

AROUND BY CHANCE

Phil and Norma Heaton

(Phil and Norma left Northern Ireland at the end of May 2009 aboard their Ovi 395 Minnie B with a plan for the first 12 months...

Visit their blog at www.sailblogs.com/member/philandnorma.)

We didn't mean to do it, honest gov. We didn't have a plan to go around ... it just sort of happened. Our daughter Anna summed up what many thought on our completing the circumnavigation by e-mailing: "Congratulations. Are you coming home now?"

Our original plan was to leave Northern Ireland in May 2009, join the ARC and cruise the Caribbean. However, an article in *Yachting Monthly* about a little-known rally changed all that. Our departure was as scheduled. The Biscay crossing, our biggest trip to date, was approached with trepidation, being accompanied by friends David and Jacquie. We left Kinsale with a favourable forecast and made it to Sada, near La Coruña, just ahead of a gale. The summer of 2009 was spent cruising the Spanish *rías*, moving on to the Algarve for our jump off to the different adventure: the now-defunct Rallye Iles du Soleil.

This French-organised rally with 32 boats left Madeira for a six-month cruise taking in parts of West Africa and Brazil. Madeira offers magnificent steep and high cliffs, waterfalls tumbling to the sea, deep gorges with lush vegetation and extensive cultivation, barren and arid areas, heather and gorse, and excellent hiking. Our next stop was Tenerife, where we were joined by Gilli and Sally and toured the island extensively – our first visit to the Canary Islands did not disappoint. Then to rarely-visited Dakhla in Western Sahara and trips into the desert, followed by our first taste of tropical Africa in Senegal – stopping at Dakar (friendly, bustling, slavery history, days of former glory, great music) and the Sine-Saloum delta (extensive bird-life, traditional villages, enormous fishing *pirogues* and more friendly people).

For the 470 miles from Dakar to Mindelo in the Cape Verdes we had a cracking beam reach sail. Provisioning for the Atlantic crossing was good, and a highlight was a ferry trip, in company with eight other cruisers, for a stay on Santo Antão with its windward-

The Rallye Iles du Soleil fleet at Dakhla, Western Sahara







A pirogue and local village at Sine Saloum, Senegal

side lush valleys, volcanic *caldera* and barren leeward side. Friends John and Beth joined us for a generally benign Atlantic crossing to Salvador da Bahia, Brazil – except for the ITCZ scoring low on the fun scale with adverse current and contrary winds, though at least the torrential rain washed off the Saharan sand and the Dakar dirt.

Brazil substantially exceeded expectations, with cruising around the Bahia de Todos Santos, historic Salvador, safe river anchorages and shore facilities at Jacaré, exploring and diving at Fernando de Noronha; the harder edge of Fortaleza, and the serenity of Soure. The rally concluded with a six-week, 1000 mile round trip on the Amazon, visiting remote riverside towns and villages as far as Santarém and Alter do Chao. The organisers had a river boat with pilot, *bombeiros* (qualified divers for freeing anchors and dislodging the vegetation masses that surround boats) ... and six police armed with an arsenal of sub-machine guns and pistols so that not-so-friendly locals knew we were protected.

From there we continued north to Kourou and Iles du Salut in French Guyana, and to Tobago for our first cruise in the Caribbean. We loved Tobago, and then concluded the cruising season visiting Grenada and Carriacou, where fate dealt another hand for us.

A Canadian couple told us about their 2400 mile 'Down East Circle' cruise: New York – Hudson River – Erie and Oswego Canals – Lake Ontario – St Lawrence River



*Santiago do Iguape on the
Rio Paraguaçu,
Brazil*



A riverside home on an Amazonian tributary

– Nova Scotia – New England – New York. We were mightily intrigued as it offered a way to keep cruising in the Western Atlantic during the hurricane season. Our new plan was to stay in the Caribbean for boat projects and cruise in the Lesser Antilles, then head for Bermuda and on to New York. We thoroughly enjoyed our leisurely trip north from Trinidad to St Martin, stopping at most of the islands, making new friends and exploring new places, and then in May 2011 sailed for Bermuda, staying long enough to visit most of the island with its feel of England. We took the first favourable weather pattern for the 675 mile passage to New York – five days of mixed weather and, at times, some unhelpful Gulf Stream adverse currents.

