

Time to move on

after 5 years in the Mediterranean

Roland & Consie Lennox-King

In 2015 it was our plan to sail from Greece through the western Mediterranean and leave *Restless* ready to sail across the Atlantic to the USA in the New Year. But plans change, and ours did.

After completing all the pre-launching jobs, and getting our Greek Transit Log renewed for six months, our friend David joined us from Scotland. We launched *Restless* in Preveza, west Greece, and motored into the Gulf of Amvrakikos, stopping at different bays each night, we walked



to the local markets and churches and climbed up to the ruins of fortresses.

6 May - We left the Gulf and motor-sailed to Antipaxos and a bay with some of the bluest water in the Mediterranean, attracting huge numbers

of tourists. We carried on to Paxos, an island with several picturesque villages along its shores, and sailed to Mongonisi, Gaios, Longos and Lakka. Then we hired a car and drove around the island, famous for its ancient olive trees, and the best quality olives that are sold in Harrods. We motor-sailed 28nm across to Corfu Yacht Club, where David left us, with many thunderstorms rolling around. We provisioned in Corfu town, ready for our trip across to Italy, but family medical problems in Sydney kept us close to the phone and internet for a few days. We cleared out of Corfu on 20 May, heading for the heel of the boot of Italy.

Passageweather.com is the site we use to keep an eye on the weather. It looked reasonable, so we set off on 21 May, with some sea and some wind. It was hazy and cold, and certainly not summer. We sailed 45nm across to the Greek island Othoni, but found the southern harbour at Ammou untenable with large waves rolling in to a shallow, small harbour, most of which is reserved for a ferry, so we found shelter in a harbour inhabited only by seagulls on the northern part of the island. A wind change to the south-east in the night resulted in a nasty swell making for uncomfortable sleeping.

22 May - We set off soon after dawn in big confused seas and strong winds to sail the 56nm to Santa Maria di Leuca, on the heel of Italy, and the 'Church at the End of the World'. We cleared into Italy without much trouble, as both Italy and Greece are in the EU. The swell from the previous



Consie above Santa Maria de Leuca

night continued to make this reasonably sheltered marina also uncomfortable. Large concrete works to strengthen the sea walls are testament to the winter storms that must pound this exposed coast.

We waited a day for the weather to clear before setting off the

75nm to Crotona, but had another rough and windy sail in F5 across the 'instep' to get there. In the Crotona harbour, we refuelled and selected one of the three concessionaries offering marina space before walking around the fort, which has become the heart of the town with a daily open-air market and shops set into the walls.

26 May - Once again we set off at 0600 for another 75nm sail in a cold N5, with thunderclouds rolling past, to arrive at Rocello Ionica, a new marina with a difficult shallow entrance. The marina manager told us to

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line up the forts on the hills, then he stood on the rocks at the entrance to the marina and told us to head straight towards him and then turn at the last moment. We drew up our centreboard and rudder and got in safely, but saw some other yachts going aground. The following day we took a break and hired a car to drive up into the mountains to Gerace, with its tiny crooked houses connected to each other. From there we saw thunderstorms rolling across the valleys. The marina had a restaurant, and we had our first real Italian pizza, served on a plank, nearly a metre long. Some tables had pizzas for 4 people, 2 metres long. No surprise that some Italians have comfortable figures! Ashore beside the marina we saw some of the tragic refugee boats from Africa abandoned to rot.

29 May - We set off at 0500 for a 100nm passage to Syracuse on Sicily in moderating winds and seas. We motor-sailed past Mt. Etna, with her head in her own ash and smoke-clouds, to arrive before dark, and anchored by Dionysos fort, built 450BC on Ortigia island. The next day Roland put his Bic sailing dinghy in the water to sail around the harbour and several superyachts. We took our dinghy into the canal between the mainland and the island, and walked around, finding the best open-air market we have ever seen, with stalls selling fresh fruit and vegetables, honey, oils, herbs, salamis, cheeses, meat, fresh tuna, swordfish, seafood and every other provision you could wish for.

3 June - We had planned to sail to Tunisia, but with conflicting reports from fellow yachtsmen and the media on the refugee crisis, we decided to sail only as far south as Malta. We set off at 0530 to motor-sail the 60nm,



Roland with pizza for two, Rocello Ionica



Market in Syracuse

and encountered dense fog in the crowded shipping lane, which was quite eerie.

The entrance into Malta is very impressive, with massive fortresses around the harbour, and many marinas crammed with Megayachts and colourful local fishing boats. We had emailed the Royal Malta Yacht Club, which made us very welcome in their small marina. We walked into Valletta town and took a 'hop-on hop-off' bus tour around the island. Another day we took a tour around Fort St Elmo, with its recently opened museum showing the history of Malta in its siege days in 1565 and its role in World Wars I and II. A very worthwhile visit.

