

Saturday, June 25. 2011

On the way to Cuba

Just a brief update. The last week was so busy I didn't get to write at all. The customs official did come around finally and 'inspected' the boat - with her radar eyes from the safety of the land. Because the engine was fixed and I felt useless without a project we started on a movie about our favorite Cafe in Santa Marta - Lulo. Work in progress. More than anticipated. Film school - William at the camera. Carrying my camera gear around caught some attention from other sailors, and they asked if I would give a film class to their kids. That happened on Thursday, and it was big fun. Friday morning we got the boat ready to leave it unattended for three weeks, and in the afternoon we left for Cartagena by bus, a four hour trip. Now we are in Cartagena in a nice little hotel with huge doors and had our first hot shower in over months. Pure luxury. I could shower for hours. Unfortunately it's late and in four hours we have to be up again to catch our plane for Cuba via Panama, so it's time for bed. Zzzzzzzz

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 00:42

Monday, June 20. 2011

Waiting for the paperwork

Gudrun in Santa Marta in order to leave the boat here until November it is necessary to import it temporarily. The mandatory boat inspection by the custom official was scheduled for last week Tuesday. Then Friday. Then Saturday. Then today, Monday, 08:30. So far nobody has showed up. Without the paperwork finished we can't go anywhere. I call Jorge, our official agent. He tells me that the new time is now 11:30. Cruising is waiting.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 02:37

Saturday, June 18. 2011

My brother, my hero

My brother Ralf just send me these pictures. While I'm bumming about on a boat, he designed and built an electrically assisted tricycle for our mum. From scratch. With suspension, motor, batteries, drive control, >100km range and a box for the shopping. Mobility for mum! (She has problems with balance and can't ride a bicycle and shouldn't drive a car) The tricycle Mark I. Mum on her first test drive. Bye mum. Happy shopping!

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 11:52

Friday, June 17. 2011

No time for sailing

Every evening, after the heat of the day, the weather turns bad. Rain and gusts and thunderclouds. The summer is no time for sailing around here.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 11:43

Santa Marta: guns and motorbikes

The security guard steps out of his hut as we approach the exit of the marina. I notice the handgun in his belt holster as he opens the gate. His colleague is dressed in camouflage and has an assault rifle slung around his back. Ookay. We step outside the tidy marina and into real Colombia. In the heat, we are thankful that the road ahead is shaded by trees and buildings. Fruit vendors have parked their handcarts on the corner and a constant stream of motorbikes, taxis, SUVs and buses flow past us as we walk. The windows and doors of the buses are open, and people stand in the doors, encouraging us to get on. A few of the door-men, on what looks like overland-buses, carry shotguns, which I don't find particularly encouraging. We continue down the street. To our left we see people sitting on benches talking, swimming in the sea or playing on the sand. To the right the street is mostly lined by restaurants, busy with local guests. After two weeks at anchor in front of quiet villages in Puerto Rico and an even quieter week at sea, we enjoy the sights and sounds of a city full of half a million inhabitants. Soon we find "Ben & Josep"'s restaurant, a place recommended to us for it's steak by Zolt, a sailor from the marina. It's been a week since we had eaten meat, and steak sounds exactly right for tonight. We sit down and order the "Volkswagen steak" - a big, round lump of meat. The sun sets behind isla el morro, and more people walk in to the restaurant from the beach. We sit and chat and are happy to have arrived. The steak is delicious, the beer is cold, and . we only need to find a dry bed to complete the "back to civilization" checklist. The beds on Gudrun are still wet from a leak in the hatch. Newcomers to the city, we wander down to what we later discover is the bad part of town, an area in the shadow and dirt of the docks which we have since been advised to avoid. We walk into several reasonable looking hotel entrances only to find shared rooms with steel bunk beds which remind me a little too much of my time in the army. Further down the street we find ourselves in a part of the city that feels completely foreign to me. Bare bricks on dirty walls are exposed where large areas of plaster is missing. Through the open doors I can see people sitting in their sofas watching TV, and the walls inside don't look a lot better than outside. "I don't understand how they can live like this" I say to Liz. "Like what?" "Like, sitting on a sofa when the plaster is falling on your head. And not getting up to fix it." We back track and finally find a hotel on the way back to the city center. The room is simple, but clean. One out of three light bulbs works, the shower is cold, the minibar empty, but the bed is good, and that is the only thing that matters right now. We fall on the bed and are asleep in the next minute. In the morning we have breakfast in a street cafe: Coffee, potato, rice, beans, eggs and arepa, a plain cornmeal bread. We only finish half of it, and a bum, about my age, who walks by sees it and asks us whether he can have it. His poise, looks and manners remind me of Jack Sparrow. If Johnny Depp ever copied of somebody, it was this guy. I look in amazement at a thing he is carrying on his head, until I identify it as a pair of pants. I smile, and say that he can of course have my meal. The waiter comes and asks me again, I agree, and he packs it into a Styrofoam box and hands it over to the guy, who walks away eating. Friday and Saturday we clean the boat, dry the beds and do our laundry. Although we work in the shade of the awning it is very hot. At least the beds should dry quickly. Saturday evening we go out. The streets and plazas are full of people, standing and talking. The many little bars and restaurants are full as well. Live music is playing in many of them. Vendors walk the streets with trays or carts, selling drinks, fruit and sweets. "This is so sad. I always thought Ulm was special because of the Schwabingerwoche, where the whole city is on the street." "And?" "Look around you. The whole city is on the street as well. But they don't need a Schwabingerwoche to do it." Liz laughs. She was never overly enthusiastic about the nightlife in Ulm. "It's good to be travelling." I say and nod. "Puts things into perspective." We just walk around for a few hours and look at it all, then we sit down for a drink and keep looking at the people. Next day I don't feel well. Stomach bug. The other cruisers in the marine tell me that most of them got it after arriving here. I lie in bed most of the day, and Monday as well while Liz spends her time writing. Tuesday I feel better and begin working on the starter motor. I soak it in vinegar and cola for a day to dissolve the rust, then clean all the parts with a soft wire brush and degreaser. The insulating cloth around the coils is soaked with rusty salt-water, and the resistance between coils and housing reads only a few Ohm, not good. After two more days of cleaning and drying it's up to 10 Mega Ohm, much better. Time to start the engine. I install the starter motor, but it doesn't turn. Disheartened I remove it again. A physicist that can't even repair a lowly electric motor. I feel useless. Zolt, our neighbor, lends me some strong testing cables and I connect the motor to the battery. Zzzzzrrrrrr! It works! My inner physicist heaves a sigh of relief. Aha, but the solenoid, the magnetic switch that engages the motor and gears, does not work. I need a new one. Jonny, one of the Marina workers, offers to drive

