

Aldebaran

Cascais in Portugal to Porto Santo, Maderia 5th Report

Thursday 30th September saw us depart Cascais Marina, the day prior to charging began, in fact there was a mass exodus. As mentioned in our last report the charges are going to be very high resulting in transit boats by passing it.

Our original plan was to continue down the Portuguese coast to Lagos but having received a reasonable four day weather forecast we decided to sail 475 miles direct to Porto Santo, a small island 25 miles North of Maderia.

Sadly we said goodbye to our American friends Bob and Judy Baily in "POOH BEAR", they were going into the Med. We had cruised with them since first meeting in Ria Arosa, Northern Spain on 30th August. Bob became a much respected father head to everybody who came in contact with him. We wish them fair sailing. When they come to Ireland in a year or two please give them the usual warm Irish welcome.

A VARIED PASSAGE:

The first day and night out of Cascais had us sailing at over 7 knots in a strong N.W. wind. However, after a most unpleasant night with confused seas, Friday saw the wind ease and back into the West with a subsequent reduction in boat speed. In contrast with Thursday night, Friday night was another magical night. The sunset at 1945 hours and a lazy moon did not appear until after midnight and took total command of a star filled cloudless sky. Night watches are a great time for contemplating, I remember on that night thinking a lot of my deceased parents, especially my father who died a few years ago. They would have got great pleasure in following our progress and relaying it to all their neighbours in Dundalk. Never in a million years did I, when still at school, think I would ever embark on a round the World sailing adventure. There is no history of seafaring in our family.

Sailing really has its good and bad times. Little did we realise how bad it would get in two days time. Saturday was a beautiful day with a gentle warm breeze and flat sea. Later in the afternoon we met with another of our cruising companions "GRAVITAS" who also left Cascais about the same time as us. We spent some time photographing each other's boats from various positions. It is always very comforting to meet other boats in mid ocean.

At night our practise, for safety reasons, is to reef the mainsail, however this night, being so settled we did not. What a mistake !! Dawn broke at 0700 hours on Sunday with a light drizzle followed at 0715 hours with an increase in wind strength. During the night we had experienced a few rainsqualls lasting about ten minutes and we therefore thought this would be the same. Not so, within about 45 minutes the wind increased to 20+ knots with the seas building to a very confused state. For the next six hours with winds in excess of 30 knots and breaking seas we had an exhilarating ride. Shortly after taking about ten minutes of video film we had an unplanned gybe with a preventor on, (for non sailors a preventor is an additional rope attached to the boom when going downwind to prevent the boom from slamming across the boat, which can be very dangerous causing major damage). The result was a bad tear along the foot of the mainsail. With Olivia motoring into mountainous seas I went forward, attached by harness and lifeline, and after some anxious moments managed to lower the sail and secure it. It was not a pleasant experience and we are sure it will not be our last. Fearing further damage we motored the remaining eight hours to Porto Santo and arrived after dark. Cruising friends in "DUCHESS" and "ASTOLATA", who were already in the anchorage, guided us in by prior arrangement on the SSB radio and later on the VHF radio.

We eventually got to bed at 2300 hrs. after satisfying ourselves that the anchor was holding. This had been our longest ever Ocean passage to date and we were glad it was over.

PORTO SANTO:

After a very roly night at anchor in the bay we moved and anchored in the harbour. It was very sheltered with ample anchoring space. On entering we were met by Miguel Smeal who gave us a very warm welcome and agreed to put us on the waiting list for a berth in the small marina. Miguel had recently taken over the marina and he has great plans for improvements. The following morning, Tuesday, we obtained a marina berth. The bureaucracy here is unbelievable, there are four different authorities to register with, the port, the marina, the police and immigration, each of which records the same information from your ship's papers and passports. Talk about jobs for the boys.

Miguel brought our sail to a "sail repair" person in Funchal, capital of Maderia about forty miles away and we were promised it back by Wednesday 13th October at the latest. This suited us as we planned to stay some time here. Porto Santo, part of the Maderia group, is a small island 11 x 6 kilometres with a resident population of 2,000, which increases to 20,000 in July and August. There is no natural water on the island except for one small spring, thus all the water is desalinated from the sea. It's main attraction is it's 9 kilometre beach of golden sand and clear blue water. The beach starts next to the harbour/marina and thus is very convenient for daily swims. A two and a half hour ferry journey links it with Funchal six days a week. The ferry departs Funchal at 0800 hrs and returns leaving Porto Santo at 1800 hours. If you are ever in Maderia, a day trip here is well worth it. This is also very popular as a first landfall on route to the Canaries from mainland Europe. With Funchal the only marina in Maderia and difficult to get a berth, many crews leave their boat in Porto Santo and travel by ferry, getting cheap accommodation there.

