TRAVEL

THE BERMUDA ANGLE

It's blue skies and rosy heat with a pinch of salt.

by Joyce Winslow

Photography by Robert T. Kahn

From the air, Bermuda sprawls like a one-clawed lobster in an aquamarine sea, vulnerable to every wind in heaven. Brilliant purple and cerulean waters lap at long white stretches of beach. Inland, the colors continue: lush green hills are flecked with lavender and white houses.

At the head and tail of this lobster, perched atop the highest hills like majestic pink bookends, tower the Princess Hotels. They are the tallest, most luxurious testimony to the island's complete dependence on tourism.

The hotels are crowned by terraced limestone roofs—as are all the houses in Bermuda—to catch and cleanse rain, their only source of fresh water. And that's the first paradox, obvious even before you land: an island built in homage to sun has shaped itself for rain.

"Paging Cecil Christley and Henry Watlington," crisps an Oxfordian voice over the airport loudspeaker. Two men attired in jackets, ties and Bermuda shorts answer the call. Bermuda is Great Britain's oldest colony (established in 1612), and the English influence permeates every phase of life—from taking afternoon tea and driving on the left to sporting a parish crest on one's blazer.

One also does what's proper by one's address. Spurning numbers, Bermudians name their houses. Mail comes delivered to "Winkfield, Somerset," or "Paget Hall, Middle Road." Inspired by such genteel personalizations, I've dubbed my estate "Unorthodox Manor."

Yet—and here's another paradox—while Bermudians swear allegiance to the Queen, they admit they're actually more directly influenced by New York. Fully 85% of the population have hopped on American Airlines' 90-minute flight to New York City to escape the "rock happies." Only 15% of the natives have ever been to London.

There are only two roads the length of this 22-mile-long island, about 11,000 cars and but one traffic light. Crowded roads are a problem, though one never feels crowded except when driving. Since the island is two miles wide, you're never more than a mile from the openness of the sea.

To prevent worse traffic jams, however, aliens are not permitted to drive (or rent) cars. You navigate Bermuda by public bus, by licensed tourist taxis you hire by the hour or day, or you don a helmet and join the "bourgeois Hell's Angels." You haven't lived till you've putt-putted on a motorbike past banyan trees hundreds of years old, their roots splayed like giant octopi; or zoomed down to a sunny beach sparkling with periwinkles; or threaded through the botanical gardens bursting with purple passion flowers.

I ask about an eerie sound I hear.

"That's the fishmonger at Hamilton Harbour, blowing a conch to announce the catch is in. Could you do with some lunch?"

Whereupon the driver flipped off the meter and drove to Den-

(Left) Hammock-happy in the sun, a vacationer flashes a victory sign. Bermudians swear a verry, verry British allegiance to the Queen, but 85% have been to New York, while only 15% have flown to London. (Top) Still life of the day's catch. Next to tourism, Bermuda's main resource is fish; hence, the island's nickname—The Codfish Aristocracy.

nis' Hideaway in St. David's. It was a tucked-away place with a grab-bag assortment of old kitchen tables and chairs. Its owner-chef, Dennis, is a Mohawk Indian version of Friar Tuck, and he served up the most delicious fish chowder and rum-laced conch stew I'd ever tasted. He also gave me a sampling of everything bubbling and crackling on his old black stoves—from delicate corn fritters to spicy shark soup to hearty mussel pie.

They're a sensible people, the Bermudians—businessmen, fishermen—with a historical aversion to farming. Except for fish, carrots, potatoes and those famous onions, all food is imported.

On the English side, they're pointedly punctual and happily formal. Ties and jackets are required after six. No bare chests allowed off the beach. They adhere to sherry before dinner, walks in the garden afterwards; powdered white wigs and "Hear! Hear!" in Parliament; Pimms and pubs and the kind of reasonable good foresight that prohibits billboards and neon signs from marring the kilometers of royal palms and banana trees.