Our friend Keir flew from Scotland to join us. We often have problems with communications when we go from one country to another, so once we had heard the news of the safe arrival of our first grandchild, Mia, on 10 June, to our son Gilbert and his wife Pip, we sailed north to Gozo island, with its sandy beaches and open coastline, a contrast to Malta's rocky shores.

With still no wind to talk about we motored 55nm to Porto Palo, on Sicily, and the following day motored back to Syracuse, where we had a crew change. Keir left and Consie's cousin Liz Dewar joined us.

Here we met some other cruising people and together decided to hire a van to see some of inland Sicily, starting with a trip north to Mt Etna. We set off on a very hot day in light clothing, but as we drove up the slopes of formidable Mt Etna it got colder, until at the top of this 3,500 metre high



Mount Etna from Taormina

volcano it was snowing! We also visited the town of Noto, with its enormous churches and palazzos, and stopped at a supermarket for heavy stores before returning to our boats. We had another crew change, neighbours Pam and Freddie Graham from New

Zealand. We took them for a sail along the coast of Sicily. When they left us they took a train from Syracuse to Rome. The train crossed the Straits of Messina on the ferry.

The next day our daughter Olivia and her boyfriend Shenton joined us from Hong Kong, to sail with us to Sardinia, via the Aeolian islands. After walking around Syracuse and provisioning, we set off north up the coast of Sicily, and tied up at one of 'harbourmaster George's' famous deep water moorings off Taormina. He organised a taxi for us up to the top of



Hunting swordfish in the Messina Straits

Taormina, where we walked around town before dinner, then taxi'd back down the hill to sleep aboard. The following day we relaxed, snorkelled around the caves and grottos along the shore, and took in the view of the famous mountain.

3 July - We set off motor-sailing at 0530, with a clear view of Mt Etna, north through the Straits of Messina and Odysseus' famous whirlpool Charybdis. We saw many swordfish hunting boats, with men perched on the mast looking for swordfish and a man on a 40ft walkway on the bow, trident ready to stab a sunbathing swordfish. We anchored that afternoon, 65nm later, at Vulcano island, and swam ashore to soak in the sulphurous bubbling hot mudbaths. Next morning there was again no wind, so we motored 15nm to Lipari, the major town of the Aeolian islands, and anchored *Restless* at the foot of a cliff while we toured town. After a snorkel around the rocks, we motored on to nearby Panarea island for more snorkelling and drank Limoncello until the sun went down.

This area of Italy is renown for its lack of wind in summer and we became tired of motoring as we passed on to Filicudi, which had little appeal. This was in contrast to Cefalu on the north coast of Sicily, which we found to be a little gem, although we anchored in Porto Novo to the east of town, in 4m of clear water. Cefalu, originally a Roman spa, has an attractive upper and lower town that typifies all things Italian.

We wanted to cross to Sardinia, so motored further west, missing the noisy dirty city of Palermo and finding a good anchorage near the city's airport off the town of Terrasini. We checked the weather reports before



Cefalu Harbour, Sicily

upping anchor at 0530 the next morning to sail the 167nm to the southern end of Sardinia.

During the day we saw a school of tuna, 3 turtles, and dolphins. The increasing SW winds and left over swell against the wind meant conditions became boisterous around midnight as we beat into a stiff F6 with a well reefed main and staysail, making progress slow and uncomfortable. We were pleased to reach the Sardinian coast the next morning, to anchor at 1030 on 9 July in Cala Pira in stunning clear water. The next day we motored 5nm to Porto Giunco and more clear water and perfect conditions to test our new 'hookah' – underwater breathing apparatus. After lunch we motored round to anchor outside the marina at Villasimius, and took our dinghy into the marina for a great meal. The following day we were rewarded with a beautiful reach in a F4 into Cagliari, as Olivia and Shenton were due to fly out early the next day. This city is served by several marinas, but we were recommended Marina di Saint Elmo at the very eastern corner of the harbour. We walked into town for a meal, and saw a flock of pink flamingos flying overhead.

12 July - At dawn we went by taxi to the airport to say goodbye. We had a few days until some kiwi friends were due to join us, so we sailed south to Capo di Pula, where the ruins of the ancient Phoenician city of Nora rest on the bottom of the sea and on the shores. We walked around the ruins and up to one of the 60 Spanish lookout towers on the Sardinian

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coast, many of which are now lighthouses.

