

August 10, 2003

Our box of boat parts finally arrived at Barillas Marina in El Salvador on Thursday, July 10. Phil was able to fix the Honda outboard motor to our dinghy. After officially checking out of El Salvador Saturday afternoon, we departed Barillas Sunday morning for Costa Rica. At 6:45 a.m. on July 13th the port captain came onboard our boat to sign our International Zarpe with departure time noted, and then at 7 a.m. the Barillas Marina panga guide started our escort out the bay. We timed our departure to coincide with the ebb current. Just like with our arrival seven weeks earlier, the trip out the bay took two hours. At the entrance to the bay we were met with 8-foot swells, but once across the seas were mostly calm. With that, our panga guide waved goodbye and we headed southeast down the coast.

The trip to Costa Rica took two days. Unfortunately, for most the journey when we did have wind, it almost always came "right down the nose" 12 to 15 knots. Fortunately, though, the seas were relatively calm. So, except for a few hours Monday morning when we were unable to beat into the seas, we were able to motor into the wind. At times the wind veered slightly, and we were even able to motorsail and sometimes, just sail. Also, during this passage there were occasions when we had a $\frac{1}{2}$ knot current setting against us. Like other passages, we saw quite a few dolphins and occasionally marine turtles.

Early in the evening our first night out along the Nicaragua coast, we were hit by quite a few squalls, complete with lightning and thunder. We were able to track them on our radar. The last and biggest squall seemed to hover directly overhead for almost half an hour. The thunder was most deafening! Once all the squall activity passed, though, the rest of the night was just gorgeous with the full moon shining through brightly.

Our second night out, a seabird became a fixture on our pulpit, beautifully silhouetted by the full moon, taking a stance as if it was there specifically to guide us to Costa Rica. It must have sat on our pulpit most the night. It wasn't until our actual arrival at Bahia Santa Elena in the northern tip of Costa Rica around 6 a.m., Tuesday, July 15, that the bird finally departed.

Bahia Santa Elena was a beautiful, peaceful, and protected anchorage. The waters were emerald green, and as the bay was part of Santa Rosa National Park it was totally undeveloped. It was here that we saw our first olive ridley turtle - an amazing sight with its humped shell making it look like a huge rock floating in the water. We were also treated to an abundance of bird sounds - truly a bird watcher's paradise. We spent 5 days at this anchorage. The only drawback, if any, was at times gusts of 20 to 25 knots would blow down off the hills into the bay.



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Anchored Bahia Santa Elena

We departed Bahia Santa Elena around noon on Sunday and had a delightful sail to the Islas Murcielagos (Bat Islands), 17 miles away. The hills on all these small islands were just striking with their many variations of green, from light green to olive green, and the water in the only small bay, Bahia Ensueno, was crystal clear. When we arrived in the late afternoon this bay was completely full of pangas; so we anchored for the night across from the islands next to the Santa Elena Peninsula at Key Point. At this anchorage there were only light swells, but unfortunately throughout the evening the winds off the hills gusted to 40 knots. We were definitely glad by morning to finally move over to the bay. The continued gusts, though, made snorkeling impossible, and with our being on a very limited time schedule in Costa Rica, we decided to continue sailing 24 miles on to Playa Panama in Bahia de Culebra. These two days of sailing ended up being our only good sailing during our entire stay in Costa Rica.

Playa Panama in the sheltered Bahia de Culebra was a lovely, protected anchorage with dark colored sand on the beach. We spent 4 nights here. On Tuesday, Phil attached the new wheels to our dinghy that we had received in the box of boat parts. On Wednesday, we took the boat for the day 5 miles over to Playas del Coco (a small tourist town) to check-in and "officially" enter the country, plus buy a few supplies. Our new wheels came in most handy, as we had to roll the dinghy quite a ways up the beach due to the increasing tides. The check-in procedure itself in Costa Rica entailed: first port captain, then immigration, next finding a photocopy machine that worked, afterwards back to the port captain, and last customs - a three hour wait as the only agent had to come from the nearby airport. We made it back to Playa Panama just as the sun was setting. My, were we exhausted! On Thursday, Phil fixed the wash down pump that had frozen while taking up the anchor in Bahia Santa Elena. It ended up being an all day project.

Friday, July 25, we departed Playa Panama planning to do an overnighter to Bahia Ballena in the Golfo de Nicoya. We ended up only motoring 15 miles down to Bahia Brasilito before stopping, as we were just too tired to continue on. Offshore, the pinnacles and islands of Islas Santa Catalina were most striking, especially as the sun set that evening.

