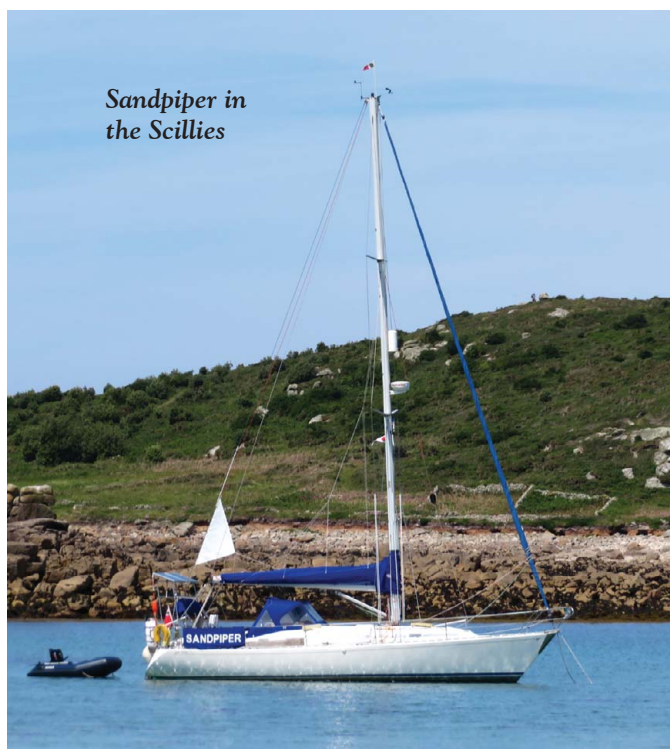


## LEFT OR RIGHT AT BARDSEY ISLAND? Stephanie Connor & Martin Fuller

*(Martin and Stephanie left their home port of Pwllheli in North Wales in late April 2019 aboard Sandpiper, their Sadler Starlight 39. The Bardsey Island of the title lies about 20 miles west of the harbour, off the tip of the Llŷn Peninsula.*

*Following the cruise described below, they continued south to Madeira and by late September were in the Canaries, intending to visit the Cape Verdes before crossing to the Caribbean. Plans for 2020 include the US East Coast and Greenland, either returning direct from the latter or heading south again next September. As Martin says on our website, cruising is all about keeping one's options open!)*

Left or right at Bardsey? That question was not resolved until a few weeks before we departed Pwllheli for an extended cruise of up to two years. Why the dilemma? Simply because we wanted to visit the high latitudes and Greenland on a circuit of the North Atlantic, but were also drawn to the warmth of the tropics after a long winter. It was the Royal Cruising Club's Galicia Rally that broke the impasse, and we departed Pwllheli on 31st April 2019 to go clockwise around the North Atlantic. In fact we ended up going straight on at Bardsey Island, as we decided to go to the Baltimore Fiddle Festival in County Cork en route. After a leisurely crossing to Arklow and a port-hopping cruise to Baltimore we had a memorable few days at Baltimore and Clear Island enjoying great traditional fiddle music – a highly recommended event for traditional music lovers.



*Sandpiper in  
the Scillies*

Our next stop was due to be the Isles of Scilly, but several days of south-easterlies almost saw us going straight to the Azores – not a direct route to Galicia, admittedly, but it would have been a good sail. The wind finally changed however, and we had a smooth passage followed by an enjoyable and sunny time exploring the Scillies. We stayed for just over a week, which was fortunate as we had arranged for Imray to send us the new edition of Henry Buchanan's *Atlantic Spain & Portugal*\*. Unknown to all of us, it seems that

\* Reviewed on page 129 of this issue.

couriered items often sit in a warehouse on the mainland, waiting for a full load of parcels to be shipped out on the island ferry once a week. Our book arrived the day before we were due to leave and ten days after Imray sent it!

