

In search of anchorages and so much more

An Adriatic Cruise

Phil Heaton

Minnie B spent winter 2021-2 ashore at Cleopatra Marina, Preveza, Greece. Our aspiration for 2022 was to cruise north to Albania, cross to Italy, day hop to Venice, stay for a month, then Croatia, Montenegro for the RCC Meet in September and back to Greece, hauling out again at Cleopatra. It mostly happened.

Norma has an Irish passport so we were not caught by the 90/180 days Schengen rules as I could travel as Norma's dependant (an alarming shift in our marital power relations has resulted), and the only restriction was the long standing EU rule that we could not stay in one country more than 90 days without registering.

We were delayed leaving as we discovered the service/repair to the windlass motor had not taken place (a communication problem, apparently), meaning we were stuck in the marina until it was fixed. We also found we needed new engine bearings and a new gearbox, which would take time for the technicians to fit us into their busy spring schedule. That was OK - we could go to Vonitsa in the Gulf of Amvrakia, where the forces of Mark Antony and Cleopatra were defeated by those of Augustus. Our first night at anchor we expected 30-35 knots wind in what should



have been a very sheltered anchorage. In six metres, 40m of chain and our 28kg Manson Supreme anchor well dug in, we should have been OK. We subsequently read that despite what the pilot book says, holding is notoriously patchy. At 0300 we were re-anchoring, again in six metres but with 60m of chain. It took two attempts to set the anchor – it was good to practice at night in F7.

The delay meant that we had the opportunity to

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meet up with a few RCC members: Hugh Symons, William and Susannah Garnett, Robert Holbrook and a brief hello to Lionel Hoare whose account of cruising in Croatia in 2021 in *Roving Commissions* 62 provided useful information.

Eventually we set sail on 24 May. Our passage from Preveza to Manfredonia, Italy was just over 48 hours and 284nm. It was good to be back at sea, enjoying the sunsets and sunrises with really good off-wind sailing, with goosewinged main and genoa, for nearly half of the trip

Manfredonia is a pleasant town with an interesting castle (we had a guided tour) and museums. Great seafood restaurants tickled our taste buds and set us up for the trip north to Venice. We did this in day hops of 40-60nm, calling at Rodi Garganico, Termoli, Pescara, Porto San Giorgio, Fano, Ravenna and Chioggia.

Ravenna, a UNESCO World Heritage city, was founded by Emperor Augustus in 1 BCE. It boasts the 6CE Basilica di San Vitale with colourful Byzantine mosaics, and the tomb of one of Italy's greatest poets, Dante Alighieri.

Two of the principal features of this Italian coast are no anchorages and innumerable extensive mussel farms just off the coast. The chart gives a good indication of where they are likely to be, but on occasions they are not charted and

charted farms are not there in reality. Staying out at the 20m contour helps.



Norma in Venice

Arrival in Venice is special, and our 2020 monthlong reservation at Venezia Certosa Marina was honoured. We were rewarded with a view across to the city and its towering Campanile, a peaceful island to escape the frenzy of the city.

Daughter Anna and her husband Neil, joined us for two days and we walked nearly 30 km around the city taking in the key sights.

We managed to fit in a couple of hiking days at Cortina d'Ampezzo. The guide book says 'Cortina is considered to be Italy's most exclusive resort, the winter playground of film stars and royalty': we were there in summer. In perfect weather, we hiked 10 miles at Cinque Torri, reaching the outcrop of rocks at 2137m and on to Passo Falzarego for the bus back to Cortina. Remnants from the fighting between Italy and Austria in WWI are evident with huts, sheds and trenches. The warfare must have been horrendous, especially during winter months, with the immense challenges of resupply and simply staying alive.

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Norma at Tre Cime

25,000 population of Verona when it was built but with the enormous set, stage and orchestra pit there were a few thousand fewer for our visit.

A decent sail took us from Venice to Trieste for outward clearance. We broke the trip, stopping for one night in Laguna di Marano Lagunare, anchored out of the channel in 4.3m in mud, literally in the middle of the lagoon and not near any land. It was distinctly odd. We do not recommend this - our raised centreboard and folded rudder meant we were fine when entering and leaving the lagoon where the depth dropped to 1.1m.