After a good night's sleep, we departed Bahia Brasilito at first light and continued motoring down the coast. By early afternoon the skies had become quite dark over the Costa Rica coastline, and soon we experienced quite a bit of rain, complete with lightning and thunder. It rained much of the afternoon and evening. And, as always, the thunder was most deafening when directly overhead. But, unlike other storms, there was very little wind associated with this weather. Using our radar, we finally anchored in Bahia Ballena around 1 a.m. on Sunday, July 27.

Even though we had only slight swells while in Bahia Ballena, it was an open bay. If the weather changed quickly there was no place to run. So after only one day of exploring the area, we motored Monday further up into the Golfo de Nicoya. As it was a most spectacular blue-sky day, the scenery and all the islands along the way were just exquisite, and traveling with the incoming tide gave us an extra knot or two at times.



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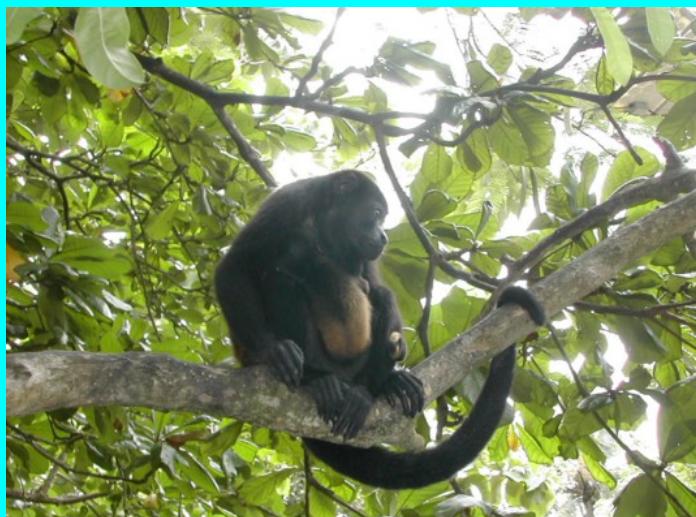
We passed close by the beautiful Islas Tortugas, full of tour boats, and a few hours later anchored in-between Isla Cedros and Isla Jesusita, a most protected and tranquil anchorage.

We spent four busy and delightful days at this anchorage. Like many of the previous anchorages in Costa Rica, we were treated here to an abundance of bird sounds, many butterflies, and the roars of howler monkeys. We ended up anchoring next to two cruising boats that had been with us at Barillas, El Salvador, and so had much fun revisiting. Often at night, lightning could be seen in all the surrounding hills, but somehow this anchorage never seemed to get the rain. On Tuesday, we tried out our inflatable kayak for the first time. On Wednesday, we took the ferry (1½ hour trip each way) across the Golfo de Nicoya to Puntarenas for the day to buy supplies, get laundry done, and enjoy a lunch with other cruising friends from Barillas. On Thursday, we had our first of two exciting “wildlife adventures” while in Costa Rica. We took a taxicab with another cruising couple to the nearby Curu Wildlife Refuge and spent 4 fantastic hours hiking through the jungle. As it was the low tourist season, we had the entire refuge to ourselves. We saw monkeys, a variety of birds, some lizards including the Jesus Christ lizard that “walks on water”, iguanas, beautifully colored butterflies, and a variety of small colorful insects.

