

**Your on the
Street Reporter**



Uyless Black

**Sailing the British Virgin Islands:
Virgin Gorda**

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Sailing the British Virgin Islands Report 7: Virgin Gorda and the Baths

October 20-26, 2008

As seen in Figure 10, we stopped-off at Virgin Gorda twice. In between these moorings, we sailed and swam around other islands in this part of the British Virgin Islands (BVI). During this time, we took a hike through a fantastic forest of rocks called the Baths, as seen in Figure 11. From the perspective of this photo, the rocks may appear to be just rocks. They appear to be small, but some are fifty feet high.

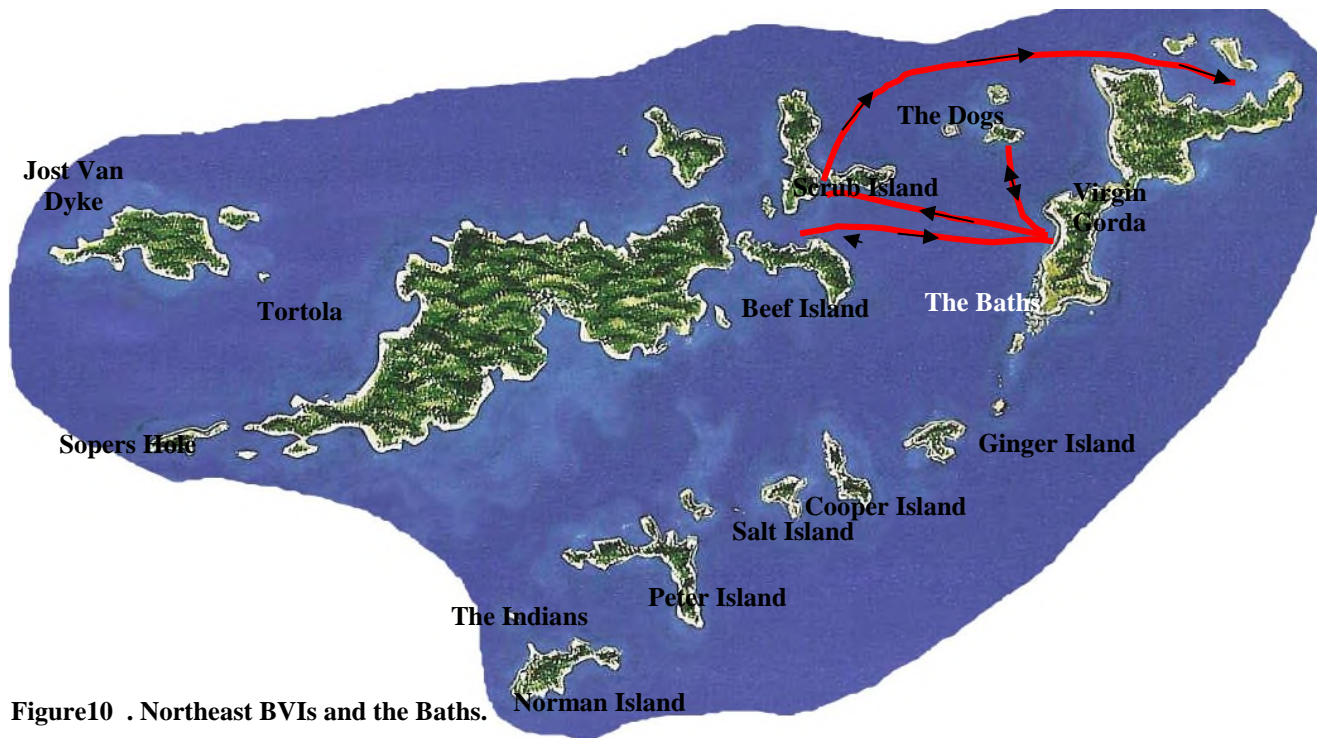


Figure10 . Northeast BVIs and the Baths.

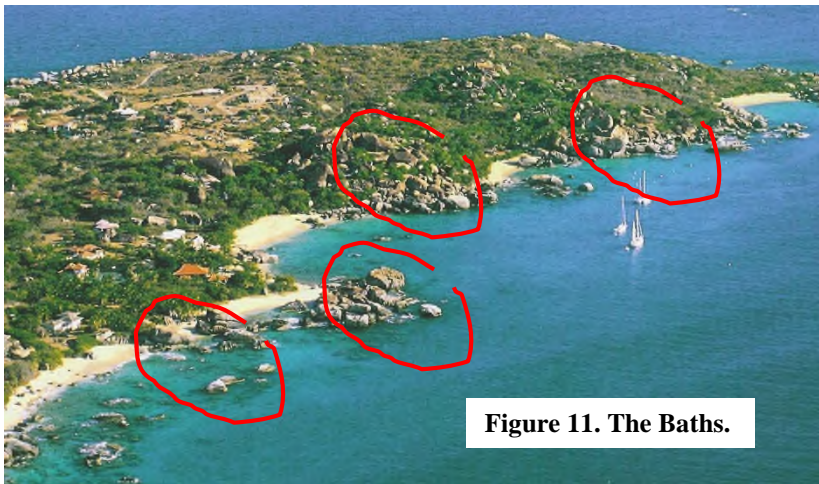


Figure 11. The Baths.

