

A Canary Island Cruise

Pemandia's 2018 Summer Cruise

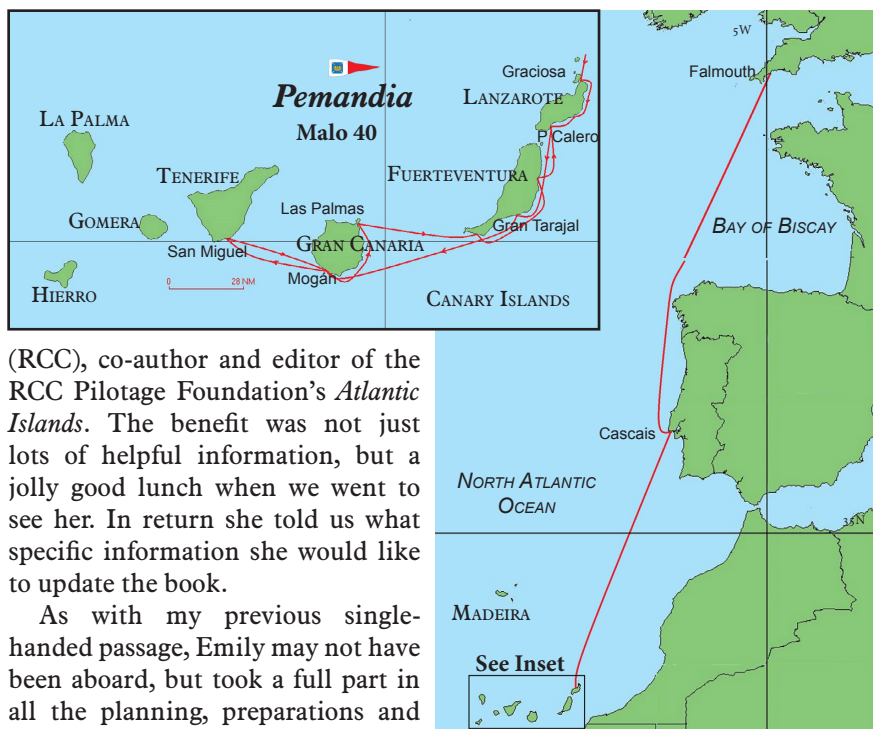
Peter Fabricius

Summer cruising in the Canary Islands is not for the faint-hearted. A yacht making her way from NE to SW through the islands, perhaps for an Atlantic crossing later in the year can be assured of warm weather and following winds. However, a yacht cruising within the islands will be faced at some stage with coming in the other direction and is certain to have strong headwinds. The combination of katabatic winds tumbling down the mountains and acceleration zones between the islands is well described in the pilot books, and must be taken seriously. During the week we spent making our way NE from Tenerife back to our base in Lanzarote we had at least F6 on the nose every day. On three days we had winds of F7-8 at some time during the day and on a couple, we had 10–15 minute gusts of 40kts.

Despite that warning, we have found the Canaries to be a great cruising ground. The year-round average temperature is 25°C+/-5. Although there is some mist, sunshine predominates and the water is warm. Pilotage is straightforward, facilities ashore good and eating out cheap. There are plenty of cheap flights to and from the UK. Apart from the wind acceleration zones, the only down-side we found was a dearth of secure anchorages and marina berthing has been the norm.

Retirement for Emily and me has not led to unrestricted time for sailing, quite the reverse. Our various commitments in our village and more widely mean that finding more than two or occasionally three weeks at a time is impossible. So we manage things as we did when I was working, sailing out to a destination, leaving the boat for a few weeks back at home and returning for further cruising. We realised that to get further afield than we have been before, we would need to spend a winter abroad and spread the cruise over two seasons.

We have twice enjoyed the Azores (*RCC Journal 2016*) and wanted to see more of the Atlantic Islands. We have no plans for an Atlantic crossing, so the plan was for me to go single-handed to Lisbon. There Emily would join me for the onward passage to Lanzarote, where we had booked a berth at Puerto Calero. After returning home for a spell, we would have a fortnight's cruise in the Canaries, with further visits in the autumn and winter if possible, before returning via Madeira early next year. *Pemandia*, our Malo 40, is well equipped for our comfort and safety and we knew she would look after us again. But there was one essential preparation; we got in touch with Hilary Keatinge



(RCC), co-author and editor of the RCC Pilotage Foundation's *Atlantic Islands*. The benefit was not just lots of helpful information, but a jolly good lunch when we went to see her. In return she told us what specific information she would like to update the book.