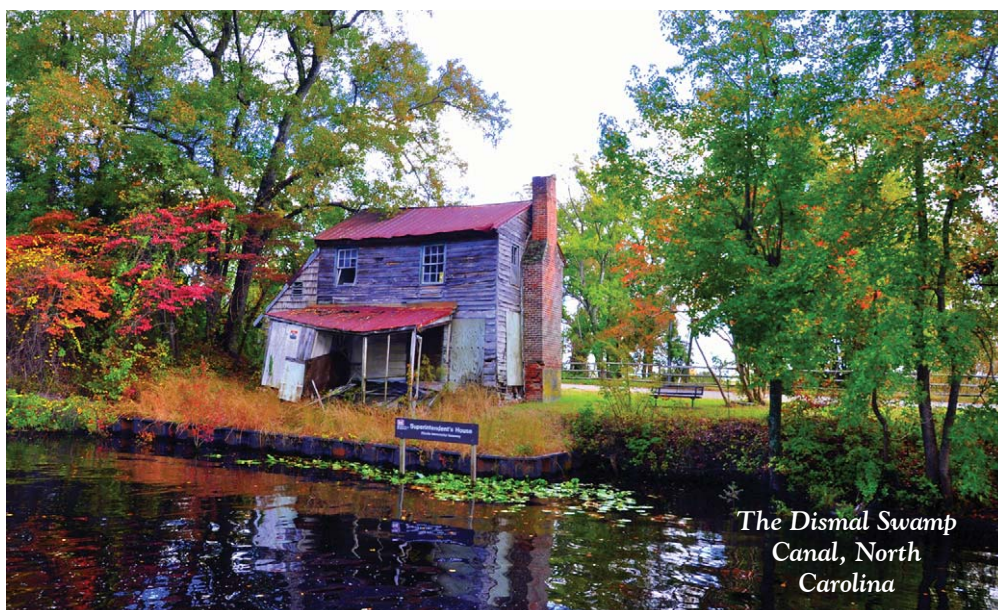


The 2010 St Patrick's Day party on Minnie B in Mojui on Brazil's Baía de Marajó



Fog greeted us on reaching the US coast and stayed until we passed the Verrazano Narrows Bridge. Clearing slowly, the iconic images of New York Harbour and Manhattan emerged and the 'wow moment' arrived. We had to pinch ourselves that we were sailing past the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island and on into the heart of New York. We stayed at 79th Street Boat Basin and loved every minute of our time there – limitless entertainment, sights and sounds. We dawdled up the Hudson River soaking up the history of this highway of early exploration and opening of the continent. The mast was lowered at Hop-O-Nose Marina and carried on deck through the 30 canal locks to Lake Ontario. A problem with our turnbuckles meant that we kept the mast on deck across to Kingston, through the Thousand Islands and the seven enormous locks to Montreal where a rigger sorted us out.

The hospitality in Montreal, Ottawa and Quebec, and at the small towns in between, was outstanding as we were the first non-North American boat to visit that year. The Montreal Jazz Festival was unmissable and Norma's cousin and wife joined us in Quebec for Canada Day weekend festivities. Onwards to the Saguenay Fjord with its majestic capes and whales galore, including belugas, and the Gaspé Peninsula with hiking and extraordinary French accents. Friends David and Jacquie joined us again in Prince Edward Island for our cruise to the Bras d'Or Lakes and the Nova Scotia coast to Halifax. We called at Lunenburg and Lockeport before sailing the 270 miles directly to Gloucester, Massachusetts. We cruised along the coast, stopping at Salem and Marblehead, being joined by Greg and Carol in Boston for the trip to Cape Cod, Martha's Vineyard, Nantucket, Cuttyhunk and Rhode Island. Onwards through Block Island and Long Island Sounds with stops at Mystic, the Thimble Islands and Old Greenwich. Finally we closed the loop in New York. NY–NY statistics: 2627 miles in 116 days, moved on 64 days, transited 42 locks, 62 nights in marinas, 25 nights at anchor, 22 nights on moorings, 5 nights on town docks and 2 nights at sea. 343 hours motoring, 9 days with some fog, ran the heating on 12 nights. It was wonderful.



*The Dismal Swamp
Canal, North
Carolina*

With autumn approaching, what next? So down the East Coast via Delaware Bay, Chesapeake Bay and the Intracoastal Waterway to Beaufort, North Carolina, enjoying the palette of autumn colours on the Dismal Swamp Canal route. Then to sea for stops at Charleston, Savannah and Fernandina. Another 'wow moment' serendipitously came our way when we had to heave-to off Cape Canaveral for the Mars Rover launch. Then on to Fort Lauderdale and some serious thinking about what next – stay in the Caribbean or head for the Pacific?

