

MARCH 2018

UNDERWAY

NEWS and NOTES from the CRUISING COMMUNITY

Edited by Jen Brett

WANDERING TOGETHER

It was overcast, but the threat of rain did nothing to dampen our enthusiasm. My husband, John, and I had pulled into a new anchorage at a new island, and we were eager to explore. The crew performed a clumsy dance as we collected shoes, water, cameras and rain jackets in anticipation, occasionally pausing to take in the dramatic juxtaposition of emerald-blue water, crimson-red rocks and a low-hanging gray sky.

Formed by volcanic activity millions of years ago, Isla Espiritu Santo looked haggard and beaten, tucked behind the Baja Peninsula in the Sea of Cortez. The red sandstone strata jutted forward from dark cliff bands like poorly healed scars. Ridges were dotted with intriguing black caves and topped with weathered shrubs that defied all odds of life as they clung to the crumbling rocks. Coming from our home waters in the lush Pacific Northwest, an environment teeming with life and fresh water, I was amazed at any living creature carving out an existence in this inhospitable world.

John and I dragged our dinghy up the beach and parked it next to two others. After we exchanged hugs and tales with fellow cruisers from the two boats we'd been sailing with, we all headed off up a winding goat trail. Soon, the small path dissolved into a field of boulders, and the easy walking became four-limbed scrambling. The seven of us clambered along, chatting and laughing together, as the rain quickened and the landscape transformed around us. There were a thousand new shades of sandstone red and a delicious fresh smell that came from a timid

plant we had completely overlooked. It was a variety of spearmint, we determined, and it was heavenly. Every turn offered new perspectives on the shifting clouds above and emerald bay below.

The group spread out as we each chose our own route over and between boulders, up the scree and around cactuses, individually determining the least intimidating approach up the steep hillside. There was nothing direct about the paths we chose, nothing fast or efficient about our pace. We stopped to peer into caves, to take pictures, to listen to a funny story. We whistled and hollered to hear the sounds echo back and forth through the canyon. It felt like the hills joined in our fun, repeating our laughter and silliness across the island.

Cruising often presents opportunities to relinquish plans weighed down with objectives and expectations. This life-style encourages us to embrace the unknown, to slip past the predictable and gather unexpected encounters, insights and reverberating laughter. It reminds us regularly that Mother Nature is in charge, not us. We could have let the rain cancel the hike; instead, we observed how it enhanced the colors, brought our attention to a modest plant and cooled us down.

I paused, closed my eyes and soaked up the sounds of the rain and the chattering of friends nearby. This is what life is all about, I decided. It's about exploring without agenda, following Mother Earth's cues and listening to authentic laughter. Above all, it's about wandering together. —Becca Guillote

While the hike up the goat path was challenging, the experience and the view from the top were worth it.