We had planned to reach Camaret in time to explore the Rade de Brest and surrounding area, but unfortunately our plans fell apart shortly after completing the crossing from the Scillies and mooring on a visitors' buoy in the Baie du Stiff on Ouessant. Having secured to one of the four large white visitors' moorings inside the harbour, we went ashore for lunch and to stretch our legs. The weather was sunny and winds not too strong – only force 3 with occasional stronger gusts off the land – and we had a pleasant stroll and lunch. But, on returning to the harbour three hours later, we had one of those heart-stopping ‘What the heck has happened?’ moments as *Sandpiper* was missing! After a moment we saw her burgee flying above the harbour wall and it looked as though she had been moved outside – perhaps we'd mistakenly moored on a private mooring and the kind-hearted owner had moved us? Strangely, though, we could not see our mooring buoy.

A rapid dinghy ride revealed the truth. As we approached there was clear damage to *Sandpiper*'s bow and it transpired that she had come free from her mooring and drifted onto the steep rocks that surround the harbour. Fortunately for us, the captain of the island ferry *Fromveur II* had seen her loose and despatched his rescue boat to investigate. They'd reached her just after she had struck the rocks, but were able to tow her to a secure ferry mooring outside the harbour before she was holed.

Subsequent investigations failed to find our original mooring, nor the reason why she had come loose. The original lines were on the bow (neither broken nor cut) and we can only speculate that the chain securing the buoy in 8m of water had parted from it allowing our lines to come free. We will never know, but are thankful



*Dropping the keel in Brest*



*The Battle of the Atlantic Museum at Camaret*

for the prompt action of the ferry captain. Lesson learnt – treat untested/unknown moorings with suspicion, and consider applying a little reverse pressure – as with anchoring – before leaving the boat unattended.

A close internal examination revealed no leaks or rudder/propeller damage, and we decided our best option was to motor to Brest and have *Sandpiper* lifted out to check for external damage. Marina Moulin Blanc proved to be an ideal place to do this, and we soon discovered there was significant but not catastrophic damage to the bow and port side below the waterline along with some keel damage. So we decided, following the advice of local Port Officer Damian Likely – who just happens to be a yacht surveyor – to drop the keel just in case.

Our plans to sail to the Camaret meet were scuppered, but being the designated photographers we had to get there! So we hired a small camper van, not only to join in the meet but also to use our time ashore to explore the area we had hoped to sail around – and what an interesting area it proved to be. The meet lived up to expectations, despite the weather's attempt to hamper our visit to the Battle of the Atlantic Museum, and the camper van came into its own as an impromptu taxi.

So despite a disrupted start to our cruise we did manage to make the Camaret meet and, after receiving great help from the Moulin Blanc Marina and KVK boatyard team, we were almost back on the water four days before the Coruña dinner on 22nd June. All was not lost and we just needed a weather window to cross the Bay of Biscay. Then, having actually read the instructions on the tin of Coppercoat antifouling, we discovered that it is a water-based epoxy and *must* have a minimum of four or ideally five days to cure, as otherwise it will simply wash off! The best laid plans of mice and sailors etc etc. But *c'est la vie*, and even so we hoped to catch up with the Galicia Rally before it finished in Baiona. This we achieved, and we enjoyed some great cruising in the *rías* in the company of both RCC and OCC members – a great sailing fraternity!