me to Alberto with his motorbike. As he says the name I can tell that he holds Alberto in very high esteem. The other marineros nod. Yes, Alberto is the man. I agree, and Jonny hands me a helmet. It's worn and too big and has no chin-strap. I keep my baseball cap on so the helmet won't fall off my head. Jonny is a careful driver. He is very careful not to accelerate or brake unnecessarily. Instead he swerves around oncoming or crossing traffic. He does it expertly. But approaching a crossing without even the slightest touch on the brake just feels wrong. My body wants to feel at least some negative acceleration. We cross a street, take a shortcut through a gas-station followed by another shortcut through a backyard. The driver of a white Toyota SUV must have had the same idea, only coming the other way. And on our side of the narrow road. And he's in a hurry. I get ready to jump off the motorbike, but Jonny swerves to the left and avoids the Toyota. Then he swerves right again to avoid another car. Then left again to enter a different street. He hasn't touched the brake or the gas at all. But we made it. Seeing no immediate threats I start to relax a little. Alberto We turn into a backyard where a man with grey hair and mustache comes out to greet us. Alberto. After exchanging greetings, I hand him the starter motor which he tests and takes apart, nodding approvingly all the while. I feel a little proud, maybe I'm not completely useless after all. We wait while he gets a new solenoid and installs it and we return to the boat. An hour has passed in Alberto's workshop, and Jonny is in a hurry now. He turns into Calle 22, one of the main streets, and speeds up. Delivery trucks block the street and pavement ahead of us. I wonder when he's going to brake. Now maybe? No. But now. No. Instead Jonny swerves onto the pavement and squeezes through the gap between the truck and the wall. I sigh in relief that nobody was trying to walk the other way. Back in the Marina I install the starter motor and break out into a grin as the motor starts. Success! Then the oil pressure warning sounds. Not again. Looks like my work is not quite done yet.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 11:36

Sunday, June 12. 2011

Pictures from sailing to Colombia

Liz pulls up the mainsail enthusiastically. Then gets a sea-water shower as Gudrun ploughs through the waves. Watching the parasailor in low winds. Dolphins!.. Thundercloud. Skullcloud. Up with the sail. Broken starter motor trying to stop the mainsail from flapping.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 12:35