They revere tradition. A summer scorcher is still referred to as a "regular Sairy Bassett"—after a "witch" who burned rather brightly at the stake in 1731. And like their forebears who shoaled here centuries ago, the islanders still use barometers made of shark-liver oil, which clouds and thickens at the approach of storms.

From the African side (all blacks in Bermuda can trace their lineage to slaves) come contributions now embraced by the population as a whole. It isn't Christmas without cassava pie. Traditional Sunday breakfast consists of codfish and potatoes liberally doused with hot sherry pepper sauce and fresh thyme.

Reggae music and vestiges of folklore persist. One woman told me the spirit of a dying person gives a death pinch to someone it loves as it leaves the body.

"But most Bermudian blacks," says a black man in a high government position, "are unique in their friendliness and their standard of living. Even as slaves my ancestors didn't perform menial tasks," he says. "They ran English households and the English refinement rubbed off."

"Integration today?" I ask.

"Well, there's a tight-lipped peace between the races," he says, "and sometimes it's ironic. For example, I recently put a new limestone roof on my house. For the price of a case of beer and some bottles of booze, ten friends came over to help. I *paid* a white mason to direct the ten of us—all prominent blacks in high positions. The mason was the conductor and we the orchestra. By choice, *we* carried the buckets and cement—and that, I can tell you, is a case of role reversal.

"See that sparkle on my roof?" he added. "That's a tradition. Before the roof dries you flip up a 50¢ piece for perpetual prosperity."

Like everything else, integration was accomplished politely in Bermuda.

"I was refused permission to eat a hamburger in a local restaurant in 1956," says Chief Inspector Allan Lester. "Now, 21 years later, my kids can't believe it."

Lester was recently promoted on the force. Until several years ago, it seemed all police officials were transplanted Englishmen. Theaters were segregated till 1967, and blacks were not permitted above the laundry rooms of big hotels.

"But then there was a sea of black faces down by City Hall," remembers Lester, "and they realized the foolishness of the situation. It was that simple. Sometimes there's some confusion about how to refer to us," he smiled. "You know that newspaper quote: 'A colored policeman arrested a black man in a Negro neighborhood today.' Well, Alex Haley can dig back to his slave roots if he wants. I'm more interested in going forward."

Despite recent strides, black citizens of Bermuda still say their biggest problem is the lack of integration. White Bermudians say "lack of space." In fact, the two problems and their solutions are closely aligned.