A couple of nights in the marina in Trieste enabled us to enjoy this vibrant and highly sociable city – Campari Spritz and Aperol Spritz were *di rigore*.

Umag was our first port of entry in Croatia on 7 July, having tied up at the Customs quay for clearance. The Police and Port Authority people couldn't have been more polite and friendly. A short

Our second day to Tre Cime, had even more spectacular scenery, but was very busy so that at times we were walking in columns of people along the popular anticlockwise route. The views are truly awesome and the 11 mile circuit provided another outstanding hike.

Being in Italy we had to take in an opera. We had the good fortune to have decent weather for the 1st century CE Roman Arena in Verona and marvellous *Aida*. The Arena could hold the

Minnie B





Roman amphitheatre, Pula

6nm hop down the coast to an anchorage at Dajla had us back in cruising mode - we stayed for four nights enjoying the facilities: a beach bar, mini-market and café.

The Istrian coast has interesting history. Having been occupied by a variety of regimes, it has a strong Italian character. We took a mooring at Poreč and explored the charming town and its 6th century CE Euphrasian Basilica, famous for its mosaics and Bishop's Palace. Then another night on a mooring at Rovinj, and to Pula where we anchored in the north of the harbour in 4.8m in mud – great holding. We took the dinghy to the fuel dock by the main marina and for a few cans of beer the attendants were happy for the dinghy to be tied up in the corner with the quay on the north side. The big draw is the 1st century CE oval Roman amphitheatre and other Roman monuments.

Our plan for Croatia was to be there for two months, spending most of the time in the north rather than the big and highly popular southern islands, anticipating that the northern islands would be quieter during July and August.

Our first stop was the small island of Unije, where we found an excellent anchorage at Uvala Vovisca: the water was clear and it provided great shelter and holding in 25 knots Bora wind. From the muddy beach we found a goat track/footpath that led to a wider rocky track and the village on the other side of the island – a two hours round trip was rewarded by fabulous iced coffees and some provisioning at the mini market.

After stopping for one night on a mooring off Ilovik, we reached the anchorage on the east side of Silba. There is not much protection from the northeast (Bora) wind but the forecast was for WNW, and the island delighted with good

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provisioning and an intriguing tower with an external staircase built by a sea captain for the love of his life.

On then to Molat, anchoring at Uvala Podgarbe, dropping in eight metres with two lines ashore to rocks. The water was clean and clear. We dinghied the 0.8nm to the harbour at Molat. We liked Molat so much that we stayed six nights, then moved on to Ugljan, anchoring at Muline South in eight metres where we stayed for two nights, before going to the east coast and the small and friendly Preko marina.

Zadar old town was a short ferry ride away. There are the inevitable Roman ruins (the forum), the 12th/13th century CE St Anastasia's Cathedral, and pleasant pedestrianised streets with cafes and shops, but the highlight for us is the Sea Organ – designed by a local architect, Nikola Bašić, it is a system of pipes and whistles set in perforated stone steps that descend to the sea. The sounds it makes as the sea pushes air through it are quite soporific. You can swim from the steps but just sitting there listening and looking at the channel between Zadar and Ugljan is mesmerising.

5 August was Victory Day for Croatia – a public holiday celebrating the end to the 1991-5 war with Serbia. We were awakened by lots of noise and chatter as many boats tied up outside the harbour wall and thronged the inside of the harbour. Just behind us some guys set up cured ham legs and got stuck in to beer and prosciutto. It turned out to be the annual Preko to Zadar marathon swim. Our new neighbours were cheerfully friendly and we joined in sampling their prosciutto. There must have been over one hundred men and women swimmers undertaking the 4.4km swim which they had to complete in under two hours, each swimmer having their own support boat.

We moved back to the west side of Ugljan and anchored at a small bay of Prtljug, with shelter from SW through N to SE. From here we made a 10 miles round trip hike to Scah (Ugljan's highest point at 296m) which included a broken and rocky track with occasional shade and cracked and creviced limestone pavements and boulders. The route became increasingly rugged, twisting, and shadeless, then we saw ... dammit, a false summit. The true summit was probably still over a quarter of a mile away but the route was even more broken and steep. Discretion



A monument to love, the tower at Silba

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became the better part of valour and we decided we had nothing to prove, but did want to avoid damaged limbs, so stopped short. On the way back to *Minnie B* we detoured to the seaside village of Lukoran for ice cold water, beer and lemonade.