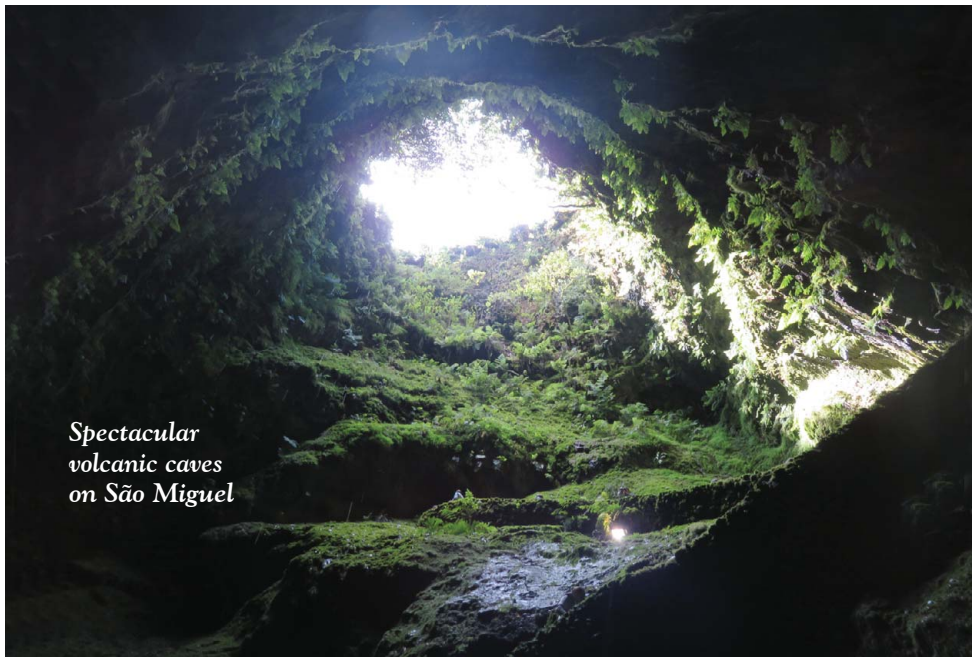


*The throttle lever wrenched from the steering column*

After Galicia we were set on visiting the Azores and, with a steady force 4–5 northeasterly, headed west from Porto on Wednesday 21st August. We anticipated a 6–8 day crossing, and our first 24 hour sail of 180 miles (a record for us) gave us real hope for a fast passage. Foolish optimists! By the third day the wind had eased and on the fourth it turned into a westerly. Three days of long tacks finally saw us closing with São Miguel, but not without a slight

drama. One thing I now realise is that if a skipper claims never to have a problem with his or her boat it's probably because they never leave the marina! In this case it was the main sheet that caught the throttle lever and wrenched it off. Of course we had sails, so no real problem ... until we needed to berth. By the time we reached Ponta Delgada we had rigged up a neat pulley system to operate the throttle, but changing gear proved more problematic. Fortunately we found a finger pontoon with a head-to-wind approach – drama over! Thomas Dargel, of Boat & Sail Service, lived up to his reputation for helpfulness and we were soon fully mobile again.

The islands are well known for their whale-watching, and our first experience came during our approach to São Miguel. As dawn was breaking we were joined by a large school of acrobatic dolphins, a display of flying fish with their beautiful colours and fairy-like wings, and then a family of four sperm whales bobbing about in the light swell 50m from the boat. What a welcome!



*Spectacular volcanic caves on São Miguel*

*At the  
Gorreana  
tea factory on  
São Miguel*

Our aim was to get a good feel for all the islands rather than to spend time exploring just one in detail, so we hoped to visit all nine during our four to five week



visit, exploring the interiors, where practical, by car. The geology, topography and flora of all these volcanic islands are stunning. The people are invariably friendly and the weather in August, with a couple of minor exceptions, was very comfortable. Each island has its own character, and all seem to have a full and regular programme of festivals to entertain visitors and locals alike.

On São Miguel we enjoyed wonderful drives through lush forests and dramatic ravine-riven mountains, tasted fresh tea at the Gorreana tea plantation in Maia and local (not cheap) wine in the vineyards, as well as bathing in the various hot springs and sea pools. One thing we did find a little strange on all the islands was the time their evening festivals and musical events started – almost invariably as late as 11.30pm, with many going on well into the early hours. When do they sleep?

Terceira holds a famous gastronomic festival in August, and we arrived in Praia da Vitória mid-festival. Its small marina and good anchorage were overlooked by two large stages hosting loud music concerts – which finished at 5am! The night-long heavy beat was a little too much and we only stayed one night before moving round to Angra do Heroísmo. The pilot\* correctly points out the problems of swell in Angra Marina – don't ignore the warning and, if possible, secure an inner berth despite the limited manoeuvring room. In future we would choose to anchor in the sheltered bay rather than strain the lines and cleats with the constant movement. The island was full of delights, including spectacular displays of horsemanship in the bull ring (not for everyone) and local bull running through the village streets, gastronomic specialities like the seafood soup-in-a-loaf served at the Hotel Beira Mar above Angra beach. The OCC Port Officers are a real treasure and we would like to thank Terceira Port Officer Linda Lane Thornton for her help and hospitality. What a great team our port officers are!