Saturday, June 11. 2011

The arrival

"How deep is it?" I ask nervously. Both echo sounders are not working and Liz is using the hand lead to sound the depth. "Eight?" she replies. She sounds and looks unsure. I am wound up tight and don't like unsure. I step away from the rudder and drop the lead myself. It hits the bottom at 3m. Our draft is 2,50m. Damn, let's get out of here! I decide to turn away and approach the anchorage again. This is not a wide anchorage, only a very small strip of 50m between the narrow channel for the freighters and the shallows near the beach where the fisherboats are. We turn south towards the marina and gybe. The water should be deeper here. The wind picks up and fills the sail. The boat heels a bit. But we don't move. "We've run aground." I state the obvious. I laugh at Liz. The tension falls away from me. It didn't work out as planned, but it could have gone a lot worse. Fortunately the bottom is sand, so damage is unlikely. And it is low tide, which means we will be afloat again in six hours at the latest. But it will be dark then and I don't want to wait that long. "Let's try to pull the boat off the shallow with the dinghy and move it further west." We drop the anchor and roll in the genoa. Then we winch the dinghy up from its position on deck and drop it over the side. Liz takes up position at the helm of Gudrun. I attach a long line to the bow of Gudrun and the stern of the dinghy and start to pull. I'm so glad I went for the 15hp outboard, the biggest I could fit on the dinghy. The outboard wails up, the propeller churns the water and turns it white. But Gudrun is not moving. Or is she? No. Maybe. HmMMM, no. I keep on pulling. "Necesitas ayuda?" A fisherman comes around with his boat and asks if I need help. "Si senor, gracias!" I throw him a line and attach it to Gudrun. We pull together. After ten minutes Gudrun starts to move. Yipieeee! We pull her westwards for 20m, then drop the anchor. "My name Alberto. You need. I am at beach. OK?". He waves good-bye. I smile. Happy that Gudrun is safe again. We ride into the marina with the dinghy. The marina is big, brand-new, and almost empty. I estimate that more than three quarters of the slips are empty. I can see no office building. But I see a man standing in front of what looks to be his sailboat. I ask Liz to approach him, and after seeing his Swiss flag send a greeting in German. We exchange names and I explain our situation, that the engine is broken. He said that he thought as much and wanted to go out to help us in. But nobody is allowed to leave the marina without a permit, which takes a day to get. "They are very serious about the permits." he says "Because of the drug smuggling, you know. But don't worry, everybody is really friendly and helpful." From then on everything goes smoothly. Silvio walks us to the marineros, marina staff. They call their boss, who insists to send us a tug complementary of the marina. And an agent to complete the check-in formalities. We return to the boat, which the tug is already approaching. I talk to the crew of the tug. They come alongside and we throw ropes. They tie the ropes to the tug and throw us some fruit, smile, and give us the universal thumbs-up sign. I smile back. I feel safe. The tug steers us into the marina expertly and drops us off on the end of a pontoon where the marineros are waiting. They tie down the boat. The agent is also here already, and we do some paperwork. He takes the passports to have them stamped by immigration. Then everybody leaves again after a lot of smiling, shaking hands and repeating names. Names seem to be very important here. Liz and I look at each other and hug. We've arrived in South America.

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 00:05

Thursday, June 9, 2011

Arrived in Santa Marta, Colombia

We have arrived in the Marina Santa Marta. Finally. True to the spirit of the whole trip the arrival was a new experience altogether. And involved a lot of very friendly people. People are just wonderful. More later, I'm too tired to write.