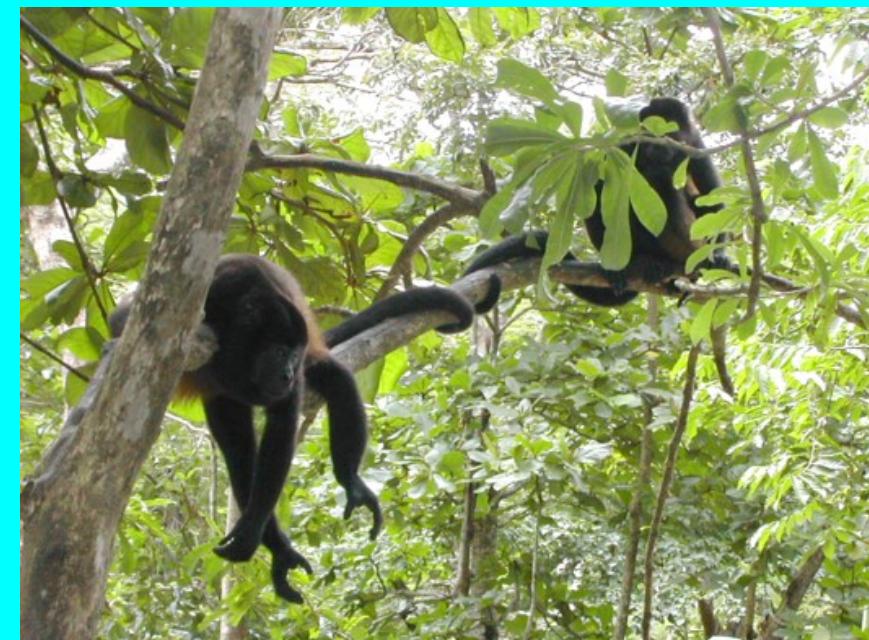
We had especially wanted to see monkeys in the wild, and we weren’t disappointed at the Curu Wildlife Refuge. Often while walking along we could hear branches move, but when we looked we saw nothing. It wasn’t until we stopped that the monkeys finally came - and did they come! It was most exciting. We could see the white-faced monkeys (more properly known as white-throated capuchin) move through the branches, coming from quite a few trees away, coming closer, curious to get a look at us. It reminded me of Curious George in the series by that same name. Then, a further ways off, we could hear the howler monkeys coming closer, but never coming as close as the capuchins. At most anchorages throughout Costa Rica we have heard the sounds of the howler monkeys coming from shore - quite a loud noticeable “howl” sound. But, here in this jungle, because they kept coming closer, the sound became louder and louder - like right out of a Tarzan movie. In Spanish, these monkeys are called “mono congo”, which I think most appropriate, as their sounds definitely reminded me of Africa.

On Friday, August 1, we departed Islas Cedros and Jesusita and headed southeast across the Golfo de Nicoya. That afternoon it rained a lot as we approached Los Suenos Marina in Bahia Herradura to take on fuel and water. In our Costa Rica cruising guide, it mentioned that the Rio Tarcoles marked the artificial boundary separating the northern dry topical forests from the southern wet tropical forests. With the rain that afternoon, we totally concurred. After fueling, we headed 5 miles back up the coast to Punta Leona. Unfortunately, the anchorage at Punta Leona ended up being very rolly, but since it was getting dark and we had no other options, we stayed and put out a stern anchor for the night to keep us into the prevailing swell.

Originally we had planned to spend a day at Punta Leona, but instead left immediately Saturday morning. As we exited Golfo de Nicoya, we were met by big incoming swells, thus making for a slow passage. Once outside, though, the waters became calm. We continued heading southeast along the coastline. Late in the day we passed by Quepos, could see that it was quite rolly, and so decided to continue on overnight to Bahia Drake. We ended up motoring the entire way with squalls on and off throughout the night. Any time there was some wind it came straight down the nose. Thus, we started coining the phrase “we must be going the right direction as the wind is right on the nose.” We anchored in Bahia Drake just as the sun rose on Sunday, August 3.