It wasn't so much a throw of the dice but more an adventure itch that needed to be scratched, and the bigger adventure would be the Pacific. So that was it.

Christmas with family back in the UK was followed in January 2012 by a cruise with Des and Alma to the Florida Keys and the north coast of Cuba – a fascinatingly attractive country of former glory, dereliction, innovation and adaptation, stunning scenery, music and dance ... and superb cigars and rum. We then called at Grand Cayman en route to Panama. Our canal experience in the US and Canada made us quite desirable as line handlers for other cruisers, and we did a trip through the Panama Canal on another boat. We postponed our own passage to return to England to visit an increasingly frail 96-year-old mother, so did not leave Panama for the Galapagos until mid April.

The fates were at work, however, and after 350 miles we hit some debris floating just below the surface, which caused damage to our hydraulic rudder, the autopilot hydraulics and the steering. This necessitated a hand-steered return to Panama for lifting out and repairs, so there was nothing for it but to postpone the Pacific until 2013 and take consolation trips to Peru and the UK. We visited the Ilas Perlas for some delightful anchorages and to get in the mood for what lay ahead, but it was another false start, returning to Panama to fix a broken tooth. Then four days' great sailing and two days' motoring through the ITCZ for the 936 mile passage. The Galapagos islands arouse a sense of wonder – and so they provide it ... in parts. We had great hiking on Isla Isabela, superb marine and terrestrial life on Isla Bartolomé and Isla Santa Cruz (where we anchored), but the conditions for the giant tortoises range from good to awful.

*Isla Bartolomé,
Galapagos*

So, the passage to Hiva Oa in the Marquesas: 3034 miles and 23 days. How did we cope? It was not a difficult trip ... apart from the failure of the rudder hydraulics repair carried out



in Panama by a supposedly top-class engineer. The rudder lifted, putting enormous strain on the windvane steering, which in turn necessitated extra reefing and beefing up of the windvane. A temporary fix shortly after we arrived enabled us to sail on until we could haul out for proper repairs in Tahiti. We had a wonderful time in the Marquesas with much hiking, snorkelling and touring. The mountainous scenery takes your breath away, and the kindness of the people gifting fruit and free rides warms the heart. We visited Hiva Oa, Fatu Hiva, Tahuata, Nuku Hiva and Ua Pou, and could have stayed a lot longer.

Everything you read about the Tuamotus creates a shivering fear – the Dangerous Archipelago. It's all just done to scare people off and keep it for a few cruisers ... maybe. With time pressing for haul out in Tahiti, we visited Kauehi with an easy pass and Fakarava with the glorious South Pass which we snorkelled and dived – swimming with sharks galore and more tropical fish than an aquarium.

Lovely Fatu Hiva, in the Marquesas





At Nuku Hiva, the Marquesas

Tahiti was a mixture of modern (supermarkets) and historic (Captain Cook's Transit of Venus observations). More hiking and touring along with great views of Moorea led us to emulate the crew of HMS *Bounty* and we fell in love with the place. We stopped at Moorea, Huahine, Raiatea and Bora Bora – all wonderful experiences.

Then on to the Cook Islands. The 540 mile passage is part of 'The Difficult Middle' and so it was, with temperatures dropping to 20°C, winds occasionally up to 35 knots, 4m+ seas, and rain. Rarotonga is a relaxing place with a cross-island hike and good

Minnie B at Fakarava in the Tuamotus





Opunohu and Cook's Bays, Moorea

bars and restaurants, albeit the stern-to mooring in the harbour is 'interesting'. We arrived for the annual festival with Polynesian music and dancing – what the men can do with their legs and the women with their bottoms was mind-boggling.

The 590 mile passage to Niue was uneventful until on arrival the engine would not start, but we successfully picked up a mooring under sail on the first approach – not showing off as some suggested. We zipped around the quiet roads on a hired

Niue's fringing reef



motorcycle, enjoying its many coves for snorkelling and hikes through limestone scenery. Then on to Tonga for the whales, snorkelling and diving, sheltered anchorages and beautiful islands. We decided to head from there straight to New Zealand for maintenance and cyclone season tourism. Our passage was again benign, albeit we had to motor a little more than ideal, but at least no gales came sweeping in.