Posted by Axel Busch at 19:57

So close and yet so far

Thursday, 09.06.2011, 12:00 local (16:00 UTC), 11:18.1N, 074:14.4W (3,6nm north of Santa Marta, Colombia). The Parasailor is up and we're sailing towards Santa Marta. Slowly at first, 2kn, then towards evening ever faster. 3kn. 4kn. 5kn. Wow, finally some decent speed. We watch (another) beautiful sunset to the west. To the south the view is not so pretty. Thunderclouds are forming again. But none to the north or behind us, so we should be safe tonight. Liz watches the lightning in awe. It is pretty spectacular. But I'm done with lightning, there were too many close encounters this week. If I have to see no more for the rest of my life I'll be the happier for it. We sail westwards, parallel to the moving thunderclouds. But eventually we have to turn south towards Santa Marta. We go faster. 6kn, 7kn. I'm worried that we're going to fast and won't be able to turn south in a safe distance behind the thunderclouds. But it's so nice to go fast again, after days of just drifting about. After midnight the wind stops suddenly. Force 4 to 0 in three minutes. Interesting. The boat rolls and bangs like crazy. I can find no sleep. I move to the bow of the boat. I don't mind the wet mattress from where the hatch leaked, I just want to get away from the sound of the waves banging against the stern as much as possible. But there is no refuge, tonight the sea beats on Gudrun like a drummer gone mad. In the morning I study the maps closer and find out why. The wind dropped us right on the start of the continental shelf, where the sea floor rises up sharply. The waves always pile up there, and we're sitting there for five hours with no chance of getting away. With the sun the wind comes back, and we start sailing again. The wind increases steadily. Force 1, 2, 3, 4. Nice, this is great sailing. The Colombian coast rises out of the mist. South America. Finally! We laugh and sing. Colombia, we're coming! The wind increases still more. Force 5, force 6 in gusts. This is a little more than hoped for. I'm wondering how we're going to anchor in that wind. But beggars can't be choosers, I'm glad we're off that ridge. And the wind should drop to something reasonable in the shelter of the mountain. But we're not of the hook yet. As we approach the Cabo de la Aguya, the wind drops completely. Again. My, this is getting tiresome. At least we are still moving, even if at less than a knot. So much for getting to Santa Marta for a nice lunch. On the other hand we won't have any problems anchoring under sails or pulling the boat into the marina with the dinghy. And dinner is much more fun than lunch anyway.

Posted by Axel Busch at 11:06

Wednesday, June 8, 2011

The race

Wednesday, 08.06.2011, 12:00 local (16:00 UTC), 12:02.1N, 073:26.8W (62nm north-east of Cabo de la Aguja, Colombia). It is hot. The washing is hanging over the rail, drying quickly. We sit and sleep under the shade of the awning. The fish find shade under the boat. I make a tuna noodle salad. Canned tuna. Encouraged by Nur and Baha I have bought the lines, hooks and rubber squids as bait for catching tuna and set everything up. But we can't bring ourselves to trail the line. Killing big game for food is not yet part of our lifestyle. Consuming it in little anonymous canned portions is easier. Again we eat, sleep, sit, read and talk. There is talk of marriage, kids, writing and working. And a lot of laughing. I feel ready to turn to a completely normal life - a home, job, kids. But first we have to get to New Zealand. No, first we have to get to Colombia. During the afternoon we drift with some current back north to within a mile of where we were Monday at noon. Various items of garbage are drifting with us. Spilled into the sea either from a river or a freighter. As the sun begins to set thunderclouds form. Beautiful clouds, shooting high into the sky. Colored in layers from white at the top, through blue to a dark red at the base from the setting sun. I take out the camera and run around the deck excitedly. Click, review, adjust, repeat. With the thunderclouds comes the wind, from the north this time. There are individual thundercloud cells to the north, east and south of us. It was very hot all day, and the clouds are very big. This is not looking good. The only way out is west. We set all sails and hope that we can out-run the clouds. Liz has become very good with handling the lines by now. Halyards, downhauls, sheets, runners and reefing lines hold no mystery for her anymore. Well, almost. Still, I am impressed. There are 22 lines leading into the cockpit of Gudrun and it took me a while as well to get them all sorted out. The race is on: "Gudrun vs. Thunderclouds Of The Caribbean". One of the most exciting evening entertainments imaginable. Liz stands at the back of the cockpit and watches the spectacle as each of the thunderclouds fires a volley of lightning into the night. I go to sleep to be fit for the final, should we fail to out-run the clouds. It is 1am. Liz goes to bed and I take over. We're clear of the western and southern thunderclouds for the time, But the northern one is hot on our heels. Too hot. The wind has shifted to north-east and we're going west too slowly. The cloud is catching up. The way back is blocked, as is the way south. I change course to north-west, windward. Close-hauled we go faster. The moon has set and it is pitch black. Except when the lightning flares up the sky in shades of color from golden to purple. I get the camera ready. What a great photographic opportunity. 3am. The thunderclouds are firing off three to six flashes of lightning per minute now. I stare through the viewfinder into the black and try to compensate for the movement of the boat. When the sky lights up I click away. With patience I have found the right balance between aperture (1:2), exposure (1/30) and iso sensitivity (3200). But getting the focus right in the dark was the hardest. Most of the earlier pictures are useless. The cloud is also closer and more westerly. I estimate that we are ahead in the race and that the show will be over in an hour. But I'm not known for being the most accurate weather frog. I put the camera away, it's enough. I lie down on the cockpit cushions and enjoy the highlight of the show. I think we're winning the race. 4am. It's over. Gudrun has won. I gybe and turn south-westerly towards Santa Marta at 5kn. During the race we've sailed 14nm to the north that we have to sail south again. I am tired. Liz comes up at six and I go to sleep for a few hours. The wind drops gradually during the morning and we switch to the Parasailor. By 11am the wind is barely enough to keep the sail inflated. But we're moving. It's very hot again. Looks like there will be another race tonight.