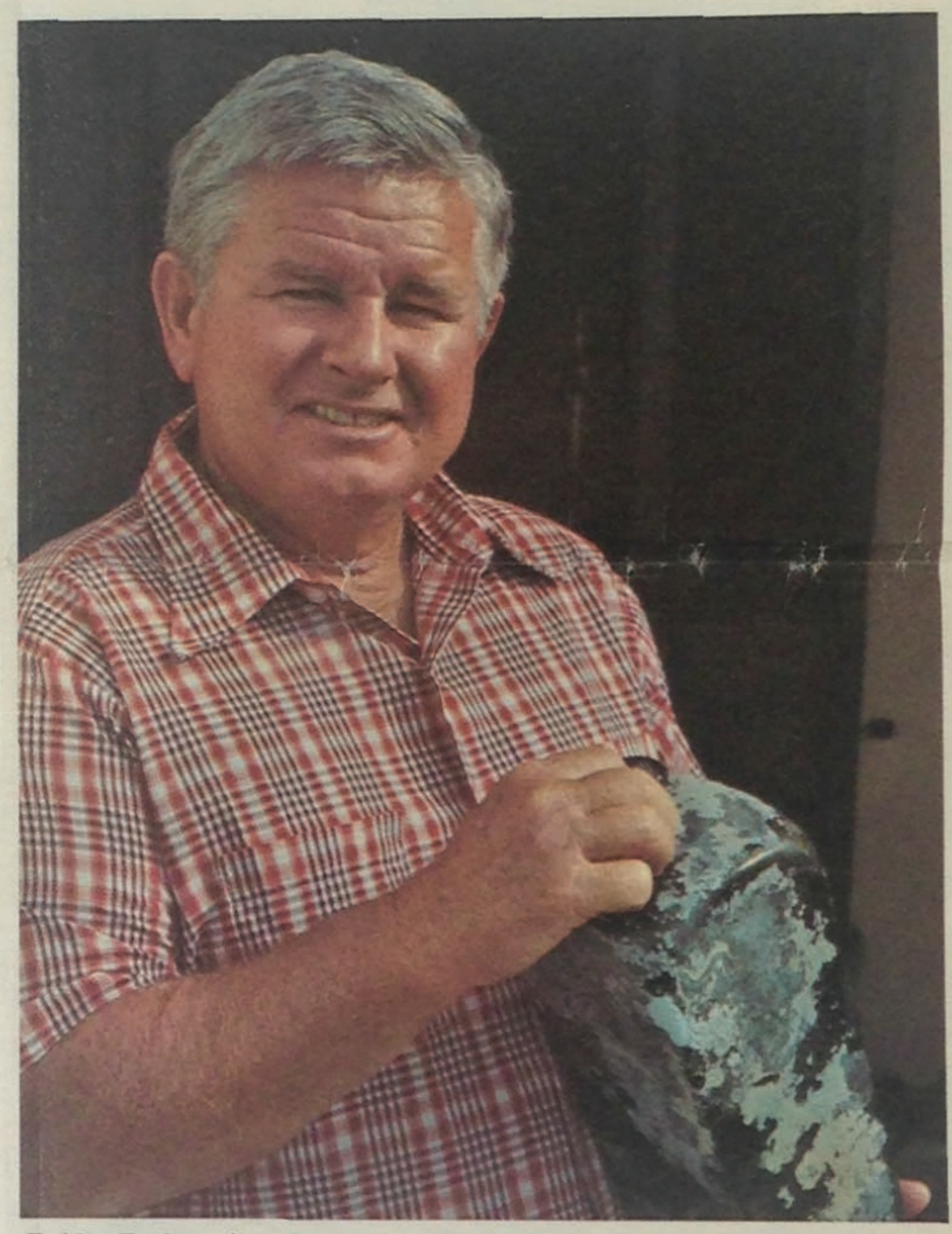
Fully 56,000 full-time residents live on Bermuda's 21 square miles. That means this tiny archipelago has a population density triple that of teeming Singapore or Hong Kong. With jobs and houses at a premium, the government has been forced to pass new legislation that directly affects integration.

Now, it's almost impossible for employers to bypass local talent in favor of foreign job-seekers. The law is to protect qualified blacks from being passed over for promotions.

Another law guarantees the availability of middle-income housing. An alien can't buy a home here valued under $100,000. "Yet, the British are the exception to this rule," complains a highly placed black in our group. "They can buy up the choicest spots and still retain their British citizenship.

"Yesterday, I saw black school kids crossing the road. I wondered, 'Where can they go?' The best jobs and choicest houses are taken by the British. These kids are like prisoners on a sunken ship. If they try to surface, they find they're trapped under the hull.

"The social situation's pretty good," he continues, "though until just last year out-of-country guests were given privileges in tennis and yacht clubs that had excluded me, a native, for 39 years. However," he winked, "there is a behind-the-scenes integration on this island that its architects would never have dreamed of."



Teddy Tucker, famous underwater diver of Benchley's The Deep, *holds recovered treasure, a 1700s gin bottle. A local legend, he retired on his golden catch. Sunken Spanish galleons tantalize divers off the coast: "Nobody was looking for my ship in the '50s," Tucker says. "Diving was a lonely profession. Now I meet all my friends and neighbors on the bottom."*

Bermuda is a paradise, to be sure. But it is also a microcosm of all the problems attendant in our own country, not the model of integration so glibly propounded elsewhere. But because Bermuda *is* an island—a fragile, tiny, crowded island—there is no room for mistakes. Patriotism runs high, and both blacks and whites want what's best for Bermuda. If any country is apt to solve its problems reasonably and without violence, it's this little one sprawled in the sea.

