to out run coast guard cutters. Or maybe the boat owners were pirates. Pirates? Sure. Not yet prevalent in the Caribbean for at-sea take-overs. But we were cautioned to keep our boat

locked up while on shore. (I was also designated as the Security Officer. Thus, I was responsible for the keys to the boat cabins.)

I make light with this series about sailing the British Virgin Islands. But I was not so naïve to know I was walking amongst some serious and deadly cigar boat navigators.

I'll take My Cigar with the Cigar Boat Owners

Everyone should secure their possessions. It is for a good reason possessions are called possessions; people like to possess them. I am writing this report after its dateline---after Bernard Madoff made off with billions of dollars of his *friends'* money. In hindsight, I was safer with these cigar dudes than I would have been at Mr. Madoff's Florida country club.

Besides, locking our boat had nothing to do with black, white, yellow, or chartreuse skinned men. The book *Freakonomics*---a funky title that belies its merit---lays claim that some 13% of a population will steal for something as insignificant as a bagel.²

Madoff fits into this population. But he also fits into a population of humans that we average folks should come to understand---but somehow are reluctant to acknowledge: Some people are *very* mentally sick.

We call them sociopaths or psychopaths. Whatever the name, they are not of normal ilk. They think differently than you and I. Don't try to commiserate with them. Don't try to put them on the path to salvation. They will not change. And if you are not careful, they will put you to ruin.

This report is meant to be on a light vein, so I will not deal with this matter any further, as I'm working on another essay about this subject. In the meantime, keep this happy thought next to your mental list of things to do...or not to do: The chances are almost 100% that you have met a sociopath/psychopath during your life. The chances are only slightly smaller that you have had personal dealings with one or more of these people.

Back to the boat. Who knows about those cigar boat drivers? The next morning I asked some locals about the number of cigar boats at the *Willie T*. One woman told me she had dinner at *Willie T* the very night we were there. She offered, "The boys have to let off steam. They race their boats."

I asked, "Where do they get their money for the boats?" She smiled and did not respond. Again, who knows? Maybe they own the *Willie T* and were checking out the clientele.

I was not assaulted. I was not insulted. I was given passage toward my Cuba Libre. I paid my tab and dank it down. On my way back to my table of Americans---a tableau resembling a white enclave in the middle of South Africa---I hit a couple of high fives with the black studs at the bar. No problem. Move on. Drink up. Chow down. Get ready for another sailing lesson tomorrow.

² Steven D. Levitt and Stephen J. Dubner, *Freakonomics* (New York: William Morrow, 2005), 44.

We were headed for Cooper Island and then Beef Island.