\* *Atlantic Islands*, researched and written by your editor in the late 1980s and approaching its 7th edition. The Azores section is now in the hands of OCC member Linda Lane Thornton – [lindalanethornton@gmail.com](mailto:lindalanethornton@gmail.com) – who would be delighted to receive your feedback (Stephanie and Martin were outstanding in this respect). Periodic updates can be downloaded gratis from <https://rccpf.org.uk/pilots/133/Atlantic-Islands>.



### ***Bull running in Terceira***

Vila de Praia on the island of Graciosa is definitely not a marina, but despite this the small and busy fishing harbour found space for us, and a few other yachts, on

the inside of their breakwater. Of note is the tidal range and swell which has the potential to strain cleats and damage fairleads – we speak from experience! Once more we arrived in time for a religious festival in the main town of Santa Cruz, where the streets were decorated with multicoloured rugs hung from first floor windows and balconies. We also took the opportunity to check out the ongoing work on a large breakwater to shelter a new marina at Cais da Barra. There are hopes that it will be completed for next season, but this seems optimistic.

Our next port of call was Flores and, after an overnight sail and a beat into the westerlies, we were met with an interesting entry to the small marina at Lajes as the entrance, already narrow, was further constricted by a large section of the breakwater that had collapsed during winter storms. Despite this the marina welcomes visiting yachts, with space either on the breakwater or on the short (5m) finger pontoons. There is limited room once inside the harbour, however, especially when big cats are in. That said, they now have showers, toilets and laundry on the slipway and very welcoming officials. We decided not to explore the interior of the island and instead settled for a sail around the

### ***A religious procession in Santa Maria, Graciosa***



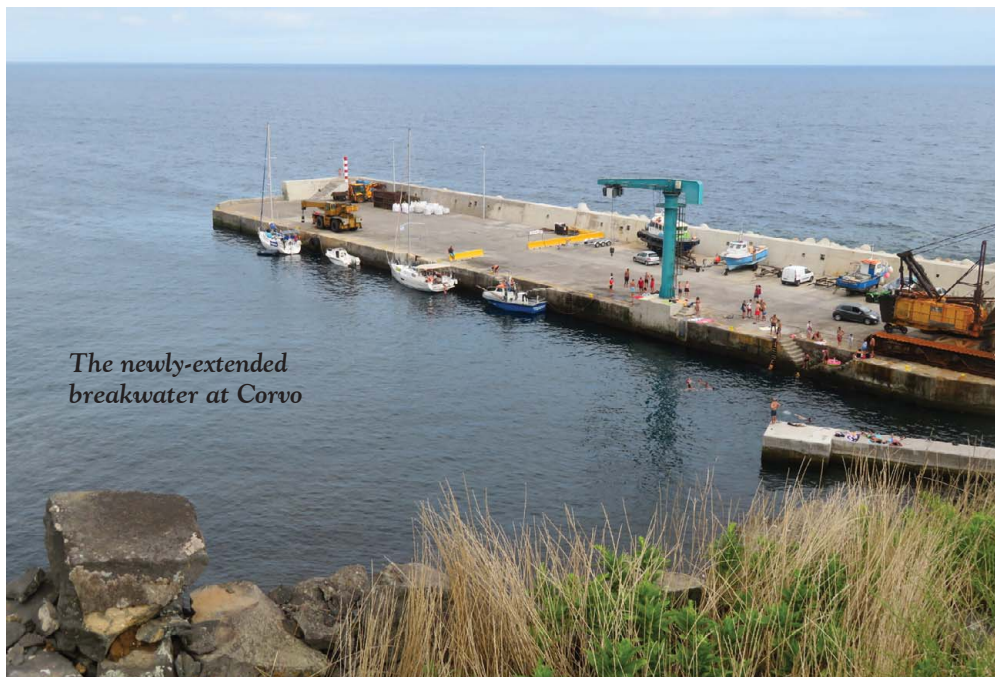




### *The challenging entrance to Lajes das Flores*

coast as our weather window for getting back to the central island group was quite short. The sailor's perspective is certainly dramatic along this mountainous coast, with spectacular cliffs, waterfalls, lava flows and isolated settlements looming around every headland – capped by the small island of Monchique, Europe's westernmost point and equidistant between Portugal and Newfoundland.