One day I went to visit Harry Cox, a ruddy, heavyset man of middle age who is a historian of Bermuda. He was wearing Bermuda shorts, a white shirt, a navy tie with white ships, and he

greeted me in his front parlor with his drink, his pipe and the accouterments of great wealth around him. His is one of the founding families of Bermuda, and he shows proudly a painting of a family ship, *The Golden Rule*, which augments the beauty of antique mahogany furniture gleaming in the dining room.

"My great-great uncle captained *The Golden Rule*," he says. "It brought the first boatload of Portuguese here in 1834."

During the week, Harry Cox is a prosperous grocer. On weekends, he is a gentleman diver and because of this, a local legend. For he has recovered from the opalescent deep "the treasure," as he expresses it: "jewels and cannon and artifacts that put me, quite literally, in touch with my past.

"To understand Bermuda today you must know a bit of its past, for it has no parallel in history," Cox says. As he speaks, he puffs on his pipe and totally ignores three rambunctious dogs tearing across the Oriental rugs after a cat.

"In 1612, when Bermuda was colonized, it was entirely uninhabited except for hogs whose squeals scared sailors into believing the place was frequented by devils," Cox said. "The first people here were Englishmen, who established what is now the oldest self-governing parliament outside of England.

"We imported slaves in 1620 and by 1674 had prohibited further importation. So Bermuda's place in the social history of the Western Hemisphere is a proud one.

"By 1834, slavery was abolished by royal decree throughout the British Empire, and the island was poor. We have no resources, lakes or minerals here. Just the sea. We needed agricultural hands and couldn't use our colored as they were closely bound to our homes. So on November 11, 1834, my great-great uncle brought over Portuguese farmhands.

"The first deep-seated schism happened locally in 1776, when you had your rebellion," Cox continued. "The Continental Congress placed an embargo on British vessels, which included those in Bermuda. If we couldn't trade with America, we'd be faced with starvation. The sympathies of Bermudians were divided between empathy with the American cause and loyalty to the Crown. The issue was resolved when Bermuda petitioned for an exemption to the embargo edict in exchange for supplying America with gunpowder.

"Now up until this time, Bermuda had been known as The Codfish Aristocracy. You see, we had nothing to earn our livings from but the sea. So we mined it for salt, traded the salt in Nova Scotia for codfish, traded the codfish for Jamaican rum and sold the rum to America.

"This filled our coffers until the steam engine rendered our sailing ships obsolete. What to do? In 1886, we embarked on tourism with the construction of the Princess Hamilton Hotel, and in the '30s we built the Castle Harbour Golf Club in the grand style of refinement and taste. It remains the best 18-hole course in the world.

"But like a swaddling child who catches a very bad disease, Bermuda's tourism industry was ravaged by two World Wars. They so devastated our local economy that today all major hotel properties are owned by foreigners. But I have great faith in this island. In education, sports, business, as well as in all the important social spheres of cricket, golf and tennis, our people have lived well."

Indeed, they have. Mark Twain, who used to frequent the island, often said: "You take heaven. I'd rather go to Bermuda." It's a compliment echoed by astronomers and divers the world over. (Astronomers—because the skies are so clear, the stars exceptionally visible for study.)

My favorite place is the Aquarium, where crashing water simulates waves swirling across the coral reefs, where spiny lobsters create a winter forest of legs and feelers. You pick up a "talking wand" on entering the Aquarium, which delivers appropriate messages as you stand before each tank.

In the Botanical Gardens, perfect for a picnic, sheikdoms of flowers bear exotic names: Pride of India, Pink Star of the Veldt, Pomegranate. Flamingoes wander past, pausing like pink punctuation, and turquoise chameleons if you lift them obligingly change color to match your clothes.

