

# A Cruise in the Ionian Sea in August

Peter Bruce

If you have a boat in the Med, you might think that July and August are months to avoid due to the heat and the number of other boating people on holiday. But what if your boat is in the UK and a kind friend offers his Med-based Oyster 46 for an August cruise and you are invited to join.... what then?

Sandy and I met up with Brad and Joyce Bradbeer, to whom the boat had been lent, aboard *Skat*, owned by Nigel Southward (RCC), at Eufimia in Kefalonia on 3 August. After a shop for provisions and, happily, we found a supermarket that delivered, we then had a swim and dinner opposite the quay. We left next morning at 0730 on the basis that the often stiff NW *maestro* wind doesn't usually get up until lunchtime. We had ten days to cruise the Ionian Sea.

We planned to visit islands in the Inland Sea, go through the Levkas Canal to Corfu and then return to Levkas where the owner would take over. Only one of us, Sandy, had been to the Ionian before so, before coming out, we read the excellent Heikell pilot book on the subject. Likely anchorages were chosen and then marked on an A3-sized chart with the page number for easy reference. This information turned out to be valuable, but we soon learnt that almost every



## A Cruise in the Ionian Sea in August

other boat seemed to have Heikell too, and every place he marked with an anchor was usually occupied with a bevy of other vessels. We also found that un-Heikell-marked, just-as-pretty, nearby locations were often almost empty. The lovely Ionian seemed thick with boats, not only because it was the height of the season, but probably because some other desirable areas had become no-goes due to refugee and political problems. When we arrived at Levkas, we observed a long line of charter yachts not in use and guessed that they had been brought over from places, such as the eastern Aegean, where there were such issues.

From Kefalonia we skirted round the steep-sided, wooded Ithaca and passed inside Pera Pigadi Island where several craft had



Cliff Bay

evidently spent the night. Then we set a course for Atokos, looking in at Cliff Bay, then anchoring at One House Bay in 13m for lunch and a swim. Seventeen yachts were there on our arrival and at least 30 an hour later, one of which, a flotilla yacht, anchored so close it had to be fended off from time to time. The young skipper didn't realise this was not quite normal and confided that this was her first time ever in a boat.

We weighed anchor and sailed to the long, thin island of Nisos Kastos



One House Bay

and, being good birders, recognising Mediterranean shearwaters en route. As usual the morning wind had been so light and fickle that the engine was the only means of making sensible progress, but the afternoon's wind was a steady and

unusually gentle NW F3, so it was a pleasure to be sailing rather than using the iron topsail. On arrival at Kastos we found the village harbour crowded, so anchored in a bay just north-east in 7m. We were in company with a Hallberg-Rassy with an RCC burgee and the owner, Robert Louth (RCC), swam over with a friend to make contact and they were duly invited on board for a glass. Robert and Josceline were not the only visitors as a

gang of wasps arrived and found our delicacies irresistible. After the wasps left at sunset - though their cousins were to trouble us again in later days - Kastos became a more pleasant anchorage. Moonlight shimmered on the sea and also that night we heard a Scops owl call; this was confirmed by a bird song app on Brad's iPad.

We left under power to the east at 1100 rounding Kastos and heading to the attractive bay at Port Leone, at the south-west end of Kalamos. The village here has been deserted since an earthquake in 1953 that cut off the water supply. Half a dozen yachts were anchored in the deep blue waters at Port Leone but, had we wanted to stay, there would have been room aplenty. We went on up the west side of Meganisi and anchored in 17m for lunch at the Robert-Louth-recommended Paradiso taverna. Desirable anchorages in the Med often require lots of cable when shallow water is already taken up or does not exist and we were glad to have 80m to allow us good scope. We were also lucky to have a French Spade anchor which not only held well but also rotated appropriately in the hawse hole before stowing neatly on deck. When we came to weigh at the Paradiso, the Spade anchor was holding a large mound of heavy mud which we dislodged with an old broom handle that was only just strong enough. This spade mud-gathering probably goes with good holding ability.

Nigel Southward, our noble owner, had recommended that we spend the night at Port Atheni in Meganisi, so there we went, looking into the now comprehensively built-up village of Spartakeni on the way. At Port Atheni almost every berthing billet was taken and Joyce noticed quite a few rat guards on shore lines.

We moved to Port Abeliki, the next door bay and anchored off Nisopoula island, putting a line out to the wooded Meganisi island beside. This was not a



A Spade-full of seabed

Heikell recommend and soon we were entirely on our own. We noticed four shaggy goats living on the tiny island of Nisiopoula and wondered how they found enough to drink. It was a glorious anchorage, but when the weather is very hot and humid, as it was, it is good to swing to the wind, rather than have a line ashore as we had done, to enable the wind scoop to operate most efficiently. The Evans scoop is designed to turn with the wind. However, if the halyard is slack enough to allow this, when the wind pipes up, as it often did, the heavy chattering of the base rod

## A Cruise in the Ionian Sea in August

on the hatch, even when insulated with socks, would keep us awake. We put lines from the top of the scoop forward to the pulpit so it was vertical and tied the side lines out to the stanchions to gather in the maximum flow. We planned only to go to bed when the land breeze had become established at about 2200 which, as one might expect, was in the opposite direction to the daytime sea breeze.