Posted by Axel Busch at 12:03

Tuesday, June 7, 2011

Living among the fishes

Tuesday, 06.06.2011, 12:00 local (16:00 UTC), 12:16.8N, 072:53.2W (44nm north of Riohacha, Colombia). Liz is washing clothes in the bucket. I sit under the awning - a big sun cover over the boom - and write my blog. I put the awning up this morning because there is no indication of any wind. Normally, in wind of more than force 2 that is, we sail 150nm. In the last 24 hours we sailed a glorious total of 11nm. Unfortunately all that distance was sailed in the evening, and since then we've drifted back half of that distance again. We will probably pass our yesterday's noon position sometime tonight. It's funny, really. The music is playing and thanks to the awning we have shade. Fortunately we left Puerto Rico with full water tanks and jerry cans. Provided we reach a port within the next ten days we'll be fine. Another blessing is the salt-water pump, which we use to spray the deck for cooling. Yesterday we had 34Å,Å°C in the boat, today it's only 32Å,Å°C. The difference is noticeable. We read, write, sleep, cook, talk and make plans about the future. When I get too hot I slide into the water. Briefly, because I still feel uneasy about swimming in the open ocean. But I'm glad for the chance, it's good to leave your comfort zone now and again. And the visibility in the water here is spectacular. Sometimes fish come to investigate the boat. I take pictures. After nightfall insects come, from wherever, and investigate our lights. Liz screams. In this way we pass the day. And tomorrow there will be wind. Seguro. Manana, manana .

Posted by Axel Busch at 12:12

Monday, June 6. 2011

Patience

Monday, 06.06.2011, 12:00 local (16:00 UTC), 12:20.29N, 072:49.04W (47nm north of Riohacha, Colombia). So, the trip to Cuba is not going as well as hoped. First of all - due to damages and the weather - we're not going to Cuba at all, but to Colombia. Which looked like an easy trip from Puerto Rico given the predominantly easterly winds and our boat's very good sailing capabilities. The best sailing capabilities, however, are nothing in the face of no wind. And an impatient captain. Sometimes Liz comes and sits with me in the cockpit. I say sometimes, because according to Liz it is not often that I can be found just sitting in the cockpit. Either I work on something, I sleep, or I run around on deck doing sailory things. But sometimes she catches me sitting in the cockpit, and she will then always come and join me to hold, to talk, or to look at the sky and the sea together. I cherish these moments, because they are short lived. Involuntarily I will notice that something is amiss or needs to be done, and jump up from our quiet musings to go about a new task. She says it's one of the reasons why she loves me. I know it's one of the reasons why calms are so hard for me to bear. It is too hot to be out. It is too hot to be in. It is too hot to do anything but to lie unmoving in the most distant corner from the sun. It might be all right if everything was quiet. But the opposite is true. A sailboat sitting in a new calm is a very noisy place, as old seas slap against it's sides, lines rattle, and blocks bang. They call out for me to stop them. But I am helpless. And that is not a state any captain likes to be in, much less an impatient one. When I left Germany on a sailboat 20 months ago, I hoped that my experiences on the trip would teach me patience. So far my progress in this regard is incomplete. Maybe I have to sail for another 20 months. I'm running, however, out of patience. Instead I am learning to me more adept with tools. Take the grinder, for example. Coming from a family of weavers, carpenters and mechanics I learned at an early age to use files, sanders, saws, and drills. I sawed and drilled everything. One of my favorite subjects was the living-room furniture, despite the spanking that it earned me. But the wood was just too wonderful. To my defense I can only say that the holes and cuts were very small, and that I made them with great care. We also had a grinder at home, which impressed and frightened me with it's sheer abrasive power. But it is not a device you use on wood, since very quickly there would be nothing left of the wood. Therefore it was not until I started living on a steel sailboat that I came around to use it frequently. Reluctantly and carefully at first, but later more often and more confidently. Yesterday I used it to make a new hand crank for my engine. Because of the way the engine was put into the boat, the original hand crank cannot be used. The space is too small. With the help of my newly made hand crank I hoped to be able to start the engine despite the broken starter motor. Unfortunately, I couldn't. The hand crank worked fine, but I just couldn't turn it fast enough to start up the engine. The last of my options exploited, we will have to sit out all te calms. And sail into the anchorage or use the dinghy to pull us in. When we get there. We haven't made it very far in the last days. There is some wind in the morning before the oppressive heat builds up, and some in the evening when the thunderclouds pass through and we try to stay away from the lightning as much as possible. But otherwise we are sitting in the water, unmoving. This morning we went fast enough for dolphins to find interest in our bow-wave, and they swam with us for half an hour. Liz took a seat on the bow fence and watched them excitedly. I ran around with the camera and took pictures, as much of Liz as of the dolphins. Then our speed dropped below 4kn again, and the dolphins were gone in the blink of an eye. Now we are back to drifting with less than one knot, 1804m per hour. Which equals one step per second, slower than walking pace. Talk about patience.

