

Radio Conference on Safety and Security

Â March 26, 2017 by Jody Aston, Editor, and Mirza Arias, Secretary, Ocean Cruising Club

This past week on the morning VHF Cruiserâ€™s Net, a theft was reported on a boat located in the Shell Bay area. Apparently, a young Guatemalan worker was invited on a boat (to the cockpit area only), and she later returned when the owner was not present, and stole an iPad and some money. The boater expressed concern that, after the fact, he discovered that several other boaters in the area knew the woman was dishonest yet no one warned him, and he wondered why there was no reporting system among boaters on the Rio Dulce. A discussion ensued and The Ocean Cruising Club port official, Kelly, on SV Patience, arranged a radio meeting for a later date to allow for deeper discussion and presentation of ideas for a solution. A significant group of concerned boaters tuned in for that and many relevant topics were discussed. It is important to note that all those involved in this radio conference stated, categorically, that the problem is not only specific to Guatemala. Similar situations occur worldwide by a few unscrupulous people. The intention in reporting is not to instill fear that Rio Dulce is a particularly insecure harbour. In fact, many consider crime to be much less serious here than in other nearby Caribbean locations. It is in the interest of the entire boating community, however, to work together and attempt to reduce the number and gravity of incidents that do occur on the rio. Many topics were discussed. Initially, there was a question as to the extent of security provided by the marinas, and it was acknowledged that all the major marinas have a 24-hour armed-guard security system in place. A few years ago, funds were collected to support a Naval boat that patrolled the river from the now defunct Marioâ€™s Marina to El Castillo. Problems arose and the security program eventually ended, primarily due to lack of funds. Not all marinas participated, and the few who contributed were, understandably, disinclined to subsidize the entire project. (Continued below - hit "Read more...")

From this discussion, the valid point arose that the majority of incidents occur on vessels that are anchored out, whether on a long-term basis near town, or when visiting Livingston, or the upper Lake Izabal area around El Estor. As is frequently preached, boaters must be conscientious about chaining and securing their dinghies, and even removing absolutely everything from their decks, especially while in Livingston. It is also a good idea to â€˜Buddy-boat,â€™ if possible, and take turns at watch. When checking out of the country, the favored option is to stay overnight in Texan Bay/Cayo Quemado, dinghy into town for clearance paperwork, and the next morning, sail on by Livingston. Having said that, regardless how much diligence is painstakingly put into securing oneâ€™s own vessel and equipment, at times, clever thieves still manage to get the goods. So, that leads to the next topic of discussionâ€˜what do we do after a crime has been committed? Consensus was that we need to establish a communication channel to report thefts and other concerns to the authorities. The Ocean Cruising Club has agreed to become the contact point and, through the port official's secretary, Mirza Arias, establish a Report and Response System which will provide a link between the cruising community and the local community, thereby working together to improve the situation. Mirza is bilingual and will help with coordination. Kelly is in the process of setting up this system, and welcomes ideas and suggestions. His contact information will be listed at the end of this article.

In conjunction with the Ocean Cruising Clubâ€™s recording of incidents, radio conference participants indicated they would also like for the Rio Dulce Chisme Vindicator to reactivate and maintain the Chisme Forum topic, â€˜THE GROUND TRUTHâ€™ subtitled, â€˜Rio Dulce Security,â€™ which was created several years ago. Kelly will pass on to us the information he receives, and The Chisme staff will be happy to comply with this request. A report to the police is called a â€˜denunciaâ€™ in Spanish and should be filed if you are unfortunate enough to be a victim. For anyone who feels their Spanish skills are inadequate, former fire chief, Rita Rabre, of Ritaâ€™s Office, on the grounds of Brunoâ€™s Hotel and Marina, offers a translation service. She says it usually takes about an hour to an hour and a half to complete a denuncia and she charges a nominal fee, Q100, to accompany clients to the police station and help work through the process. Her contact information will also be at the end of this article. If you report through Rita, we ask that you also remember to contact Kelly and Mirza, so the incident can be logged onto the Ocean Cruising Clubâ€™s list (which, in turn, will go to the Chisme Forum list). Thoughts were presented about having a list of reputable workers to employ on the Rio Dulce. It was agreed that the idea of a â€˜blacklistâ€™ is not acceptable, but rather, a list of people that have been recommended is more desirable. The Chisme, in fact, already has a good list under â€˜Rio Phone Numbers,â€™ in the menu bar on the left of the front page. As stated at the top of that page: Disclaimer: All the service resources have been recommended by someone on the rio - but use at your own discretion and risk.

The discussion returned to the notion of prevention, and participants brainstormed ideas to pursue. One approach is to establish a system of rewards in which the local community is encouraged to provide information that aids the police in arriving at an arrest and conviction of the guilty. There are pros and cons to this type of system. If people know they will receive a reward through an anonymous report, they would be more inclined to aid in apprehension of the perpetrators, but that can also be interpreted as paying someone to steal, and possibly creating a bigger problem. This issue was tabled for later discussion. Another participant remarked that there is a group in Panama, called The Retirement Detectives, that has put together a successful safety and security program that relies on the self-help of the boating community. Kelly is going to check into this further and get back to us later. Kelly suggested we implement a type of

boaterâ€™s Neighborhood Watchâ€• and asked if others would be willing to use their dinghy and donate time to this approach for safety. He says that it would be funded by donations and include the sector of the community riding at anchor. In this we can include the local law enforcement agency. There is a boat proposed and outfitted to carry out this activity.â€• He continues, â€œWe have also had contact with "The Ranger" (manager) of Castillo de San Felipe, and there is a great level of enthusiasm on the part of this person to be involved in the subject of security for the cruisersâ€™ community. This can be a path to gaining access into the enforcement agencies to enhance the protection of our property and halt, once and for all, this situation... Â There is also the possibility that we can provide this person a VHF radio and antenna so that he can participate directly in the Cruising Community Network and more importantly participate in the security and protection of the area.â€•

If you have suggestions or inquiries, and would like to help with any of these endeavors, here is the contact information: Kelly, Ocean Cruising Club port official, via VHF channel 68, or see him at Captain Johnâ€™s Marina, where his boat (Patience) is docked. Mirza Arias, Kellyâ€™s assistant, email: miesarbl1507@gmail.com Comments can be added to the Rio Dulce Chisme Forum, under the topic â€œTHE GROUND TRUTH.â€• The webpage can be accessed here.

Note: You must be a member of the Chisme Forum to comment. If you have not signed up yet, hit the â€œregisterâ€• button at the top and the Forum administrators will reply. They will ask a question for you to answer â€œ this simply proves you are not a spamming robot. Jody, Editor of Rio Dulce Chisme Vindicator: jody.riodulcechisme@gmail.com (I will be in Guatemala City this week with limited access to internet). Rita Rabre, Ritaâ€™s Office, translation services up to 1 1/2 hour, Q100, can be reached at 3067-5321 (Tigo) or 5715-0926 (Claro). Rio Dulce Police: 7930-5406 - The police station is located on the hill beside the (only) Catholic Church - going north towards Tikal, just past the second left-hand turning (that goes to San Felipe/El Estor) on the left. Fire/EMS- Emergency Services: 3164-7763 ASISTUR - INGUAT TOURIST AID: 5555-2922

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