

VOYAGE IN PRINCIPITO

PART-5 Golfito, Costa Rica to Panama Canal

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GOLFITO TO GOLFO de CHIRIQUI, PANAMA

Returning to Golfito from Cocos Island was less trying than the trip out which took 8 days. We left on December 2nd and arrived in the early morning of the 6th. Hove to for a few hours until daybreak and got some rest. Everything looked familiar since this was our return trip to Golfito to pick up our friend Normand. He had arrived the previous day and was waiting for us at Captain Tom's.

We had to restock our provisions following close to a month at sea and Isla del Coco. Staples like rice and flour, water, fuel and everything else had to be purchased and re-stored. We had our reunion that evening on the boat after shopping all day.

When I left Montreal Normand had given me a bottle of [Ch. Lascombes](#). I told him we would open it when we met again. We, each signed the bottle and dated it. So this was it! Some may argue, not without reason, that a Margaux, a 2e Cru as it is, was not the best pairing with spicy enchiladas but the reunion with our friend and the circumstances dictated that the event rule over convention.

After this excellent reunion it was decided that we would take a few days to rest and finish shopping, write and send some letters - Normand had a list of items he wanted. It was also decided we would set sail for and explore the Islands in Golfo de Chiriqui between Golfito and the Canal the following day, Tuesday.

You may have noticed that I am treating this passenger with respect and deference not like the treatment our last visitors suffered. I don't think they deserved as bad a treatment as they received! This is an apology! The difference is all in my corner: This time we are rested, the boat is sorted out and we have much more experience with this life.

We didn't know what the Golfo de Chiriqui had in store for us. We did not meet many sailors who were coming from the South. Heading North is heading into the prevailing wind especially this time of year and not everyone would stop in the Golfo. They would be wanting to get northwest of Panama and Costa Rica taking long tacks offshore to make headway. Of capital importance is having Pilot Books with ["Sailing Directions"](#) These are for Panama and Golfo de Chiriqui.

We were heading into this leg of our voyage not knowing what we would find. The chart showed a series of islands with the largest being [Isla de Coiba](#). From Wikipedia: *In 1919 a penal colony was built on the island and during the years that Panama was under the dictatorships of Omar*



69 Ch. Lascombes, Margaux & Julianne's Enchiladas

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Torrijos and Manuel Noriega, the prison on Coiba was a feared place with a reputation for brutal conditions, extreme tortures, executions and political murder. Nobody knows exactly how many people were killed in the prison during this period, but sources claim that the number could be close to three hundred. As such, the island was avoided by locals, and other than the prison, was completely undeveloped. More about this later!

We departed Golfito at 13:00, December the 18th on the last leg of our Pacific journey bound for the Panama Canal. Expecting nothing less than that we would explore whatever island we ran into for about 2 weeks. Expecting only that we would be in an calm anchorage every night. This entire area is a paradise for divers and fish. We traveled through most of the islands anchoring every night before sunset and going ashore to cook our daily catch a Dorado one night, lobster



Landing a Dorado [Mahi-Mahi] Using a gaff hook, being the only way to retrieve the fish and be able to pull it on deck. I don't know how but someone: Julianne must have been wrestling with Matey while taking this photo.



Normand raising the prize with the author. Sadly the brilliant blues and gold leave the body of the Dorado very soon after being taken out of the water. In seconds really the body turns gray. Sashimi for Matey coming up. The freshest possible

the next.

This type of travel is ideal for our friend Normand's initiation. The passage between the islands is like skimming across a pond and fishing is an on demand concept. The Golfo de Chiriqui is a haven for wildlife. We saw howler monkeys, we encountered sharks. Dolphins abound: common, bottle-nosed and spinner. Matey was overwhelmed with them leading us around.

The Golfo is spawning ground for sperm-whales, orcas, fin-whales, pilot-whales, and bottle-nosed whales. The season is May to November so we were a little late. Some 750 species of fish have been identified.



Islas Secas Today

By now Normand was getting into the groove of the pace that we spoke of before. While we were here we had visitors. A ponga with a set of 5 dogs lashed together tightly to prevent them from moving around too much.

They were squirming like snakes once they got a whiff of Mate. I had anticipated that and had a good hold on him by the collar. I had a very strange feeling that those dogs were being taken somewhere to be sold for their meat. The fishermen were watching mate the whole time not taking their eyes off him even when talking to us. Ouch!!! It was Christmas day and Normand was [Jonesing](#) for a Cerveza

SECTOR 8. PANAMA-PUNTA BURICA TO PUNTA MALA

about 3 miles N of Isla Uva. The other islets which make up the group lie within $\frac{3}{4}$ mile of Isla Brincanco. Anchorage can be taken in a depth of 54.9 m (30 fms) about $\frac{1}{2}$ mile N of Isla Brincanco. Small vessels can anchor close N of the islet in a depth of 25.6 m (14 fms). Isla Canal de Afuera ($7^{\circ}41'N.$, $81^{\circ}03'W.$), 215m (704 ft.) high, lies about $4\frac{3}{4}$ miles WSW of Punta Jabili and can be passed on either side. A small islet lies close N of the W end of the islet. A light is shown from the S side of the island.