Posted by Axel Busch at 11:05

Sunday, June 5, 2011

Becalmed

Sunday, 05.06.2011, 13:00 local (1:00 UTC), 12:55.8N, 072:24.1W (44nm north of Cabo de la Vela, Colombia). It is five pm. The wind just dropped, earlier than usual. We drift dead in the water. Again. I try to fire the engine again. Nothing, no surprise. But fortunately the engine can be cranked by hand. I get the crank lever and put it into the socket. I start cranking but don't get far. The engine is mounted too deep in the boat and a strut blocks the way. Spanish engineering, I think. I try anyway, but to no avail. I am dripping sweat. Liz looks at me and laughs. I laugh back. I drop the main sail because it's making so much noise. I return to the cockpit, and feel a breeze on my cheek. Typical. Just when I drop the sail, the wind starts up again. I stop. This is not right, the wind is coming from the other direction than before. And strengthening. So that thundercloud that has been hanging out all afternoon to the west is moving in after all. And I had been suspicious of the one to the east. Ha, got me. Lightning strikes the water, maybe two miles away from the direction of the wind. Not good. We hurry to lash everything down. I furl up the genoa except for a bit and set course hard to starboard, to avoid the center of the thundercloud, I hope. We go below. I disconnect the GPS and Radio. We sit and wait. It is very hot inside. From outside we hear rain, lightning and thunder. Gudrun has no windows, so we don't see what's going on. A scene from the movie "Das Boot" comes to my mind. The submarine is depth-charged by a allied destroyer. They dive deep and stay quiet. "Jetzt wird's psychologisch" says the 2nd Watch Officer to the accompanying war correspondent Lt. Werner. It's nine pm, the thundercloud has passed to the south-east where it highlights the sky on a twelve mile wide front in bright flashes. A little wind remains, and I unfurl the genoa and head further west, away from the spectacle. Soon the rain stops. The night passes slowly. The boat rolls and clangs and bangs a lot, and I can find no rest. Two more times I raise and drop the main sail. It seems heavier every time. Why am I doing this again? Because it's fun and an easy life-style. Yeah, right. Today there is still no wind. I start to work on the engine. I remove the starter-motor and open it. A brown sauce and little bits ooze out. Not good. I clean it up and put it back together, not believing that it will do much good. But I have to try. I test it. It doesn't work. Well, so much for that. I climb into the cockpit and look at the sea. The water looks inviting. The sea here is 2200m deep, clear, and very blue. I'm scared of going in, and so is Liz. I go first. Liz brings me the diving mask and I have a look around. I am amazed at how clear it is. I can make out every barnacle on the hull of Gudrun. And there is a little fish swimming with us, just below the keel. But it is unnerving. The sea is too big, and I am too small. Liz goes next. We take some pictures. We have lunch. We wait. According to the weather forecast we'll have some more waiting to do. I don't expect to arrive in Santa Marta before Tuesday. More time to try stuff with the engine.

