

# A BVI stamp of approval



**Geoff Holt**

The former professional yachtsman who was paralysed in a swimming accident and inspired sailors when he became the first quadriplegic to sail the Atlantic.

MANY people know that I have an affinity with the British Virgin Islands.

It was there, 26 years ago, whilst working on a charter yacht, that I had the accident which paralysed me and put me in a wheelchair.

I've returned many times, not bearing grudges, but simply to enjoy the beauty of the islands. In my opinion, they are the most perfect cruising grounds in the world.

So Tortola was the obvious choice of landfall after my 3,000 mile, four-week



Geoff Holt and Governor Boyd McCleary



unassisted trans-Atlantic crossing last year, specifically Cane Garden Bay, the very beach where my life changed after diving into its shallow waters and breaking my neck in 1984.

My arrival on Impossible Dream in January 2010, and the ensuing publicity it generated, resulted in being awarded "Honorary Belongership", in effect, citizenship of the Territory, a privilege previously awarded only once before, and that was to Lawrence Rockerfeller.

In February 2011, a year after completing my Atlantic crossing, I was invited back to the BVI by their government to attend the launch of a new set of stamps to recognise the work of Sailability in the Virgin Islands.

Of the set of six new stamps, they have included me on three of them, in recognition of that Atlantic crossing.

To be honest, I thought you had to be dead to appear on stamps but it is another great honour afforded me by their government for which I'm extremely proud.

The ceremony itself was quite some event, coincidentally held on my birthday, with His Excellency, BVI Governor Boyd McCleary, Premiere Ralph O'Neale, Deputy Premiere Dancia Penn QC and Postmaster General Kevin Smith, all there to do the "honours" on the dock at the BVI Sailability centre.

Turquoise seas, blue skies, disabled kids sailing in the bay. It was a perfect day.

Anyone wishing to obtain a set of BVI Sailability First Day Covers can do so through the BVI Post Office.

[www.finance.gov.vg/postoffice.php](http://www.finance.gov.vg/postoffice.php)  
Follow me on Twitter @wetwheels

## Sailability Caribbean style

ALISON Knights-Bramble has perhaps the most enviable RYA Senior Instructor's job in the world.

The British Virgin Islands Watersports and Activities Centre which she has been running for the past five years with husband Colin is located in Sea Cows Bay, Tortola in the stunningly beautiful islands.

Perhaps what makes the BVI Watersports Centre stand out from its British RYA Training Centre counterparts, more than just its year-round perfect climate, is the emphasis on total inclusion, regardless of ability.



Alison Bramble in RIB with disabled sailor in Pico

Whereas in the UK, many disabled sailing groups exist as a separate entity alongside a host training centre or sailing club, Alison built her centre around total inclusion from the outset.

"I don't even like the term integration," said Alison, the passion evident in her voice. "The word implies two different groups. I don't see able bodied sailors and disabled sailors. I see sailors. And as in all walks of life, some go on to show talent and we work to develop those skills, others are happy just to be out on the water."

Life-opportunities for many disabled children and adults in the BVI are limited but sport, in particular sailing, has seen participants flourish. Their self-confidence and skills develop to levels not previously thought possible.

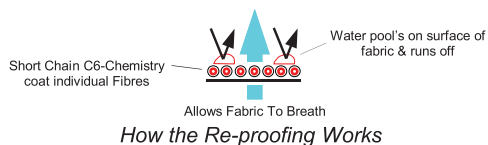
"Not only do our disabled students benefit from our programme, but so too do all the students, plus their relatives and the community as a whole. Our sailors have all forged great relationships which extend beyond the gates of the Centre" explains Alison.

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