Corvo, some 10 miles north of Flores, is the smallest of the nine islands. There is no marina, but the old breakwater has recently been extended and now offers real shelter



*The newly-extended  
breakwater at Corvo*

***Portuguese  
men-o'-war  
washed up  
on the beach***

for alongside  
berthing in  
most winds.  
Thankfully  
the distance  
between the  
huge bollards  
has been  
shortened



(previously it was 25m) and there is no longer a need for very long lines. We were met by the local police and immigration officer who cleared us in quickly and advised us on upcoming festivities and the best places to eat! The restaurant next to the airport terminal proved to be excellent, as did the moving, lantern-lit religious procession commemorating lost sailors ... in contrast to the loud, disco-style concert that followed into the small hours. As with most of the Azores the water was very clean and surprisingly warm, so much so that it was difficult to find an excuse not to swim – but only after a careful check for Portuguese men-o'-war, as these jellyfish were evident in quite large numbers on all the islands except for Santa Maria, which one harbour master put down to the apparent rise in sea temperatures of as much as 2°C.

Horta, on Faial, was our next port, and after a quick passage with a following wind we rounded the headland of Ponta do Cavalo (labelled on some charts as Ponta da Espalamaca) with its interesting tidal eddies to enter the large and busy marina. There are surprisingly few visitors' berths\* and we ended up on the inner breakwater. There is ample space for safe anchoring in the outer harbour, however, and the busy harbour master assured us there had been 50 yachts anchored there at the height of the season! Peter Café Sport is a traditional watering hole for Atlantic ocean sailors and a must visit. OCC Port Officer José Azevedo, Peter's son and the current owner, continues to fill the same role for visiting yachtsmen as his ancestors and has been honoured by featuring on one of the archipelago's stamps! The scrimshaw museum in the rooms above the café should be on everyone's visit list, and if José happens to be around his tour brings it beautifully to life.

During our stay we decided to sort out a new problem that had emerged with our Raymarine chartplotter, on which the touch screen facility had decided to stop working. OCC member Duncan Sweet of Mid Atlantic Yacht Service responded quickly to our plea for help and confirmed that the unit needed replacing. Fortunately it was only just over two years since installation, and although the warranty if self-fitted is two years we were relieved to see that it had a three-year warranty if agent-fitted, as ours had been. For once we benefited from the small print!

\* There are actually many visitors' berths – the problem is that there are generally even more visiting yachts!





*The summit of Pico, an iconic sight*

From Horta we visited Pico, a 20 minute ferry ride across the Faial Channel. There, a large breakwater encloses a sheltered harbour with limited yacht anchorage near the old inner harbour, where two pontoons are mainly used by dive and whale-watching boats. However, the harbour, though accommodating regular commercial traffic, also has ample room for visiting yachts, albeit without shoreside facilities. We took the unusual decision to book overnight accommodation so we could attend a folklore festival which ended after the last ferry back – a decision that not only gave us our first

*The old inner harbour at Madalena, with an anchored yacht in the background*



night in a proper bed for over four months, but also let us enjoy a fascinating insight into the Azorean folklore, music, dance and traditions.

The breakwater at Vila das Velas on São Jorge has been extended significantly in the past few years and now provides excellent shelter in all but easterlies. Apparently the busy season had just ended, but the very helpful marina manager, José Dias, who is also our Port Officer, told us it had been very full until the week before. Calling ahead is highly recommended therefore, as is the case in all marinas in the Azores. With a period of calm approaching we decided not to linger, and after an overnight stop in this friendly and charming marina we pushed on to Santa Maria, our last island in the group.

Vila do Porto on Santa Maria, nestled beneath a high cliff and fort, was our favourite port of call. It has ample space and excellent facilities, a convenient and good *Clube naval* bar and restaurant, good diving facilities and of course the ever-helpful officials. We regretted not being able to stay longer. Exploring Santa Maria was the only time we experienced heavy rain, notable in that it created major hazards on the roads with many closed for several hours due to fallen trees or landslides, turning the steeper ones into dangerous torrents and creating dramatic waterfalls in several places.



*Storm damage in Santa Maria*

All good things come to an end, sadly, and before long we were looking for a weather window for the 480 mile passage south to Madeira. We hope to return to the Azores one day and, having visited all the islands, can definitely recommend them as more than just a refuelling and restocking stop-over en route from the Americas.

