

VOYAGE OF THE HARRIER: Around the World in the Track of HMS *Beagle* – Julian Musto. Published by the author in soft covers and available via Amazon for £27.37, or £3.99 for Kindle. 290 229mm x 152mm pages, with most illustrations in colour. ISBN 978-1-5151-0589-3

I'm generally sceptical of cruisers who feel the need to 'legitimise' their sailing by giving it a scientific or historical aim. Why not circumnavigate just because you want to? Julian plainly doesn't agree with this philosophy, and makes his case by interweaving *Harrier's* voyage with that of HMS *Beagle* some 170 years earlier. There is no doubt that this adds considerable extra interest to what might otherwise have been a relatively conventional, albeit highly admirable, circumnavigation. The juxtaposition of his thoughts and discoveries with those of Charles Darwin* as expressed in the latter's diary and correspondence is perhaps a little less successful, though we learn a great deal about both of them along the way.

Post retirement as an architect and seemingly without family commitments, Julian leaves the UK in July 2001 aboard *Harrier of Down*, a 25ft junk-rigged Folksong not dissimilar to *Jester* and, like her, basic in the extreme. Having made two Atlantic crossings in boats of similar size in the 1960s, however, he plainly knows what he's taken on. *Harrier* visits Santiago in the Cape Verde islands before continuing to Brazil, as HMS *Beagle* had done. There Julian remains for more than a year, having been offered a contract and research grant at the Universidade de Brazilia, the first of several lengthy pauses during his eleven year voyage.

Further down the South American coast disaster strikes when *Harrier* grounds on a shingle beach 'at the top of the highest spring tide of the month on the most remote part of the coast of Patagonia'. Despite help from (some) local people she does not survive the experience. Returning to Argentina he buys a fractionally larger (25ft 8in) boat which he again names *Harrier of Down* and, after 18 months' work, resumes his voyage. Though much of his circumnavigation is made singlehanded, for doubling Cape Horn he wisely takes on crew – presumably a success as Stephen Johnson, an American wildlife photographer, rejoins him five years later in Cape Town to sail back to Brazil via St Helena and Ascension.

Once into the Pacific Julian sails north with the intention of visiting the Galapagos to view Darwin's iconic finches, but is frustrated by officialdom – not the only time this happens during his circumnavigation. Thereafter his passage across the Pacific to New Zealand goes according to plan, but an attempt to follow HMS *Beagle's* track south of Australia proves impossible against the prevailing westerlies. (The tracks of the two vessels form Appendices A and B, unfortunately not on the same page.) Skirting the east and north coasts of Australia goes well, however, despite encounters with potential people traffickers and/or drug smugglers, and the Indian Ocean is remarkable kind – 'My luck with the right weather at the wrong season held', a statement typical of Julian's low-key approach. Describing himself as a 'simple-lifer',

* OCC members will be aware that Darwin circumnavigated aboard HMS *Beagle* in the late 1830s, developing the theories which led to his *On the Origin of Species*, published in 1859. This followed his *Voyage of the Beagle*, published 20 years earlier which, together with his *Diaries*, was a major source of inspiration to the author.

financed by ‘a modest teacher’s pension’ and with VHF and GPS but no SSB or EPIRB, he is following squarely in the wake of Slocum – whom he quotes frequently – and other early sailors as well as Darwin and the *Beagle*.

There’s the odd error – such as writing May when he obviously means April at the beginning of Chapter 5, but overall I found remarkably few typos, often a major failing of self-published books. He also goes off-message a few times, with remarks and opinions which a commercial publisher would have insisted on deleting, but I found nothing too offensive. All too often self-published books stumble where it comes to images, and though many of the photographs in *Voyage of the Harrier* have reproduced well, others – and most of the maps and line drawings – are noticeably fuzzy and/or pixelated.

The twelve appendices are so comprehensive – not least where details of all three vessels are concerned – that I’d suggest reading at least some of them before embarking on the main text, particularly for those unfamiliar with Darwin, HMS *Beagle*, or boats in general. The bibliography and index are also impressive.

I suspect that *Voyage of the Harrier* was written more because the author had a tale he wanted to tell than with an eye to serious commercial sales, but it certainly deserves a wider audience than immediate family and friends. Most cruisers, and all those interested in Darwin and his contribution to the understanding of our world, will both enjoy and learn from it.

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