The whole harbour wall in Porto Santo is adorned with murals of all shapes and sizes created by the many boats passing through. We also left our mark with a 30" x 58" (76 x 148cms.) painting incorporating our national flag, shamrocks, pints of Guinness complete with creamy heads, ALDEBARAN and both our names. Photographs and video were taken for showing at a later date. Next to our masterpiece was one for "PLYADAS" sailed by Fergus Quinlan from Galway and Kay. They were just a few days ahead of us having left Malahide in June on a two year Atlantic circuit.

The social life is showing no signs of abating. It seems to be increasing in intensity. I dread to think what it will be like if we ever reach Las Palmas in Grand Canaria the starting point for our Atlantic crossing beginning on 21st November. Since 1st August I have been in contact with many boats on the SSB radio, (this is a radio for communicating over long distances, free), most of whom we will meet in Las Palmas and I fear the face to face meetings will result in much socialising. For some unknown reason I have become the channel through which they all communicate. This has resulted in a song being written about us, see below.

On Thursday 7th Oct. I was, believe it or not, involved in organising a party for 59 people of all nationalities in a local restaurant in Porto Santo. It is amazing the deals you can negotiate in the off-season. It was a great night with story telling and singing during which Malcolm, Helen and Laura Shaft of "MUNA" in revenge for our comments during his anchoring manoeuvres on arrival in Porto Santo composed a song and distributed copies of it to all 59. It is sung to the air of the "HYMN", ALL THINGS BRIGHT AND BEAUTIFUL (imagine a hymn to me, I can almost hear Joe Phelan laughing). You would think they had been practising it for weeks. Singing in perfect harmony they could easily have won a choral competition.

“ALL BOATS BRIGHT AND BEAUTIFUL”

Chorus

All boats bright and beautiful,
All ARC yachts great and small,
All crews weird and wonderful,
Pat Murphy knows them all.

----- Chorus -----

He listens to their route plans,
He answers every call,
He notes all information,
And never tires at all.

----- Chorus -----

He welcome in outsiders,
And guides them into shore,
And tolerates their ramblings,
On down wind rigs and more.

----- Chorus -----

When stormbound crew are gathered,
To keep from going in sane,
He entertains with many a quip,
And never forgets a name.

----- Chorus -----

He runs the SSB bands,
From the good ship Aldebaran,
Olivia does the sailing,
While Pat just has a yarn.

----- Chorus -----

Need I say any more, other than to say thank you Malcolm, Helen and Laura and remember Malcolm I am watching you. We invited Miguel and his girlfriend to the party and during the meal he made a speech congratulating us on the party and said we were all his guests on the marina that night. Sure enough when we went to pay we all got our free night.

Getting back to more serious matters, our sail did not arrive back as promised on Wed. 13th but we were assured it would be back on Friday 15th. At this stage we were starting to get worried. However there was nothing we could do and so we decided to take the ferry to Maderia for a few days.

MADERIA:

This was like going away for a short break; imagine sleeping in a bed that did not move after 3 months at sea. After booking into our centrally located hotel at IR£12 B&B we strolled down to the marina and met some of the boat crews we knew. Lisa a crew on FANIA had just made a lovely bread and butter pudding

and not wanting to see it going to waste I devoured the remainder. Next morning we bravely boarded a local bus for the hour journey to Santa de Serra at a cost of £1.56. After finding, with great difficulty, the Levada trail to Camacha we began the 16 kilometre walk. The Levadas are small man made water channels built round the mountain edges for irrigation, alongside which is a walking path varying in width from about two metres to barely walking width. On arrival in Camacha we were totally exhausted. The return bus to Funchal, £1.08, was to say the least, nerve wrecking, I was never so glad to see a large truck pull out on front and so slow our driver. In total contrast to Porto Santo, this island is very fertile with not a barren piece of land anywhere, even on the highest mountains. What it lacks in beaches it makes up in scenery. Would I come here on holidays? no, unless I was into walking in a big way. The following day in company with Malcolm and Helen from MUNA, yes he who wrote the song, we hired a taxi for the day at a cost of £60. There is no way I would hire a car here. We started at 0900 hrs and finished at 1630 hrs. during which we toured the whole North of the island. The drive was very spectacular especially the coast road on the North West on to which rocks keeps falling. On Saturday morning we returned to Porto Santo only to learn our sail had still not arrived. While everybody in the marina office was very apologetic I insisted that the sail be returned as is. We had been given the excuse that a machine had broken down. Anyway, on Monday morning the sail was returned unrepaired. Miguel was genuinely very apologetic and said he had learned a lesson and was not going to send any more sails to the individual.

Our next report will, hopefully, bring us to Las Palmas on Gran Canaria

Pat & Olivia, yacht ALDEBARAN