The walk to the village of Ugljan is through olive groves, with some trees 2000 years old (we are told), along gravel and stone tracks where we found solar powered smart benches providing WIFI connections and charging points – so old and so new.



Smart bench in Ugljan



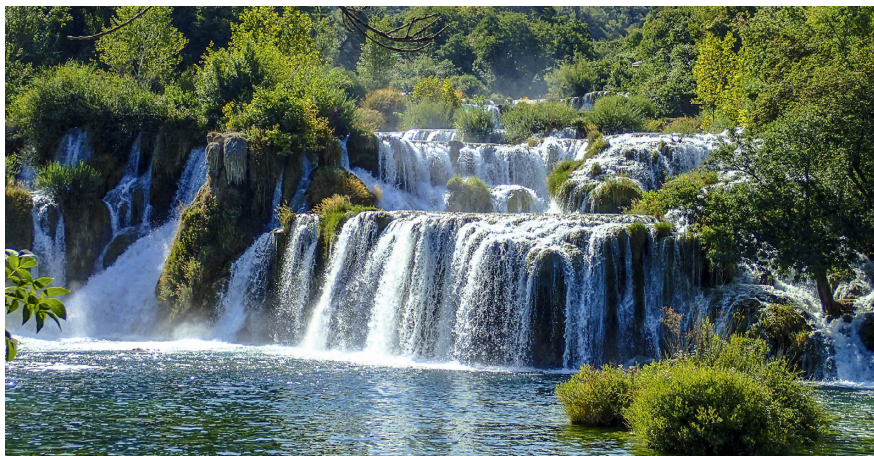
The Kornati National Park was next – 89 islands of a very different landscape, comprising karstic terrain featuring cracks, caves, grottoes and rugged cliffs. The deforested islands have startling white rock formations contrasting with the azure sea. We picked up a mooring (included in the park fee) at Kravljacica, from where we could hike to the 6th century CE church of St Mary and the Fortress of Tureta on the commanding hill.



The following day we motored slowly through the rest of the islands, past the abandoned dwellings on Mana island and its vertical cliffs, on to Murter for diesel and provisions, anchoring in the large well sheltered bay.

Murter

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Krka Falls

By now we had settled in to a pattern of moving on Fridays and Saturdays, as these coincide with charter boat changeover days so many anchorages are quieter. We left Murter on 19 August, heading for the Krka National Park. We had wind to sail and had full main and genoa, until a large and lengthy squall, with much lightning and thunder, hit us with sustained winds of over 35 knots. Rapid reefing ensued and fortunately we had, for the islands, plenty of sea room so we sort of hove-to waiting for it to pass. All was well.

After the squall, we pressed on for the Krka National Park, mooring at the pontoon beside Konoba Vidrovaca (restaurant), which was free if you ate at the restaurant. It was a short RIB ride to Skradin for the ferry into the park. There are multiple waterfalls and well developed and maintained boardwalks and paths with good viewing stops. Another ferry trip above the falls took us to the island of Visovac and its Franciscan monastery dating from 1445. If you are into that kind of thing, the monastery boasts a collection of historical church linens and dishes.

Our departure from the restaurant pontoon did not go according to plan: a gusty crosswind did for us. We snagged an adjacent mooring line around our propeller. The thickness of the line was too much for our rope cutter and we were well and truly caught close to the rocks ashore. The anchor was rapidly deployed to stop us hitting adjacent boats and lines were taken to two other boats to stabilise matters. With the help of other cruisers and the diver called up by the restaurant, there was a successful outcome albeit our wallets were a bit lighter. One valuable outcome though has been to solve the question of Norma's Christmas present 2022 – it will be a bow thruster.

With some strong northerly winds forecast we decided to find a suitably sheltered anchorage and on Sunday 21 August we moved to Luka Rogoznica where the holding was excellent.

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Phil and Norma in Stari Grad

We were now heading for the big and more popular islands. Our first stop was Stari Grad on Hvar, anchoring to the east of the ferry terminal. Our guidebook says that Stari Grad is 'a quieter, more cultured and altogether more sober affair than Hvar Town, its stylish and sybaritic sister. If you're not after pulsating nightlife and thousands of people crushing each other along the streets, head here'. Yes, Stari Grad is our kind of town, and we had a superb lunch of traditionally cooked fish.