At 1030 on 6 August we left for a circuit of the one-time-Onassis island of Skorprios, now Russian-owned. We anchored at the south end of the island as it seemed the most attractive part. A line of red buoys discouraged access in several other bays and, by anchoring in deeper water, we were conveniently separated from the rest of the throng.

The intention was to visit Levkas town next day to have a sailmaker



He was bigger than us . . .

repair one of our bimini side screens from which the zip had torn, so we needed a nearby anchorage. The one we chose was Marathias on the mainland but, on seeing the number of craft already there, we toyed with the idea of anchoring off the small island of Nikolaos. Another possible choice was nearby Vathi Vali but this was full of fish-farm clutter. After not

much deliberation Brad dropped the anchor in 11m into the translucent blue water at Marathias, along with the numerous others already anchored there. Trim lines of sunshade parasols stood on the sandy beach from where came jolly band music. Interestingly, a 50ft yacht did anchor off the island of Nikolaos, but did not stay for long, possibly because the wind had got up to F5 or so. We spent a sheltered night in Marathias and were awoken next morning by the pleasant tinkle of goat bells coming from the field by the shore.

We weighed anchor early, and in the Orsos Dhrepanou had to give way to a large German ketch coming from our port side, sailed by a large German. We had seen plenty of signs of novice seamanship but it was something else for a boat to deliberately ignore the collision regulations. Going up the canal we saw a pelican on the marshes to our right.

There were occasional gaps in the craft berthed on the Levkas town quay and we chose one next to a tidy RNSA yacht called *Stravaighi* from Scotland. Our bimini screen was delivered for repair and we had lunch in a nearby taverna along with a host of excited kids but, in compensation, the bill was reasonable. There was a fresh water supply on the jetty, for which

we had to borrow *Stravaigh*'s hose for an extension, as taps are far apart, but it was a joy to have the water to wash the boat thoroughly while the girls did the shopping – which included delicious figs. The zip had been sewn by 1630, so we got under way, only to find that our 12mm cable and anchor were coated with glutinous foul-smelling mud. The priority was to catch the bridge – which opens for marine traffic on the hour and that we did but, being unused to the handling characteristics of the boat, not before the writer made a slightly questionable manoeuvre in the confined waters of the canal. Happily we caused no inconvenience but the canal was not the ideal place to establish a boat's handling characteristics.

We made the short passage to Preveza under power and anchored off the town where there was room east of the seabed power cable shown on the chart. It was a noisy and involving place to anchor but we felt comfortable, notwithstanding children screaming, dogs barking and church bells ringing. We used up quite a lot of precious water cleaning off the cable, but luckily *Skat* has a water maker.

Next morning we left at 0630 in calm weather, mindful of the Battle of Actium off Preveza in 31BC when Octavius Augustus



defeated the combined forces of Mark Anthony and Queen Cleopatra. By 1100 we were anchored for lunch at Agradidho, Anti Paxos in 25m. There was quite a collection of craft in the bay when we arrived and quite a few more by the time we left. A varnished yawl there with a troupe of topless young ladies aboard might also be mentioned in passing . . .

We weighed at 1600, planning to spend the night at Morganisi in Paxos. It seemed a bit full when we arrived, so we anchored in an almost empty cove called Ozhodisi Limi in 14m. We put a line ashore, thinking we would be well clear of the seabed cable that was not only marked on the chart but prominently advertised on boards overlooking the bay. A swimmer even warned us about the power cables too, but we thought that no one would want to extend the cable deliberately very far into the bay and away from the charted position. Even if they did, the water was so clear we thought we'd see it. We swam and then had a supper of stuffed aubergines.

Unsurprisingly the anchor was clear when we raised it at 0900 and we went on up the Paxos coast to look in at Gaios, which Heikell describes as beguiling but crowded with tripper boats and ferries charging in and out causing chaos. This was probably true later in the day, but we found Gaios



pleasantly quiet at 0930. We went in by the North Channel but stopped short of the town on account of the shallow water, bearing in mind we were in a borrowed boat, though actually we should have been alright.

At 1300 we anchored at Boukari, Corfu where we planned to meet with *Prospero*, Bruce Mauleverer (RCC), and she arrived an hour later, having just sailed out from the UK. We all went ashore and had a grand lunch at the Spiros Karidis fish restaurant. We spent a peaceful night there and heard a Skops owl again.

Next morning we motored north past Corfu old town and the impressive ancient citadel island on the headland at Ak Sidhero, which had gallantly held out against the invading Turks in 1537 and again in 1716. Further up the coast, and just after three dolphins came to play, we anchored in 8.5m for a swim in the clear waters of the little, northern bay of Kouloura. We viewed Albania not much more than a mile away, looking rather bare and empty compared with Corfu. We remembered the incident in 1946 when two British destroyers, the *Volage* and *Saumarez* unexpectedly struck mines in the Corfu channel with the loss of 44 sailors' lives. In a fine act of seamanship the *Volage*, with her bow blown off, managed to tow the even more disabled *Saumarez* into safe waters in spite of a well-developed *maestro* blowing both ships towards the Albanian shore.