19 July - We returned to Cagliari and met our friends Ingrid and John, joining us for 10 days to sail to northern Sardinia. We saw the pink flamingos again when we walked into town for a meal. On 22 July we sailed 21nm to Villasimius, where we had a sudden thunderstorm with lightning and heavy rain. The storm came and went in 30 minutes. The next day we sailed another 50nm north to Bellavista bay, near Arbatax, and another storm passed us by. The following morning we set off north again to the Cala Gonone area for lunch. This area of grottos and cliffs is noted in all the tourist guides as a 'must-see'.

We had a beautiful 21nm afternoon reach to Capo Comino, where we had another thunderstorm. This open anchorage did not look good, but by now we were starting to encounter increasing numbers of other yachts. Several were anchored in the very shallow open bay. It turned out to be a very pleasant spot.

26 July - We sailed 18.3nm to Porto Brandinghi, the real start of the popular cruising area that covers the NE corner of Sardinia. Here we were in the company of some 40-odd yachts, including our first superyachts. A great meal in the upmarket Marina Puntaldia, a favourite with the locals, rounded out our day. The next morning Ingrid and John took a taxi to the airport, to return home to NZ.

27 July - The high temperatures and strong winds sparked off a fire ashore, and we watched 2 planes scooping water and dousing the fire all day. We had a visit from the Coastguard, who asked us to pass over all



Vernazza Harbour, NW Italy

our documents into a fishing net. No prizes for guessing what happened next! Roland's passport slipped into the water and he dived in after it. We rinsed, mopped and dried it in the sun. The Coastguard retreated in embarrassment.

30 July - Our friend David arrived in Olbia from Scotland to cruise the remaining 240nm to Genova, from where we were to ship *Restless* to Florida, USA, at the end of August. We motored a few miles to Isola Tavolara, and anchored the next few nights in aquamarine bays near this huge granite island. It was school holidays, and all the bays were crowded. We had been having trouble with our alternator, so we motored into Marina di Olbia, where a new one was fitted. We visited the Olbia Museum, where a recently discovered Roman ship had been found while digging a tunnel under the harbour.

5 August - We motored into the Costa Smeralda, where hundreds of megayachts and superyachts made *Restless* look like a small tender. Some of the kiwi crew from some of the superyachts came to say 'G'day' and a friend of our daughter Olivia's brought us a precious loaf of NZ Vogels bread! We tried to swap him some Vegemite, but he had some already. He told us that it was not possible to anchor in Cala di Volpe and Porto Cervo. A mooring buoy costs €4,000 a night and most of them are taken by superyachts. There are plenty of other places to anchor. We took our dinghy in to look at the superyachts crammed along the quay at Porto Cervo. The Mistral was blowing, so we motored around to a sheltered anchorage at Golfo delle Saline, a few miles away.

We set off from Sardinia, sailing through La Maddalena to Porto Liscia, and left Italy's Sardinia to sail the 27nm to Corsica, France, changing over our courtesy flags. We went ashore in Porto Taverna and had Corsican mussels, followed by ice cream. We left Corsica and sailed across to Elba, where Napoleon was exiled, and went to his Palazzino at Porto Ferraio, where we had been 25 years earlier, in our yacht 'Reverie' with our 2 children.

20 August - We still had over 100nm to sail to Genova, so we set off at 0615 and motor-sailed 78nm before anchoring in La Grazie, in La Spezia, a well-protected harbour. We had heard a lot about the Cinque Terre, five once isolated villages on the coast between Portovenere and Portofino, now connected by a railway and a walking path to the rest of Italy. In good weather, the best way to see them is from the water, so on 21 August we set off past Portovenere to Riomaggiore, Manarola, Corniglia, and tied up to a buoy at Vernazza, nearly 11nm away. We went ashore at this picturesque village and climbed to the top of the fortress to look down on the ice-cream coloured houses squeezed up against each other around the small harbour. We had an Italian meal in a wonderful sunset, before spending a quiet night aboard. The next morning we took our dinghy into the last of



Portofino - the Holy Grail of Italian sailing

the five villages, Monterossa, for a coffee and a gelato.

22 August - We motored 25nm to Portofino and made a quick tour in *Restless* of this small harbour, favoured by the rich, famous and beautiful people, then anchored in nearby Sta Margherita for a last swim in the Mediterranean. The next day we motored into Genova harbour, past the eyes of hundreds of amazing Palazzos lining the shores, and tied up at Porto Antico marina.

31 August - *Restless* was loaded aboard a Dockwise ship, and AGW&WP (which stands for All Going Well and Weather Permitting) she was due to arrive in Fort Lauderdale on 17 September. Roland would meet her there to put her away for the winter. We will return to her in April 2016 for another cruising season.



Restless (left) aboard the Dockwise ship