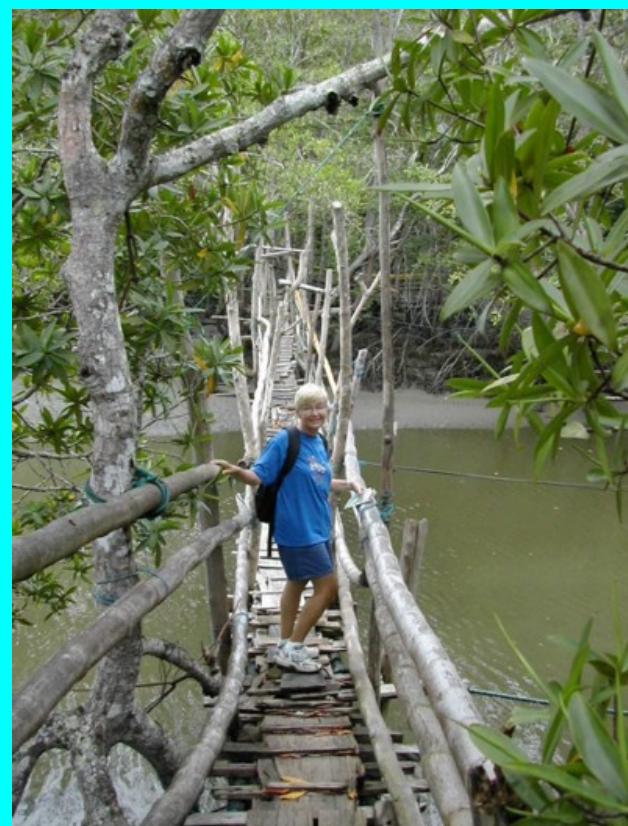
Howler Monkeys



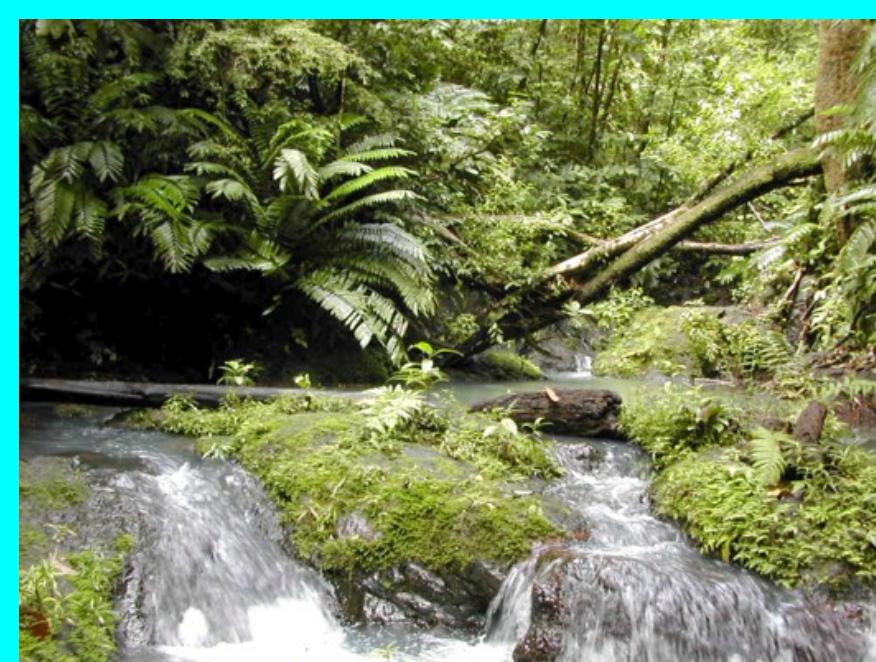
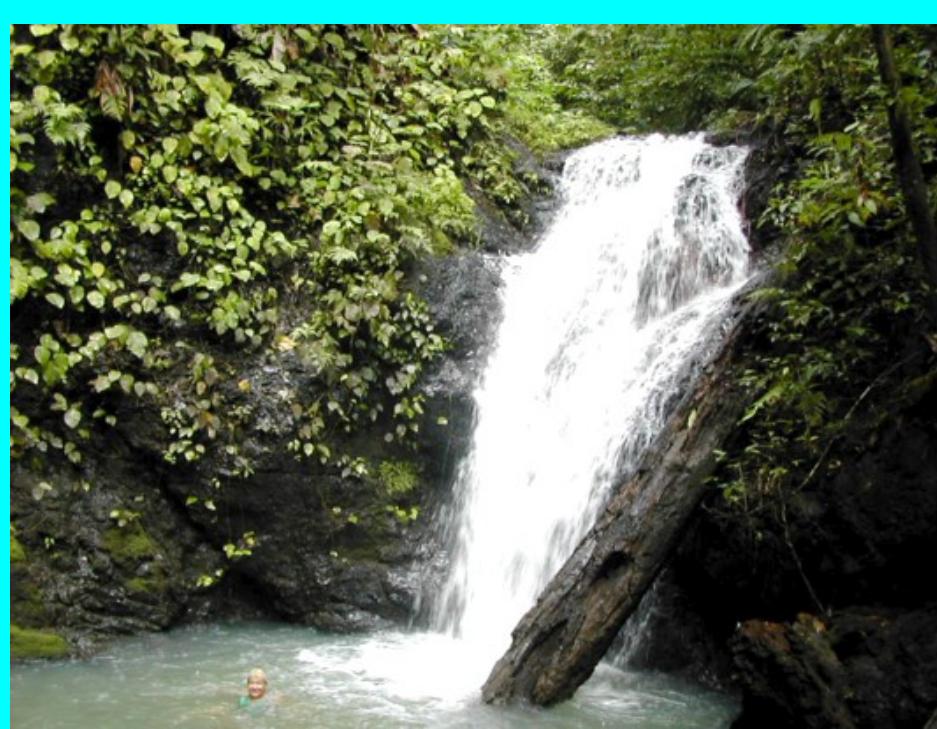
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We spent two days at Bahia Drake on the Osa Peninsula. The annual rainfall on this peninsula is 220 inches, making it one of the wettest regions of the country. Sunday afternoon we went to shore in our dinghy to explore the area and got caught in a downpour. We ran quickly for cover at the nearby local bar, and one of the locals befriended us. Later as he was walking along the shore toward his home, we were trying to get our dinghy out pass the surf line. While Phil started the engine he kept the dinghy out of the surf line, and as the beach dropped off quickly he ended up having only his head above water at the last moment. What a sight that was! Once back on shore, he waved goodbye and continued his walk toward home - truly a "friend," indeed.

