

Fabazab

Pemandia's 2016 Cruise to the Azores

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We originally planned to visit the Azores for a retirement cruise in 2014, but it was apparent that I had not recovered sufficiently from a head injury (RCC Journal 2012). I began to think that I might never again be fit enough for a significant short-handed passage, so Emily and I adapted by sailing more with others aboard. However, just as my neurologist promised, I continued to improve, so that the Azores was once again on the agenda for 2016.

Pemandia, our 2007 Malo 40, is no stranger to the Journal. She is just the right boat for our sort of sailing, comfortable for one or two couples, seaworthy and well equipped. This year we added two, new, down-wind sails to our inventory. Peter Sanders had made a new furling main and genoa last season and we had been very pleased with the result. This time, after much debate, we added a conventional symmetrical spinnaker and a specialist reaching sail that sets with a furler attached to a short bowsprit. We also bought a satellite phone primarily for emergency use, but also for emailing home and weather forecasts. Following our experience of recovering a casualty last year (RCC Journal 2015), I fitted AIS transmitters to all our life-jackets and up-graded our PLB to a full EPIRB, with a life-jacket PLB for lone watch-keepers.

As the year advanced, our plans came to gradual fruition, first agreeing the reality then exploring possible crew and finally investigating flights and where we could best leave the boat to return for some home duties. Atlantic Islands (RCCPF) has a wealth of useful information and I had a helpful discussion with Nick Chavasse (RCC) who visited last



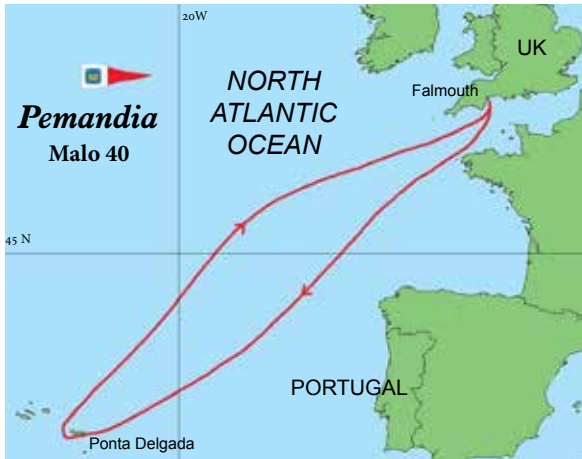
The new reaching sail

year. I wondered if I would be fit to fulfil a long-held ambition to do a long, single-handed passage and Emily whose judgement in these things is absolutely correct gave me the necessary vote of confidence. Though this may have been a single-handed passage, it was never a single-handed voyage. Emily did a massive amount of hard work provisioning and preparing home-cooked meals for the freezer. She ensures all our sailing together is fun and relaxing but does not enjoy long (5 day +) passages. Susanna Hart and Malcolm and Judy Luthman are regular shipmates and we were delighted that they all signed on. Susanna would join us for a week in the Azores, followed by Malcolm and Judy who would accompany me on the homeward passage.



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After a shake down trip to Falmouth, so that all systems were tested, I departed on Saturday 14 May, not waiting for a fair tide down to the Lizard because the weather was too good to waste. As I set off on my first significant single-handed passage I was very excited and just a little apprehensive. How would I cope with whatever the weather threw at me and how would I cope with the isolation? I kept myself busy so that I did not have time to dwell too much on these concerns. My first task was to set our new reaching sail. Wow! So much



easier to deploy and retrieve than a cruising chute and the pull seemed to be much more ahead rather than just to leeward. I was well impressed and treated myself to a tin of beer.

For the first two nights I slept for short breaks only. It seems to be agreed that sleeping for 20 minutes at a time ensures that you wake at the right bit of the REM / non-REM cycle. I read somewhere that NASA research had showed that 26 minutes was the optimum, so I split the difference setting an alarm on my phone to wake me after 23 minutes. I seemed able to cope with this, but several times awoke in a panic thinking I had forgotten to set the

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timer, only to discover that I had another 10 minutes still to sleep. After two nights, with no shipping seen I relied on the AIS alarm and slept for four hours or so, but again found I always woke before the alarm because of some subtle change in motion or sound.



Getting to grips with astro

third, so all I had to do was choose a delicious dish to thaw and add some vegetables. This was especially welcome when the weather became nasty and I could still eat well if not comfortably. Fresh fruit, salad and vegetables lasted the whole way out.

The Iridium phone was a success and I was able to retrieve text forecasts throughout the passage. I had not had time to get my head around GRIB files and to install the necessary software on my iPad before the outward passage, but did so later and found them also very helpful. I also took up a new sport of blogging. Some of my entries were simple progress reports, but at other times I had great fun making up jovial entries. One described my rather dreary fellow guests at the captain's cocktail party, none of whom would speak to me and another was about the ship's education programme, including cookery demonstrations from some well known TV chefs and a badly timed talk on how to retrieve the end of the topping lift (just after I had done it...).