Posted by Axel Busch at 13:50

Saturday, June 4, 2011

Happy together

Saturday, 04.06.2011, 12:00 local (16:00 UTC), 13:49.5N, 071:40.8W (83nm north of Punta Gallinas, Colombia). "You know, it's not that bad when it's like that" she says. I laugh. It's partially cloudy, bright but not hot. The wind is light, the sea is calm. We sail with 3kn, a little over walking speed. Slow going. But yes, it's nice. Very different from the morning, where we were speeding along with 7 to 8kn and reduced sail area in 25kn of wind. We talk. We laugh. We have each other, and other than diminishing supplies there is no reason to get somewhere quickly. Not that we could go anywhere quickly if we wanted, in this wind. Later I cook dinner, something Thai-like, we call it "Pineapple delight". I know she'll miss the chicken, but with a broken fridge we don't carry any meat. I notice that the boat is going slower. We sit down to eat. The wind drops. Without pressure in the sail the boat starts to roll. And to clang and bang, my nemesis. I get annoyed, and jump from my meal. I drop the main-sail and we tie the boom down. We work on the deck with our headlamps on. I look into the sea, and see little golden reflections. The eyes of some creatures. I am mesmerized. All my anger is gone. The seas hit the stern and make more noise. I decide to start the engine. The engine won't start. Fault finding procedures kick in. It looks like the starter motor is damaged or frozen. Probably a late gift from when the oil-cooler broke and showered sea-water all over the engine. The rate in which stuff fails on the boat is just amazing. I have to laugh. We finish dinner in darkness. Despite the rolling, the non-moving, and the broken engine we are in a good mood. "This is good!" she says. "Would be better with chicken" "I know" she smiles. The stars come out. I go to sleep. At 11pm we switch. I see thunderclouds and lightning around us, but above us it's clear. No rain. I think of a lightning strike. But I'm confident it won't hit us. That would just be too much bad luck. Nevertheless I make sure that I'm not in contact with the aluminium hull anywhere. Liz is safe in the salon. I look at the sky, the stars. Still no moon, I wonder where it's gone. But this night is not as dark as the last, I can even make out the horizon. I doze off. I dream. My dad brings me plans and spare parts for my engine. I wake up, smiling. I look around. A freighter is passing us in the distance. I watch the stars. The boat sails very slowly and quietly through the night. No engine noise. Peaceful. Liz comes out at six. I am happy to see her. I sleep a bit, then we have tea and cookies. As noon approaches energy from the sun fuels the wind and we go faster. We sit in the cockpit. We read about writing and talk about it. We are happy to be together.

Posted by Axel Busch at 13:03

Friday, June 3. 2011

Half-way

Friday, 02.06.2011, 12:00 local (16:00 UTC), 14:52.2N, 070:38.3W (half-way between Puerto Rico and Colombia). Liz gets seasick quickly below, so I cook lunch. Potatoe curry in the pressure cooker. Yummy. As I fill the first bowl a sea hits the side of Gudrun and she heels quickly. I spill the contents of the bowl over my leg and on the floor. Ouch. Fortunately I've cooked enough for four. We eat lunch, happy. The wind drops and we take out the 2nd reef to increase sail area. The wind drops further and we take out the 1st reef as well. The wind drops further. We can't get more sail area up. We're going slow. It gets dark, real dark. This is the darkest night in my life. No stars, no moon, a thick cloud cover, rain, and no scattered light from civilisation. The wind is gone, but the old seas are still there and the boat rolls heavily from side to side. Bang, clang. The noise of the boom and rigging clanging and flapping is unnerving. We work with our headlamps to secure the boom and tie down everything. When people ask about sailing they always want to know about the storms. But to me the worst are the calms. A sailboat without wind is the most useless piece of equipment. Under sails it's elegant, graceful, fast. Becalmed it becomes a manifest of frustrated dreams and hopes. I look at the wind indicator. 5 to 6kn from the back. Barely enough to fly the Parasailor. But we have to try. We can't just sit there and get pounded to insanity. An hour later the Parasailor is up. It always takes ages and is extremely frustrating, especially at night. We move with 2.5kn. Only walking speed, but enough to not have the seas crashing into the back of the boat. Quiet. Finally. We fall asleep. We wake up to the proximity alarm of the AIS. A tanker is crossing our path and will come to within half a mile. I wonder what the chances are for that. Later we see the tanker turning around and heading back. It is circling. That solves the question of how we got so close, but why is it doing it? We'll never know. The wind has increased again and turned further south. We change the parasailor for the genoa to maintain course. Still completely dark, still raining. Liz is crying. The darkness, the noises, the event with the tanker is getting to her. I try to comfort her, she falls asleep. We have breakfast in the cockpit. "I feel so vulnerable, useless" she says. "It's not your environment, yet." "It's not my environment. Punkt." She laughs. I laugh. We wonder how we'll cross the Pacific together. She doesn't want to do it really, but she doesn't want to leave me alone either. I don't feel like doing it right now either. But I want to have done it. It sounds all very romantic and adventurous when you think about it from the shelter, safety and comfort of home. After a bad night at sea it doesn't seem like such a good idea any more. But it's just that: "It's an adventure when you want it to stop right now and go home."