Our second exciting "wildlife adventure" in Costa Rica took place on Monday as we explored the tropical rainforest of the Osa Peninsula. At 8:30 a.m. one of the local panga drivers picked us up at our boat and dropped us off at Playa San Josecito, a remote beach further down the peninsula. As we came through the surf to the beach, it was most exciting to watch him maneuver the panga, turn it around, back in, and then lift the big Yamaha outboard out of the water just before reaching the shore. We had 6 hours in the area before he returned to take us back to our boat. First, we hiked along the jungle trail over to the Rio Claro, rented a canoe, and went exploring up the river. We were only able to go a little ways up the river to the first waterfall as debris caused from heavy rains was blocking the passage to the second larger waterfall. We had a most delightful time at the first waterfall climbing over the rocks and enjoying its cool waters - plus we had it all to ourselves. On our return, we saw another Jesus Christ lizard "walk on water". Once on land, though, the lizard looked more like a miniature dinosaur as it quickly walked up the log on its back legs. Afterwards, we enjoyed observing the beautiful scarlet macaws and the white-faced monkeys as the forest just abound with them. The scarlet macaws always seemed to be fussing with each other, and the monkeys always seemed to be leaping quickly from branch to branch, busily gathering food. Sometimes the monkeys would leap, wouldn't think where they were landing, and would end up at the tip of the lightest branches - such a funny sight to watch. We arrived back at our boat around 3:30 just before the rainstorm. The swell was also now coming into the bay; so it made for a most uncomfortable night with little sleep.



Exploring the Jungle



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At 7 a.m. on Tuesday, August 5, we pulled up the anchor and headed around the Osa Peninsula to Golfito in Golfo Dulce. It was a beautiful blue-sky day over the entire peninsula, most rare indeed at this time of year. As we left Bahia Drake, the current was with us but we were motoring against the swell. Once we hit the southern part of the peninsula, both the current and swell were with us and we were "motorsailing" on a reach, using the motor only for that extra knot as we had a long ways to go and wished to arrive in Golfito before dark. As we went up Golfo Dulce, the entire area surrounding Golfito was immersed in dark black clouds and rain. Upon approaching Golfito, our radar made us look like we, too, were being engulfed into "the black hole". Luckily, the main part of the storm passed just as we were approaching the entrance to Golfito Harbor. As it was getting dark, we followed the range lights into the harbor. About 15 feet away from an unlit channel marker directly in our path, a bolt of lightning lit up the sky allowing us to quickly change course - just in the nick of time. Normally, cruisers do not like lightning as a number of boats have been hit by lightning causing much damage to their electrical systems. This time, though, lightning was our friend. We put down the anchor at 7 p.m. - both of us totally exhausted. This past week we had had two "wildlife adventures", one overnighter, and two very rolly nights at anchor. Our lack of sleep finally caught up with us in Golfito.



We spent the next three days in Golfito catching up on needed sleep, obtaining fuel and water, and running around getting needed supplies. While in Golfito it rained a lot, and we definitely noticed the increase humidity. Friday afternoon we checked out of Costa Rica, going first to the bank to pay the \$20 exit fee, then to customs, next to immigration to get our passports stamped, and last to the port captain to obtain our international zarpe.

Saturday afternoon, August 9, we departed Costa Rica for Panama. Our 25 days in Costa Rica had truly been full of so many fond memories. Like when exiting Golfo de Nicoya, we motored out Golfo Dulce against the swell and straight into the wind. Once pass Punta Banco, though, we had no wind. As we traveled along Costa Rica's coastline throughout the night, we had many squalls. We ended up motoring the entire way to our first anchorage in Panama - Isla Parida, 80 miles away. Our arrival at Isla Parida on Sunday, August 10, was timed for an hour after daybreak as sunlight was needed in order to navigate around all the islets, rocks, and shallow waters that surrounded the island. We finally dropped our anchor in the beautiful clear waters off Isla Gamez, located just off the northeastern coast of Isla Parida. As Panama was on Eastern Standard Time, we set our clocks ahead one hour.



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