8.06 Isla Rancheria ($7^{\circ}39'N.$, $81^{\circ}42'W.$), 151m (496 ft.) high, lies within $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles of Punta Bal tasar, the N end of Isla de Coiba. Several islets and sunken rocks lie within $1\frac{1}{4}$ miles NW and $\frac{3}{4}$ mile NE of the islet. La Viuda ($7^{\circ}39'N.$, $81^{\circ}41'W.$), a dangerous pinnacle rock, with a depth over it of 8.5m (28 ft.), lies about 1,600 yards ENE of Isla Rancheria.



Isla Coiba Penal Colony



Pier at Isla Coiba

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Isla de Coiba ($7^{\circ}30'N.$, $81^{\circ}48'W.$), the largest island off this section of coast, is mountainous and heavily wooded but there is some swampy land on its W side. The island rises to an elevation of about 427m (1,400 ft.) in its central part.

Anchorage can be taken off various parts of the island but there are no harbors to provide shelter.

The island has a penal colony on its E side and landing is prohibited without prior permission of the Government of Panama.

The W side of the island between Punta Balthazar, its N extremity, and Punta Hermosa, about $11\frac{1}{2}$ miles to the S, is bordered by deep water and may be approached close-to. Punta Hermosa, together with Punta Adelarda about 2 miles to the S, form the W extremity of the island. Punta Hermosa has been reported to be a good radar target at distance up to 24 miles.

Between Punta Adelarda and Punta Anegada, the SE extremity of the island, the coast remains

steep-to as far SE as Punta Brigida ($7^{\circ}22'N.$, $81^{\circ}47'W.$), but E of this point several detached dangers lie within $2\frac{3}{4}$ miles offshore.

A bank with a least depth of 6.5m ($3\frac{1}{2}$ fms) lies $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles S of Punta Anegada. Breakers extend offshore for about 1 mile during the winter season when SW winds prevail.

Caution.-A local magnetic anomaly was reported to exist off the S coast of Isla de Coiba between positions 14 miles SE and 12 miles SSW of Punta Anegada.

Hill Rocks, two rocks awash, lie about $5\frac{1}{2}$ miles WSW of Punta Anegada.

Passage Rocks, a group of rocks awash, lie about $7\frac{1}{4}$ miles W of the same point and $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles offshore.

Between Punta Anegada and Punta Fea, 5 miles to the NW, the coast is fronted by foul ground which extends up to 1 mile offshore in places.

Bahia Damas ($7^{\circ}27'N.$, $81^{\circ}40'W.$), entered between Punta Fea and Punta Clara, 7 miles to the NNE, is the principal anchorage on the island. Depths between the entrance points range from about 53 m (29 fms) shoaling to a depth of 18.3 m (10 fms) about 1 mile offshore. Anchorage can be taken as convenient, however, it is not advisable to anchor in depths of less than 27m ($14\frac{3}{4}$ fms).

The penal colony lies along the N shore of this bay. Ensenada Arenas ($7^{\circ}34'N.$, $81^{\circ}42'W.$), entered N of Punta Damas, provides anchorage in its central part in depths 9 to 36.6m ($29\frac{1}{2}$ ft. to 20 fms).

8.07 Isla Montuosa ($7^{\circ}28'N.$, $82^{\circ}15'W.$), a small and heavily wooded island, lies 21 miles W of Isla de Coiba and rises to a height of 155m (509 ft.). Foul ground extends about $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles W and $\frac{1}{2}$ miles S from this island
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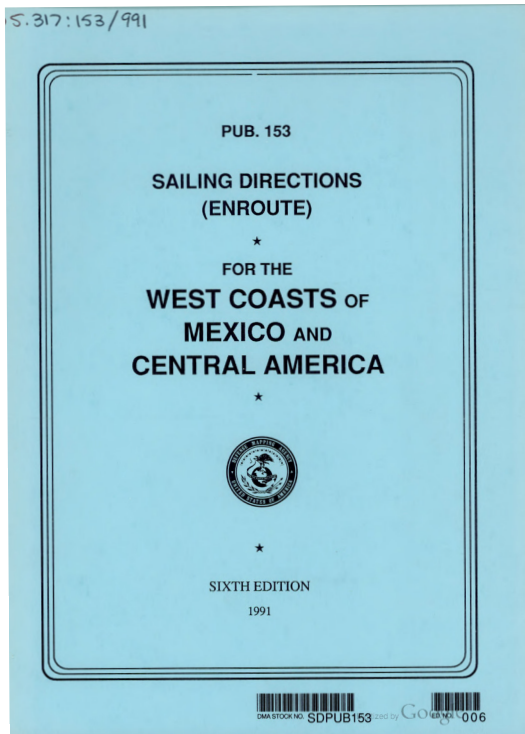
A Scarlett Macaw

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EXCERPT from SAILING DIRECTIONS

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