

Ascension is another interesting British volcanic island, 8 degrees South of the equator in the middle of the Atlantic, a total of 17 days NW of Cape Town by Sunflower, including 5 days from St Helena. To a tourist, it is as isolated as airport-free St Helena since you need a connection to the British or US military to arrive by air at the impressive US airstrip. Since 1815 this island has been/is all about the British navy, preventing Napoleon's escape from St Helena, British (undersea) Cable and Wireless, WWII US air links to Europe, BBC transmitters, protecting the Falkland Islands, and US test range and space tracking facilities. The few "locals" that live here are all employed by these functions.

The determined tourist, or yachtie, who does arrive here will immediately notice that Ascension is a "new" (1 million years, and 600 years since the last explosion) volcanic island, with impressive sharp stacks of barren exploded lava scattered everywhere. In contrast, St Helena's lava is 15 million years old and is now lush and fertile in the interior. Much of Ascension is bare, except for 50 volcanic cones and antenna arrays and radomes. But through the centuries British marines have seeded and planted many valleys and especially the top of Green Mountain which is tropical with pines, dense stands of ginger, and bananas.

ASCENSION YACHT ARRIVAL INFO:

We anchored in Clarence Bay, Georgetown, on a Friday morning, 17 May, to seaward of the local mooring buoys at 07-55.17 S, 014-24.91 W in 60 ft of water. It would have been slightly better to anchor shoreward of the mooring buoys where the wind chop would be less, but the swell still refracts deeply into the bay. I finally resorted to a bridle on the anchor chain to keep the bow into the swell and reduce the roll. The Sailing instructions prohibit use of the buoys.

The primary challenge of this anchorage is landing and mooring the dinghy. Paul on Nije Faam flipped his dinghy here in a heavy swell. You should judge the swell and be prepared for a nimble and muscular landing. There is a seawall and one ladder that everyone uses to get ashore, but it is not safe to leave your dinghy on the seawall. The sailing instructions indicate you should tie to a provided boat and then pull yourself to shore, but the boat sank some time ago. So we attached a pulley to a blue mooring line and used a 50' loop to land

and pull the dingy away from the wall. Be careful - there will be a lot of lines around the dinghy with this technique. Coming home in the dark after dinner and turtle watching, I wrapped a line around the prop and stripped the shear pin.

The Harbor Master is at the end of a row of buildings on your right as you leave the pier, and Immigration is at the police station up the hill in town. The officers were very friendly and Officer Martin gave us a brief tour of the island in his car. Go to the bank to get pounds sterling. Most places will accept US\$, but not the Immigration Office.

The military and their contractors live mostly on separate US and British bases, making the harbor town, Georgetown, look like a ghost town. As a result, if you are looking for a nice lunch after check-in you will go hungry unless you buy some snacks from the small grocery store (which stocks Easy-Yo!). The only hotel, The Obsidian, only serves dinner, and only if it is convenient and only if you make advance reservations. But they do rent cars (25 pounds/day), and that is how you get fuel, see the sights and get to "Two Boats" for a meat loaf hamburger, or to the Volcano Club on the US base.

You have to Jerry-jug your own fuel from Birdies gas station about 2 miles out of town using a rental car. Loading full jugs from the steps to the dinghy requires two strong and quick people. Birdies Petrol Station is open for limited hours, which are printed on the map given when you rent a car.

We got an up-close and personal demonstration of how to deliver 7 million liters of jet fuel when a tanker anchored 50 yards to port of us and two barges strung a hose almost a mile around the entire anchorage and mooring field. We thought we were trapped and might have to move, but whenever the tanker swung toward us he would use his side thrusters to hold it off.

The Obsidian serves a very nice dinner where we ate two nights (at 7PM sharp). We had interesting conversations with a Navy couple serving in the Falklands, and two men on a trip to certify fire engines in the Falklands. The hotel will accept MasterCard (and probably VISA) for car rental, but cash only for dinner.

After dinner we drove to the beach to look for Green Turtles. It was near the end of their season but we were able to get a picture of one turtle laying her eggs in the moonlight, and several babies scampering for the surf. The babies were SO tiny, it is a miracle that any survive.

The huge BBC antenna arrays and transmitters were a very impressive visit. As we circle the world, BBC shortwave has been Sunflower's main news source, so this site was special to us. We rang the reception bell and Richard was very pleased to show the innards of his transmitters to another electronic engineer. I had never seen transmitters this large before. While Richard and Dave spoke in "electronic tongues", Kathie appreciated the beautiful copper lining the enclosures, filled with tuning coils constructed of water-cooled copper tubing--all very bright and shiny.

If you were interested in the Apollo program, visit the NASA site. It was closed long ago, and only one building remains, but it was one of the first sites to receive "one small step for man ..." and it's a nice drive with nice views and all the guavas you can pick. Kathie baked a tasty guava tart, and we are now wishing that we had picked more.

Green Mountain was the nicest drive and walk. At higher altitudes the road is lined with pines and at the top there are nicely maintained walks. Elliot's Pass walk is through tropical foliage and tunnels, circling the top of the mountain, with spectacular views of the island, and even some Ascension lilies planted along the trail.

Check out the museum for a good review of the interesting history of this place. It's one block to the right as you are walking toward Georgetown. It's open 2 hours on Saturday, 10 AM to 12, and one other day.

To our sailing friends behind us: This is an "adventure anchorage" but don't miss it - it is a fascinating place and you are unlikely to come this way again.

Dave & Kathie, SV Sunflower.