We toyed with the idea of visiting Korčula and Mljet, but put off by the mooring options we headed for Lovište at the western end of the Pelješac peninsula. This is a small, sleepy village with one shop and a few bars/restaurants but it provided a very large and secure anchorage with good

holding and protection. It also provided an unexpected bonus with a hike to Sv Ilija, summiting at 961m. A taxi to the start of the trail near Nakovanj Pass gave us a commencing height of 269m. The round trip of 15km partly along a gravelled track, partly through steep and rugged karst, partly through pine forest, rewarded us with magnificent views from the top.



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Our trip from Lovište to Slano on the mainland provided us with some of our best sailing in Croatia with a close reach in F5/6 along the Pelješac peninsula past Mljet for 17nm, until the nice big black cloud providing the wind dissipated and we were back to motoring for the last 18nm. Slano bay is another large and safe anchorage, with evidence remaining of the town's devastation by Serbian artillery in the 1991-5 war.

On 6 September we motored the 23nm from Slano to Cavtat, passing close by Dubrovnik old town with its fortified walls. It is a very scenic and impressive from the sea.

There are supposedly two anchorages at Cavtat – in the harbour on the south side or in the bay on the north side, Uvala Tiha. The former had too many small boat moorings for our comfort, and although Lionel Hoare reported patchy holding in 2021, since there was only very light wind forecast, we anchored in Uvala Tiha in 7-8m having searched for a sandy spot to drop the anchor. All was well.

We cleared out at Cavtat reflecting that our two months in Croatia had been absolutely marvellous. All the negativity on social media about officials being rude, unhelpful and even corrupt was far removed from our experience. We had avoided the very popular places where some folk have said you can be ripped off by people claiming you have to pay to anchor and went for quieter and in many ways more picturesque places because they were not so busy. In 62 days, we anchored for 54 nights, had two nights in Preko marina, two nights on a restaurant pontoon, three nights on paid moorings, and one night on a mooring in Kornati (included in the park entrance fee).

Apart from the fact we had never been and wanted to see the majestic Bay of Kotor, we were going to Montenegro for the RCC Meet, and to get a replacement impeller for our Yamaha outboard. We chose to clear in at Porto Montenegro, a large megayacht and superyacht marina, so we could have the outboard collected and assistance with clearance (not that the latter was necessary). All was good.

Then HM Queen Elizabeth II passed away. In amongst the sadness and remembrance, the airwaves filled with advice on flag etiquette. Because our ensign staff is relatively short, we could not fly the ensign at half-mast, so we adopted the alternative which is to have a black cravat/ribbon tied at the top of the staff. The marina was hugely respectful and organised a two-minute silence followed by the sounding of ships' horns – it was very touching. The RCC Meet was due to start on the day of the funeral and was cancelled.



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Kotor

We moved round to the anchorage at Kotor, a splendid walled town where the climb to the Kotor Fortress provides stupendous views north along the bay with its steep sided mountains rushing down into the water.

A forecast for some strong winds, rain and thunderstorms later in the week, had us seeking the relative shelter of the island of Sveti Marko near Tivat. The wind and rain made an appearance but all was well, anchored in 11m of mud, albeit at times it would have been nice to have had a shorter fetch for some wind directions.

A few days of northerly winds set our departure for the 240nm to Preveza, Greece. We bypassed Albania and sailed west of Corfu, arriving at 0650 on 24 September having slowed down for a daylight entry to the Preveza anchorage and taking 45 hours.

We then had a leisurely month cruising through the Levkas canal to Ormos Vlikho, where we met up with James Baker (RCC) on *Bellatrix*, then onto Palairos, Mitika and Port Atheni on Meganisi. Our daughter Julia and son-in-law Tim flew in to Preveza and we did the same mini-cruise again with them. A joy.

Minnie B was laid up on 22 October after a superb sailing season covering 1760nm. Croatia and Montenegro substantially exceeded our cruising expectations, enabling us to enjoy what they can offer and, overwhelmingly doing it by anchoring. Our season provided us with truly memorable places and experiences.