"That," pointed out Mark Oxenham, a young executive and professionally trained cook, "is a loquat tree. Loquats taste like a combination plum, peach and apricot. It's *un*ripe when it's yellow and *ripe* when it's yellow—so to understand where a loquat is," he raised his eyebrows like Groucho Marx, "you must *press* it. It makes wonderful loquat soufflé."

If you've a day when you can tear yourself away from some of the most beautiful coves and beaches in the world, take a trip to St. George and enjoy the history of Bermuda. You'll see a full-sized replica of the *Deliverance*, the ship that was to supply starving Jamestown, Virginia, with food when it washed onto Bermuda. You'll see stocks, pillories and you can dine in English taverns.

On the way back, it's fun to stop at the Perfume Factory, where thousands of Easter lilies, jasmine and passion flowers are pressed into oils and perfume. It takes one hundred blossoms and six months of aging to make a single ounce.

Of Bermuda's many limestone caves, the most glistening are

Deputy Inspector Pearson and two constables direct traffic on Front Street in downtown Hamilton. Driving is on the left: two roads, 11,000 cars and one traffic light on this 2- by 22-mile archipelago.

the Crystal Caves, known for their cool, patient stalactites, which have been dripping prisms of water for the last million years.

Two places where tourists don't seem to go (and should) are Spittal Pond and Nature Reserve (for solitude) and the Robin Hood Bar (for camaraderie). At Spittal Pond, look for Match Me If You Can, a prevalent shrub whose every leaf is as distinctively different as a fingerprint.

Shopping is fantastic in Bermuda—goods from Europe are half the price you'd pay in the States. Calypso offers colorful batiked sportswear; Cooper's sells fine French labels and tartans at ridiculously low prices; Trimingham's offers china, perfumes, clothes, plus hot sherry pepper sauce and an incredible confection called "clotted cream toffees." A ten-pack of various liqueurs sells at

Continued on page 96

Bermuda

continued from page 93

different shops for $33, and you can find Betsy Ross' splendid book on Bermudian cookery almost everywhere. Its delicious recipes, authentic native and English foods are served up at Belfield-in-Somerset under the careful wooden spoon of Lady Hilda Astrid.

Deep in Bermudian waters, below the reef, below the fiercely dangerous coast subject to violent storms (a coast which the Spanish called "Isles of the Devils") lie hundreds of shipwrecks. It's known that these Spanish galleons spilled great holds of gold onto the ocean floor, gold which now lies waiting for discovery.

One man who got more out of the ocean than he put in is Teddy Tucker, professional fortune hunter and consultant to the film crews of *Jaws* and *The Deep*. In 1955, Teddy found a treasure trove of Spanish gold and jewelry that made him a very wealthy man.

"It took me many months in the library researching ancient voyages and old sea charts," he says. "And then three years of diving till I found the ship. But I figured if I looked long enough I'd see it."

Teddy Tucker is approaching middle age. He's a stocky blond man with direct blue eyes, an easy manner and a smell of salt about him. And he says the secret to his success is curiosity.

"Nobody else was looking for my ship back in the '50s," he says. "Diving was a lonely profession. Now I meet all my friends and neighbors on the bottom. Bermuda traces its origins to shipwrecks. There's a lot more down there."

And so it goes. Above Bermuda, the kiskadees and longtails cast slender shadows across the sun. Below Bermuda, human forms slip in and out of decayed hulks and the ballast stones that are all that's left of the holds of ancient ships.

The British pour another cup of tea and the sun and the gold shine.

TRIP TIPS

LANGUAGE: English

AIR SERVICE: American, Eastern, Delta (from Boston only).

Summer Rates (round trip New York)—First Class, $286; Coach, $186. (Off season, $134-$161).

HOTELS

Chain: Southampton Princess, Sonesta Beach Hotel, Princess Hotel, Holiday Inn.

Local: Inverurie Hotel, Elbow Beach Surf Club, Castle Harbour Hotel, Belmont Hotel & Golf Club.

Double Room: $39-$68.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Bermuda News Bureau
630 Fifth Avenue
New York, N.Y. 10020