

TUGBOAT PEGGY

Peggy Hall is one-of-a-kind. What else can you say about a lady who sells her business, moves on a tug, and becomes a park warden?



By Mike and Anne Adair
Photographs by the Authors

We don't exactly recall the first time we heard the name Peggy Hall, but during the spring of 1985 we did receive news that our friend, Burle Nelson, had retired from his post as warden for the Exuma Land and Sea Park, and his



replacement was a lady from Nassau.

We thought, at the time, that the Bahamas National Trust's selection was unique, but as we were soon to learn, Peggy Hall was an ideal choice for this challenging post. As we approached the familiar profile of the upper Exumas, we looked forward to meeting the new park official.

"*Snorkey, Snorkey, this is Moby,*" came the snappy call over VHF radio, laced with a thick Irish brogue. "I've heard of your coming and I'm looking forward to meeting you. I'm Peggy Hall."

Having dropped the hook in a favorite spot just behind Little Bell Island, we spent the remainder of that first afternoon relaxing on deck and soaking in the pristine scenery that now surrounded us. Green topped coral cays—some large, some small—lay in a framework of turquoise-blue fingers, typifying the entire 176 square miles of park terrain. Beaches in the area are so numerous and desolate that one feels imposed upon when the sparkling strips are shared with even one other boat. Below the clear Exuma waters you can enjoy the magnificent undersea sights found on the area's living coral reefs.

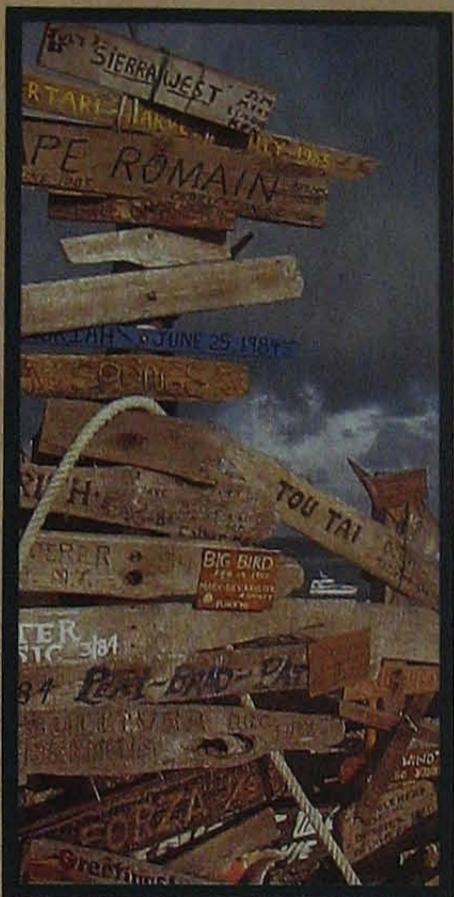
Just as the afternoon sun threw an orange cloak about our tranquil scene, the profile of a small tugboat appeared, making its way boldly along to Little Bell. A petite, silver-haired lady popped from the deckhouse, went forward, and efficiently let go her anchor. As the miniature tug swung into the breeze, we could read in large, block letters on the wheelhouse "PARK WARDEN."

Our VHF again sprang to life as Bill and Betty Pass hailed us. Our long-time cruising friends had seen us arrive and now were inviting us for pizza that evening onboard *Que Sera*.

"Pizza? Did he say pizza? In the Bahamas?" we asked one another. We had been dining on fish and conch for six weeks now, and the thought of good old melted cheese and pepperoni made our mouths water. "Oh boy, yes!" we replied appreciatively, "We wouldn't miss it for the world."

That night, amid much laughter and

That's Peggy and her tug on the preceding pages. Below, signs at north Warderick Wells.



chatter onboard *Que Sera*, we met Peggy and immediately knew that we had found a new friend. As we savored Betty's "from scratch" Italian creations, she explained, "I've been saving this last batch of ingredients for a special occasion and getting you and Peggy together was well worth the effort."

The Job: Yachtsmen Can Help

The next morning the entire crew of *Snorkey*, including our trusty dog Toad, assembled by our stern ladder to welcome Peggy and her dog, Powerful, onboard for a visit. We had immediately taken a liking to this independent lady, and wanted to hear how she happened upon her unusual job.

"I was on the Trust's warden selection committee and we were having a difficult time coming up with a person to continue Burle's good work," explained Peggy. "It suddenly struck me that I was retired, I had a new boat, and my plans for the future were up in air just then. So, I decided to put my name in the pot."

Though Peggy enjoys her work and the opportunity to live among these beautiful jewel-like cays, she takes her job very seriously and has many goals that she wants to accomplish during

her term.

"Unfortunately, until recently this area was only a park by name," Peggy explained as she sipped her second cup of *Snorkey's* gourmet brew. "Visitors were allowed to fish, spear, and gather conch in our waters nearly at will. I feel that if you're going to have a park, it should be a true refuge for the area's wildlife. I went to the powers that be in Nassau and got excellent support with my appeal."

As of August 16, 1985, the Bahama National Trust declared that no one shall be allowed to fish, spear, or gather lobster or conch within the Exuma Land and Sea Park's boundaries. The refuge will now serve as a much-needed replenishment area for all the Bahamas.

"This ruling is a big step for the Bahamians, who are just now starting to feel the effects of over-fishing in their home waters," elaborated Peggy. "Though this park was the first of its kind in the world, it is hard for these people to grasp the necessity of conservation since they have always made their living taking from the plentiful sea. But now, due to the ever increasing demands for seafood, many "smacks" [Bahamian fishing and conch boats] are having to go farther and dive deeper to gather their dwindling catch."

Moby, Peggy, and Powerful can be found covering the park's 22-mile length end-to-end every week: checking park markers, tidying the premises, and chatting with visitors. New arrivals are usually welcomed by the little tug and her captain, as this energetic lady explains the regulations, points out trails and snorkeling spots, and attempts to solicit assistance from yachtsmen.

"There is no end to the work around here," says Peggy. "The lush vegetation grows year round, which makes keeping the trails open a big job, and the beaches collect a good bit of untidy litter with each incoming tide. Folks really pitch in once they realize their help is needed, and hopefully their participation will instill within them personal pride for this park and its contents. I have been for-