Repairs and maintenance in New Zealand are first class and we recommend Whangarei for this. We joined the millions who have discovered the wonders of New Zealand, touring the two islands.

Fiji was but a short visit and we did not do it justice – we visited Savusavu (very nice) and Musket Cove (over-hyped), before heading for Vanuatu – Anatom for



Julia and Tim filming 'The Man with the Blue and White Plastic Gun', Phang Nga Bay, Thailand

hiking and meeting local people, Tanna for Mount Yasur volcano, and Port Vila for provisions. Then to Papua New Guinea.

We had intended to break our passage to Darwin for the start of the Sail Indonesia Rally at Thursday Island, but were put off by the general conditions and set up, so called in at Port Moresby for a break after 1500 miles. Papua New Guinea has a bad reputation for security, but we stayed safely at Royal Papua Yacht Club, toured around Port Moresby, and wished we could spend more time in this captivating country ... must return.

The 1150 mile passage through the Torres Strait and across the Arafura Sea to Darwin kept us on our toes and raised our admiration for Captain Bligh's navigation skills. Australian Customs and Immigration were charming, and we thoroughly enjoyed this vibrant city. A quick overland trip to The Rock in the Middle and on to Sydney gave us a flavour of this vast country, but we had little time before the departure of the Sail Indonesia Rally which helped with clearances, some routing, festivals and local events.

Our passage through Indonesia (See *Indonesian Update*, *Flying Fish* 2015/1) was a highlight of the whole trip around – great scenery, snorkelling, food and such lovely people making us so welcome that the smiles never left our faces. Komodo dragons, climbing Mt Rinjani on Lombok, beautiful Bali, Kalimantan orang-utans, quiet anchorages, music and dancing ... and lots of motoring ... innumerable fishing platforms and boats ... but memories to treasure.

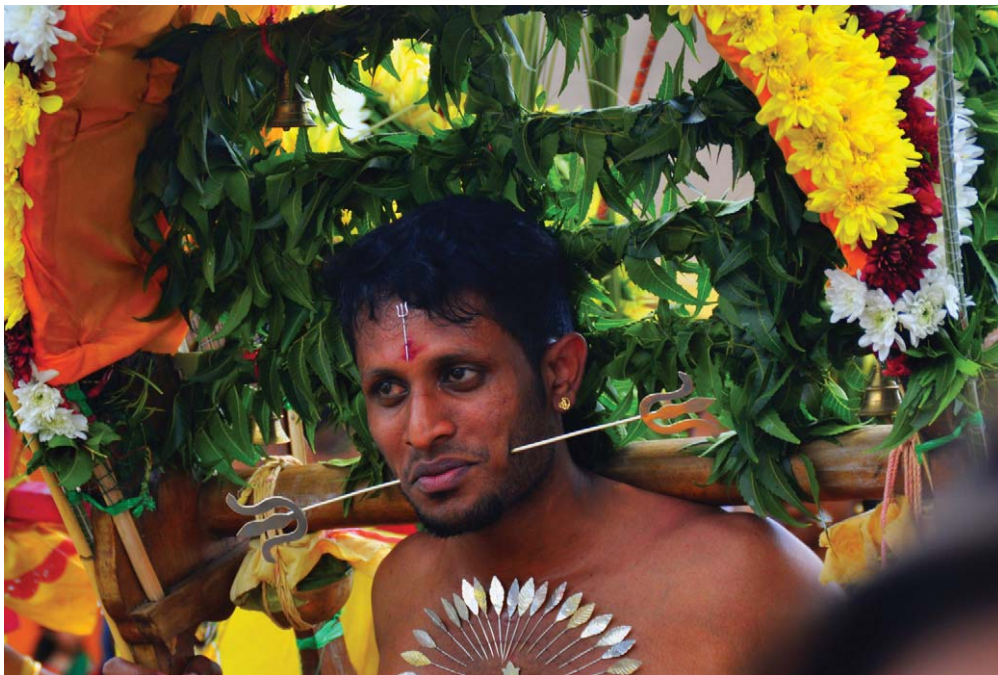
Then up the coast of Malaysia for a brief lay-up at Langkawi, a Christmas trip to UK and on to Phuket, Thailand for repairs and maintenance. Cruising Phang Nga Bay, with its iconic limestone islands accompanied by daughter Julia and her husband Tim, was magical. Finally we returned to Langkawi to secure *Minnie B* while we took a plane, train and bus trip through northern Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam – more magic.

