

Donna 'rocks' into Virgin Gorda

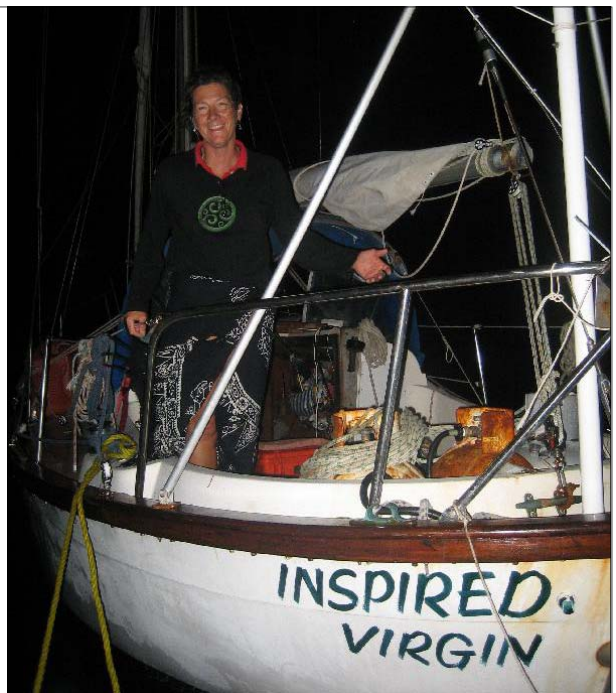
Donna Lange has arrived safely in the British Virgin Islands!

At 20.00 on the evening of 28 March Donna and her old friend and website manager, Neil Van Gundy, met in an emotional reunion off the island of Virgin Gorda.

Donna has stopped off in her 'Caribbean Home' to fit in with her 'Welcome Home Ceremony' scheduled for 21 April at the Herreshoff Marine Museum in Bristol, Rhode Island. She has been making phenomenally fast mileage, her best was 144 nm in 24 hours.

Halsey Herreshoff, Chairman of the "Bristol Welcomes Donna Lange Committee" has volunteered the use of the Museum dock as a venue for the day. The Committee, organised by Will Barbeau, has been instrumental in creating a fabulous ceremony to mark Donna's heroic voyage and her safe return to Bristol.

Many presentations are planned, including one by Representative Doug Gablinske of Bristol, who has arranged for April 21 to be proclaimed "Donna Lange Day".



Safe outside Virgin Gorda Yacht Harbour

By Neil Van Gundy

Donna's approach was anything but smooth!

"I have so much to say and write. The last 24 hours have been horrific, nearly fatal, disastrous, stressful but miraculous as now all is wonderful."

She approached in squalls, hand steering to maximize speed on the wind shifts, never knowing how much wind would hit her, how big the wind shift would be or whether there would be any lightning.

At only 10 miles out she started to see outlines of the smaller Virgin Islands which became silhouetted in the setting sun. She was surprised by the amount of traffic - airplanes, ships, cruise ships, fishing boats and at one point she was startled by a huge ship passing only a few 100 yards off her stern. At six hours off she decided to start the engine, always a gamble, but it roared into life on the second push! Navigation was extremely tricky as she didn't have any paper charts of the islands, having originally not planned to stop there. C-map on the computer wasn't very descriptive, but didn't mention any hazards, so she decided to take a short cut through a passage between islands.



"... I was just getting to the middle of the cut, keeping my eyes on the lights from Tortolla marking a clear horizon in the dark, when I saw breaking water to my left... The sea became a churning, lifting white water run. As I headed for clear water, a massive black boulder seemed to jump out of the sea to the left. I was in a boulder field of big rocks. I scrambled to douse the engine, careful not to stall it, heart in my throat, pounding ... waiting to hear the crushing sound of the hull and keel smashing against a hidden rock in the sea. Somehow, the moments passed and we had made it through in one piece."

Checking her satellite phone shortly afterwards she read a message from Neil, "Donna, be careful of the boulders in that cut at Jerusalem...they are right out in the middle...."

Donna's had two months tough sailing since she left Ushuaia, so she's revelling in time ashore with dear friends, *"every minute of the day here has been special. I really didn't understand just how much stress I have been under until it was lifted. I am like a kite."* Relaxing on the beach, playing music, dancing, sleeping in a bed with sheets, interviewed by 'All At Sea' magazine and honoured by the Tortolla Yacht Club at their Spring Regatta.

She plans to leave the Virgin Islands on 5th April for the final leg of 1,542 nm to Bristol, Rhode Island. It'll be a challenging sail so early in the season and once beyond Bermuda the nights will be down to freezing. But she has endured worse and the incentive to get home to family and friends is huge!

Check out Donna's site www.donnalange.com for up-to-date information on her Welcome Home Ceremony.

By Jane Pares in New Zealand and Will Barbeau in Rhode Island