Approaching Ponta Delgada

The last four days were pretty nasty. The wind was never less than F7 and on the night of 22/23 May the barometer fell 8mb in as many hours. It blew a full gale and for a while the wind speed was 43 knots, true. The seas, described in forecasts as high, seemed absolutely massive. I felt that I must surely sustain some serious damage as we crashed off the waves with the most terrible pounding. I experimented with different combinations of sail and found that a deeply reefed main, no genoa and the engine running slowly was perhaps the most comfortable. This was not until after the genoa furling line had parted in the middle of the night. The sail unfurled in a rush and we were horribly over canvassed. I tried to heave to while I sorted it out but the balance of the sails was wrong



Emily Fabricius in holiday mode

so I ran down wind instead. In my blog I referred to it as meeting a girl called Gale (sic) at a bad taste, fancy-dress party – my fancy dress was pyjamas, lifejacket and double harness but no waterproofs. Sorting the mess out on deck I was thrown against something and I think broke a rib, adding to my discomfort.

During the bad weather I should have kept out further to the west, but for a variety of reasons, including the possibility of bailing out to Lisbon, I did not and paid the price when, as the wind veered W, it was still on my nose. Eventually land was closed and with great relief I tied to the Reception jetty in Ponta Delgada at 0815 on 26 May,

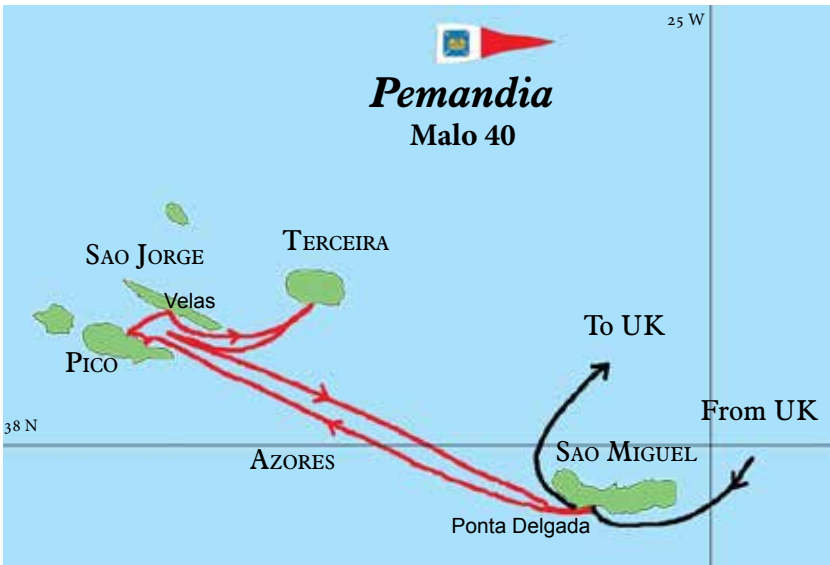
two hours less than 12 days after leaving Falmouth.

Clearing up later that day I was alarmed to find saltwater in the normally dry bilge. I checked the seacocks and the mast cable fitting but all were dry, so I started to lift floorboards. At the base of the compression post that takes all the thrust from the mast was a hairline crack and it was damp. Not enough to need immediate lifting out, but over the next few days there was water ingress of perhaps half a litre per day. When we were lifted out, the external crack was just at the root of the keel. At the bottom of the keel on the leading edge there was another defect. It seems that we must have unknowingly hit an underwater object and this combined with pounding from the weather caused a stress fracture. The good news is that the combined opinion of surveyors, insurers, builders and the repairer is that the repair would be at least as strong as new and well up to ocean-crossing strength.

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Emily joined me on 28 May. It had been our intention to sail from Sao Miguel to the central islands and perhaps even get to Flores before flying home for a couple of weeks on 10 June. Of course the storm damage put paid to that and although our insurers were very supportive we had a frustrating time arranging to be lifted out for the repair. Eventually we were lifted just hours before our flight back to England. We made the best possible use of our enforced stay on Sao Miguel. A minibus tour took us to see the hot springs and other sights in the volcanic crater at Furnas and the island's one tea plantation, then a local bus took us to Vila Franca do Campo. We enjoyed the art gallery, especially an exhibition of the sculptor Canto da Maia. We even went to a concert by the Azorean Conservatoire and heard a rather fast rendering of Elgar's *Nimrod* by a saxophone quintet! In anticipation of our lifting out, we spent our last night ashore in a hotel, then had a happy, few hours in Lisbon between flights.

Back in England we took in grandchildren, Henley, Glyndebourne



and I had the honour of unveiling a commemorative stone in memory of Captain John Green VC, a RAMC doctor who was killed on the opening day of the Battle of the Somme and is one of five RAMC doctors to be awarded the VC during that battle. I flew back to the Azores a week later, to check on the repairs - very well done - and supervise the re-launching before Emily flew out with Susanna the following day. They had a terrible flight and got so close that I could hear their plane, which then headed back to Lisbon because of fog. Worst of all, they forfeited a litre of rather special gin in the security check.