What would the next throw of the dice bring, as we wondered whether to join friends who were shipping their boats from Thailand to the Mediterranean, or to continue across the Indian Ocean and north up the Atlantic to ...? This was a remarkably lengthy debate, until we concluded that we needed to complete the 'around'. We also had to choose whether to take the northern route via Sri Lanka and the Seychelles, or the southern route via the Mascarene Islands. So south it was to Singapore and on to Jakarta, so that we could leave the boat and fly to Jogjakarta to visit Borobudur. We saw only one other yacht on our trip through the Riau Islands, stopping on our own at *mouillages sauvages* (wild moorings) and again enjoying visits from smiling children in dugout canoes.

The marina at Jakarta is most welcoming, but even with our lifting keel the entrance needs careful timing. Jogjakarta and the Buddhist temple at Borobudur were enchanting, and then it was time to start for South Africa. We anchored one night at Krakatoa, with Anak Krakatoa steaming and smoking, and then on to Cocos Keeling, a beautiful atoll, where we relaxed, had superb snorkelling and hung out with other cruisers heading west.

Our Indian Ocean crossing was smiled on by the gods of wind and sea, and we safely arrived in Rodrigues having sailed 2011 miles in just over 14 days. Maximum wind speed was 30 knots, albeit the last three days saw sustained wind of 20–28kts, but we had little rain. Rodrigues was charming with good coastal walks, but the downside was having to move from the anchorage when the supply ship arrived and departed – a small price to pay. Next was the 350 miles to Mauritius, which we enjoyed but on reflection would have lingered less, although a Hindu festival we attended was spectacular with people having extensive body and face piercings and carrying enormous, heavy, flower-covered contraptions called *cavadees*.

A pierced adherent carrying a cavadee at a Hindu festival in Mauritius



Then it was time for another decision – Reunion or Madagascar? Opting for Reunion, the 138 miles involved many sail changes but the island is a hiker's paradise with tree-covered volcanic landscapes and an active volcano that just had to be flown over in a helicopter. The French supermarkets had everything we needed and there are good marine services. Again it was decision time – direct to South Africa or north via Madagascar? We took the former, mainly because the final legs are the same distance (about 1400 miles) and this route has a better wind angle, and we know lemurs are cuddly but ...

The passage to Richards Bay was generally good, but the currents were fickle and the wind was up and down. We thought we had escaped the worst of the weather, but the last seven hours saw southerly winds of 30–35 knots over the south-going Agulhas Current – but it was dark and raining, so all was well as we simply could not see the height of the waves.

South Africa exceeded our expectations, and we spent a month touring in the east before getting a favourable forecast that enabled us to make the 950 mile passage to Cape Town in a single hop, broken only by an overnight anchorage at Mossel Bay. We had more outstanding experiences touring in the west, and the warmest of welcomes at Royal Cape Yacht Club. A quick trip to the UK was followed by departure for Namibia,



An oryx in the Kalahari Desert, Namibia

where we stopped at Luderitz and Walvis Bay – stunning scenery and beautiful wildlife rewarded us, along with very relaxed and welcoming people everywhere. Then superb sailing for the 1200 miles to St Helena, where the moorings are good and the island fascinating with varied scenery and Napoleonic history.



We made the 1800 mile passage to Jacaré/Cabadelo in Brazil in April 2016. Again it was good, apart from our arrival when we encountered electrical storms and such rain that it was like sailing under a waterfall. And here was our old friend Nicolas, Operations Director of the Rallye Iles du Soleil, running the marina! We had crossed our outbound track and so completed our circumnavigation.

We have now logged over 50,000 miles in *Minnie B*, and she has carried us safely to places we had only dreamed of and never dared to believe we would visit by boat. We regard ourselves as privileged and very lucky to have had the opportunities that chance has thrown our way.

We would like to finish by saying a big thank you for their help and hospitality to the OCC Port Officers of Montreal, the East Coast of the United States, Cuba, Panama, Niue, New Zealand, Fiji, Reunion, South Africa, Brazil and Trinidad.



There be triple ways to take, of the eagle or the snake,
Or the way of a man with a maid,
But the sweetest way to me is a ship's upon the sea
In the heel of the Northeast Trade.

Rudyard Kipling