Posted by Axel Busch at 11:30

Thursday, June 2, 2011

Waiting

Thursday, 02.06.2011, 12:00 local (16:00 UTC), 16:01.2N, 069:15.6W (165nm SW of Punta Aguila, Puerto Rico). I look at the logbook. What happened yesterday? Ah ja, the wind increased in the afternoon. We put in the first reef, later the second. The seas get bigger and Liz gets her first salt-water shower. We celebrate with a rum-punch. The sky is overcast and it's not so hot. Liz likes that, she doesn't seem to mind so much that the going is rougher. But the wind is strong and I take down the Bimini. Even though it's only protection from the sun and rain, without it the boat feels much more open. More vulnerable. We talk of McDonalds Cheeseburgers, and how cool it would be to have a McDonalds in the middle of the Ocean. It's a popular demand, I've had this conversation with other sailors before. But no big yellow M in sight. Instead we have pancakes. Liz sees dolphins, but in the distance and going the other way. The sun sets and it gets pitch black. No moon, no stars, a thick cloud cover. It's Liz' turn to watch. Then it starts to rain. I go to sleep while Liz sits underneath the sprayhood. She says she's alright. I'm amazed. For a bloody landlubber she's doing exceptional. At 11pm we switch, my turn for the rest of the night. The rain has stopped. I sit outside. I hear birds flying around us, and I see bioluminescence as Gudrun ploughs through the waves. Other than that it's pitch black. Eerie. The rain returns. I go inside. Suddenly a loud Bang on the hull! And again Bang! from the keel. We must have hit something. I go out with a flashlight, check out the boat and surroundings. But there is nothing to see. I'm so glad for my aluminium hull. The rain leaves again. I lie in the cockpit. Thinking about my friends, my family. Sailing is waiting. Waiting for the weather to change. Waiting for the arrival. Today the sea is rough. The boat rolls a lot, seas come over the side. I notice that the front hatch leaks. I fix it, but the bed is wet. Now it's wet inside and outside of the boat, haha. Awesome. Suddenly the tiller pilot jumps off the tiller and the boat turns into the wind. We tape down the tiller pilot. We sit. We talk. We sleep. We wait. I check the charts. We've sailed 175nm, almost a third of the way. Have I mentioned that sailing is waiting?

Posted by Axel Busch at 13:01

Wednesday, June 1. 2011

Heading SW

Wednesday, 01.06.2011, 11:45 local (15:45 UTC), 17:45.7N, 067:28.18W (9nm SW of Punta Aguila, Puerto Rico). I wake up at six. The night was horrible, I can feel mossie bites all over my body. Later I count 42 bites below my right knee alone, despite a full covering of DET. There are even some on my butt, and one on my weener. Time to get out of this place. I think of the people that hole up in the mangroves for hurricane season, and wonder how they endure it. Liz awakens with me. Surprise, she must be motivated to get going as well. We get up, have a coffee and then start pulling up the anchor. As usual the chain fouls up in the tube and I have to crawl underneath the bed and shake the tube. Then we are free. It is seven, and we motor out of the bay. Outside the bay we catch wind, as expected. 10kn from the east. We turn into the wind and Liz hauls up the main-sail and unfurls the genoa while I take pictures of her. I am very proud. Most sailors I know haven't sailed more than 20lm off shore or for more than a day non-stop in all their life. Liz, who is afraid of the water, will sail with me the 1000km across the Caribbean basin for four days. The sails are up and we get back on course. Liz goes down to sleep again. I start trimming the sails. The wind varies in strength from 7 to 14kn and frequently shifts 70 degrees. I adjust the sheets, vang, outhaul and even halyard tension to keep the speed of the boat above 7kn. The double sheet system for the main works very well. I watch the sails and admire the work of Octavio. These are very good sails, thanks my friend. After two hours I get tired of climbing around the cockpit. There are simply too many lines to pull on. I decide to trim for a beam reach in 10kn. That gives us around 6,5kn of speed most of the time. Sometimes a knot less, sometimes a knot more. This will have to do until the wind gets more stable. But does it ever? Puerto Rico is out of sight. Around us only deep blue water. I like it this way, few other boats and no obstacles to bump into. The boat roles surprisingly much for the little wind as the waves pass underneath the boat. They are short and steep. This reminds me more of the Mediterranean than the Atlantic Ocean. I hope Liz doesn't get seasick. I also hope that we'll see turtles, dolphins or whales on the way. Liz would love that. But it's not really season, so the chances are not very high.

Posted by Axel Busch at 11:04