Our return coincided with one of Sao Miguel's most important fiestas. A two-day procession through Ponta Delgada included livestock, bands, floats with colourful floral decorations, religious communities and youth organisations. To top it all, our previous lack of interest in football was reversed as we were drawn into the excitement of Portugal beating France in the European Cup. We drew ourselves away to set off for Pico on 11 July. We had lovely conditions for the 150-mile 26-hour passage although in a head wind which varied between 3 and 16 knots. We anchored first in an unmarked anchorage on the north coast, which was fine for a day-time break, but we suspected that it would be subject to katabatic winds off the volcano at night. We moved on to the harbour at Sao Roque do Pico. The Pilot has good advice about the foul bottom and need to use a trip line. It was and fortunately we had.

A short crossing took us to Vila das Velas Marina on Sao Jorge. This pocket-sized marina is pretty full, but Jose the harbour master is really helpful. He watches approaching yachts on AIS, so although he is not allowed to take advance bookings, he actively manages berthing, keeping the few bigger spaces for larger yachts. We hired a car on Sao Jorge and



Healthy eating on the return passage

although much of our drive was above the mist line, we enjoyed seeing inland and taking some vertiginous hairpin roads down to several little bays.

Time soon ran out for Susanna who was to fly home from Terceira and be replaced by Malcolm and Judy. Although Praia da Vitoria is closer to the airport, we liked the sound of Angra do Heroismo and had a pleasant sail there. The marina is very prone to swell, except perhaps further in than we could get, so we were a bit uneasy in our berth, but it is otherwise a delightful town. I went with Susanna in a taxi to the airport and met Malcolm and Judy there. Poor Susanna had another awful journey as her flight to Lisbon was delayed and she missed the connection

on to London.

With Malcolm and Judy installed, it was time to cool off with a swim. The beach near the harbour is almost perfect and the dark grey volcanic sand has been supplemented by the best, Moroccan, golden sand. Just as we were on our way out of the water, Emily was stung by a jellyfish. She had a horrible local reaction that took over a month to settle, but thank

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goodness she did not react more generally.

Our intent was to head towards Horta. We set off from Angra in rather squally conditions with showers and a head wind. The new crew had not got their sea legs yet and we had a 50% casualty rate. By 2300 we were only about 15 miles from Velas, but I thought it very unlikely that they would have a vacancy in the bad weather and the anchorage would not be tenable. Horta was going to take all night, so we turned down wind and headed back to Ponta Delgada. The crew was slightly perplexed at my decision to change from 15 miles to about 100, but soon appreciated the immediate improvement in motion. I noted wryly in the log at 0200 that our position was almost identical to that of 12 hours earlier. The weather changes quickly in the Azores and we motored for the last 15 miles in hot sunshine, arriving in time for pre-dinner drinks with our friend Jim Holden on *Yuva*, his beautiful Oyster 56.

In Ponta Delgada we took a taxi to see the famous blue and green lakes. During our May visit they had been obscured by mist. Malcolm and Judy spent another day on an island tour and we stocked up and cooked for the passage home. We had found the very good supermarkets during our initial visit and only now did we discover the excellent market where there was a wider choice of fruit and vegetables which all looked of much better quality. The meat was also excellent and we had three, cooked meals as well as some delicious ratatouille consigned to the freezer for the passage home.

Emily left for the early flight on 22 July and at 0800 Malcolm, Judy and I motored round to the reception quay to refuel and clear out with the authorities. The passage home was very different with weather as good as we could ever want. Despite an expectation of motoring north, possibly for several days to find wind, we had a gentle breeze, mostly sufficient to sail, right from the start. We made our way west around Sao Miguel and were amazed at the visibility. The high mountains of Sao Miguel were still just visible at 40 miles.



The new spinnaker

One big change from the outward passage was in the galley where Judy took charge. Who better than an anaesthetist (gas man) to run the gas stove? But I found myself almost facing an exclusion order. My occasional

forays there were limited to waving a tea towel, normally just as a flag of surrender. So we lived well and comfortably and had a happy passage home. Music, conversation, books, wine and sailing were all enjoyed to the full. We were mostly on a reach; at times we needed to reef and at others we motored. In between, we were able to confirm that our new spinnaker was up to the same standard as our other sails.

In the early hours of 1 August we used the engine to help us round the Lizard. Emily was coming down to Plymouth to meet us, so we continued to motor-sail and came along side our berth at Mayflower Marina at 1130 with 1,394 miles on the log. Emily and Tony Saunders, the marina harbourmaster, were on the pontoon to take our lines, despite the drenching rain. I have previously described Malcolm and Judy as not being experienced sailors, but good people to have aboard with us. Over a bottle of Champagne I formally withdrew that status; they are excellent, fully fledged crew.

This was another very happy cruise and this time a bit further from home than we have been in recent years, marred slightly of course by the damage and interruption for repairs, but nevertheless, another successful stage in our cruising life.

. . . and my title? Years ago when we were medical students, my friend David Smith and I discussed our ambitions over an extravagant lunch. His memory, better than mine, was that I hoped to do a significant, single-handed, ocean passage. He coined the title in an emailed response to my blog, written at a time when the going was just a bit tough and later produced a rather special congratulatory bottle!