The Baths are strung-out along part of the southwest side of Virgin Gorda. The main rock formations are circled in red. Note the five beaches interspersed between the boulders. The red-roofed building houses a café and fresh water pool we visited after climbing around the Baths.

True Love

During this part of the sail, we also anchored at the Dogs Islands for swimming and leisure. But what could be more leisurely than sailing? Time and again, we see scenes from old movies---such as Bing Crosby, pipe in one hand, helm in the other, effortlessly guiding his sailboat while he belts out, “True Love.” Grace Kelly sits alongside Bing, happily listening to his vocals while she fantasizes about Cary Grant. Cary is the only one with any sense, as he is sitting on the dock.

Going to the Dogs

The Dogs are a good place to swim if you like schools of fish swimming alongside and around you. Some of my friends do not like fish in their water. During our times on St. Thomas, we met a number of people who worried that swimming among fish might run the risk of swimming among Barracuda. Their fear, a remote reality, kept them from wonderful adventures.

To join the fish in the Dogs waters, all you need is bait. Pull it out of a plastic bag or throw it from the boat, and you will have a lot of company. Figure 12 shows two photos I took a few yards from the stern of the boat. We had just tossed these fish some bait, so I jumped in to snap the shots. The fish were oblivious to me and my camera. They swam nearby but not close enough for touching.

Once, while swimming at St. Thomas, I took a large bag of bait into the bay near our place. I opened the bag and in less than five seconds, I was surrounded by fish. They took no note of me. I could feel their fins brush my head and body. I could not see beyond a massive wall of fish. For a moment, I felt claustrophobic. But soon, the bait was gone, and so were the fish.



Figure 12. Fish scenes.

The Baths

The Dogs offered fine swimming and explorations. But during these days, the Baths were the highlight of our adventures. I had never seen anything like them. One view is shown in Figure 13, which illustrates their clear water, sandy bottoms, and proximity to boats. They are part of the BVI national park service. According to this organization, “The granite boulders are as large as 40 feet in diameter. Their origins are subject to debate, but they are probably the result of weathering of softer rock, leaving pockets of very hard granite exposed.”¹

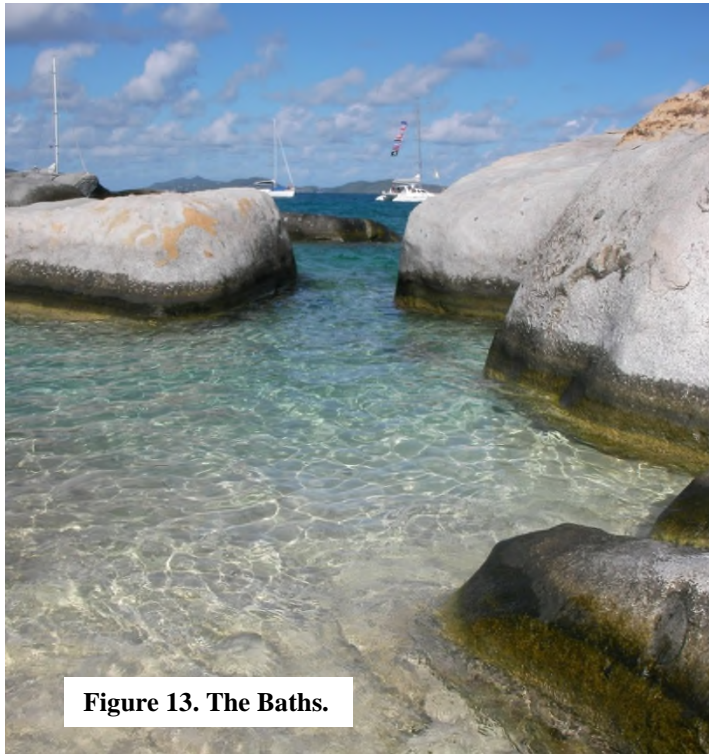


Figure 13. The Baths.

The pools of water shown in Figure 13 were so calm and shallow that we sat down in them as if to take a salt water bath. Perhaps that is how the Baths got its name.

We meandered through the boulders and the beaches, taking a short trip, beginning at the beach shown in the lower part of Figure 10 to the beach at the top part of the figure.

During this trek, we encountered the sights shown in Figure 14. The only downside to visiting the Baths is contending with its popularity. We were there during off-season, and we still encountered scores of visitors. If you can make it to this part of the world, strike out for the

Baths early in the morning. You will likely have most of the place to yourself.

After your walks and swims, take an hour or so to rinse off the salt water in the pool at the Top of the Baths, which also has a café for other forms of rinsing off...or rinsing down. Our crew had lunch here. I recommend the fish sandwich (fresh from yesterday’s catch), rinsed down with a frosted Margarita. Enjoy the view. (One vista is shown from the café in Figure 15.) As you take in this pleasure, keep in mind how unselfish you are being and how generously you are behaving. After all, we are told, “They who seldom take pleasure seldom give it.”² Later on, you can give some of this pleasure back. For now, soak it in.

¹ http://www.bvinationalparkstrust.org/vgparks_2.html

² Altered slightly from Fluke Greville, *Maxims, Characters, and Reflections*, p.192, 1756 in Leonard Roy Frank, *Quotationary* (New York: Random House, 2001), 604.



Figure 14. Scenes from the Baths.



Figure 15. Top of the Baths.