While we were swimming we were politely importuned by a British motor launch charterer to help him recover his anchor, which had become jammed in the seabed. A dive down into the crystal clear sea showed



Off Meganisi with line ashore

from which angle the anchor needed to be pulled from under an overhanging rock and away it came, much to the relief of the chap, his wife and family.

We got under way just to give relief from the heat but, as we did so, a breeze got up and we re-anchored for lunch a mile north at an inlet called Ormos Kerasia. By 1845 we were keen to explore some of the bays further north which sounded attractive and set

off past Ay Stefanos, noting a small unspoilt bay to the north just before the reef of Ifalos Serpa, marked by a light. Past this reef, the next bay is also pretty and wooded with no sign of human habitation, as indeed was the deeper one further on off Ak Psaromita though this had a single yacht at anchor.

We had gone as far north as we planned to go and resisted the temptation to join this yacht where it might not have been sheltered if the wind had got

up. We turned round and tried to anchor in Kalami Bay but it wasn't easy to find a gap in the half dozen vessels already there. At our first attempt we found ourselves too close to another boat and at the second, when going astern to dig the anchor in, we dragged. At our third attempt, in 20m, the anchor held with 70m of chain out and we found ourselves close by Laurence Durrell's White House in which he and his wife Nancy lived from about 1936. It is now a holiday home and a taverna with a fine pontoon. Next day we lunched there and found the White House taverna most agreeable. We weighed at 1455. It was now Friday 11 August, so we had another three days before having to get back to Levkas, during which we decided to go down the mainland coast. We set a course for the Sivota Islands, off which there had been an indecisive naval battle in 433BC between the Corcyreans - the natives of Corfu - and the Corinthians which had led to the first Peloponnesian War. On the way we made several attempts to sail in the light, variable wind with limited success, while a large



The citadel at Corfu was tough for the Turkish to crack bowl of cherries depleted steadily. On arrival we nosed round the town of Mourtos, choosing to drop anchor between the islands of Nisis Sivota and Nisis Ay Nikolas. It was a lovely position, giving the best chance of a cooling breeze, and only slightly marred by the inexperienced crew of a charter boat, who first tried to anchor on top of our anchor and then anchored rather too close behind. Happily they moved on at 2000, leaving us almost alone in peaceful and beautiful surroundings.

After a marvellous morning swim and a minor visit by wasps, we got going at 0850, heading for Ay Ioannou and Fanari. True Ioannou was the more attractive anchorage, but Fanari had the mythologically famous river Styx spilling out from its southern shore. We toured round Ioannou, failing to find the freshwater spring marked on the chart, then anchored at Ormos Fanari under the cliffs on the northern side of the bay. Sandy and I went off seeking immortality in the river, but reached only a short distance above the village of tavernas and boat moorings, before being put off by the outboard appearing to suffer fuel starvation and the coxswain of a tripper boat - gesticulating negatively. We called him Charon though it has to be said he was clearly not to be encouraging us to go to the underground caves of Hades.

At 1440 we weighed and set off back to Ioannou, or 'Joanna' as we called it. We anchored opposite the well-populated beach in the north-west

## A Cruise in the Ionian Sea in August

corner near a big motor cruiser called *Helios* and noticed she was using a buoyant, bright yellow, high-visibility stern line to the shore. Later a most handsome, black ketch came in and we looked her up on AIS and found she was the Ed Dubois (late RYS)-designed *Beagle V* of 115ft. We thought she looked a fitting memorial to her late designer. She anchored well out in the bay in over 20m and must have had an even longer chain than ours. We decided to spend the night further out too, but when the anchor came in we found, surprisingly, that there was a twist of chain round the swivel. Brad swiftly put 18mm rope on the anchor and took its weight on a genoa winch, which immediately freed the twist.

That night the wind got up and the windscoop looked like it was trying to lift *Skat*'s bow clear of the water, so we got it down and still found adequate ventilation, the wind being what it was. In the morning we set off south at the usual 0900, bound for Preveza.

It was good to be under sail downwind with a NW F5-6 and Brad's reputation for being fated always to be going to windward came into doubt. At first it was quite roly, but it was more comfortable after bearing off round the corner at Two Rock Bay, which from seaward we thought looked rather nice. It was as well that we were properly secured for sea.

We came up the dredged channel with a beam sea, which was no problem, and anchored off Preveza town again.

*Beagle V* was here too and had anchored



Brad takes *Skat* downwind to Preveza.

north of the marina which seemed wise in hindsight because the town bands, as we should have remembered from the previous visit, played on deep into the evening. It was still blowing a bit through the night and we noticed in the morning that a Canadian catamaran beside us had dragged and we wondered if she'd caught the power cable that we'd noted on our first visit.

We left at 0630, probably before the Canadians had woken, heedful of a windy weather forecast. The wind was light at this time, but with a moderate swell. The Levkas bridge opened on time at 0800 and we berthed after fuelling at the quite crowded Levkas marina at 0900 14 August.

It had been a most enjoyable, busy and interesting cruise, even in August.