As with my previous single-handed passage, Emily may not have been aboard, but took a full part in all the planning, preparations and provisioning. We drove down to

Plymouth together on 21 May, did the last minute stowage, topped up with fuel and water and said our goodbyes before I set off for Falmouth. Antony and Julia Wells (former RCC) were also there and saw me off. I always like to have a short day sail at the start, to find out what I have left behind and what does not work. On this occasion it was the radar. I had installed a software update and assumed this was the fault, but after checking all the settings and phoning the Raymarine helpline, I realised it was the scanner itself. Efforts to repair it in Falmouth and later in Lisbon failed in the short time available, as I was being treated to some northerly weather and did not want to waste it. The other benefit of starting in Falmouth is that it is much easier to keep outside and clear of shipping lanes, an important consideration when single-handed.

On the way to Falmouth the VHF warned me that *HMS Monmouth* was conducting a live-firing exercise close to my position. I contacted her to ensure that I was clear and was pleased to talk with her. Emily's grandfather served as engineering officer on a previous *Monmouth* on the China Station. In 1909 his stokers won a fine silver cup in the fleet gig rowing competition. He was lost at sea on *HMS Opal* off the coast of Orkney in January 1918 (see account in *RCC Journal 2014*), but the cup had remained with the family. When the

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present *Monmouth* was commissioned, Emily's mother and surviving sister presented the cup to her. The Royal Navy laid on a superb reception for these two elderly ladies, even arranging that the engineer accepted the cup with the



Comfortable Downwind Rig (for gentlemen!)

whole ship's company on parade. It was fun to make contact and confirm that the cup still resides in the wardroom.

By the time Billy from BT Marine in Falmouth had visited the following morning and made his diagnosis on the radar, it was almost 1100 before I was underway. I wanted to be away from land as soon as possible and certainly clear of shipping lanes by nightfall, so I motor-sailed a bit on the way to the Lizard. By mid-afternoon I was clear of the Lizard with a generous north-westerly filling my code-zero reaching sail. By supper time, bowling along at over 7kts, it would have been easy to overlook the wind speed,

now up to F6, so I reduced to plain sail overnight and apart from some rather uncomfortable rolling, I was pleased that my first night was quiet with only a single ship requiring a close watch. During the night the wind veered N and in the early morning NE, where with only minor variation it remained until my last few hours at sea when it went N and NNW again. However, there was sufficient variation in both direction and strength to ensure I never had a chance to get bored. It was mostly 10-14kts, but on the night of 25 May blew up to F6 and did so briefly again as I approached Lisbon. I enjoyed my time, sailing, cooking, reading, sleeping and just being.

I did not set the spinnaker; I always have a slight anxiety about getting it down again on my own if the wind blows up. I did experiment with just about every other combination of sails. When the wind was well aft, my favourite was to set the reacher on the spinnaker pole and goosewing the genoa. This would mostly stay full without its own pole. Even though the genoa is quite a small sail (105%), I found setting the main as well did not add very much speed, but if the wind was dead aft, caused much more disturbance from the slatting sail and sheet.

It was such a relief to have a following wind after my experience going to the Azores two years ago. Mostly sunny, it was of course cold. On my third



day at sea there was a change. The barometer didn't move, but it was greyer with a slight haziness and in the evening it blew up over 25kts, so I furled the reacher and unrigged the pole. Fast progress continued and by the morning I was well across Biscay, just 80nm from Bayona and 250 from Lisbon. Another reminder of the strength of the wind was passing a large ship heading N and seeing the amount of spray it threw up.

With such unexpectedly good progress, I had time in hand before Emily's arrival and considered anchoring off the Ilha de Berlenga which would perhaps allow a daylight arrival. However, I was not sure that it would provide a comfortable anchorage, so I continued to Cascais, coming alongside the reception pontoon at 0430 on Monday 28 May, 814nm from Falmouth in 5 days, 18 hours, with just 4½ hours of motoring.

After some sleep and a clear-up, I moved to a marina berth and enjoyed a few days in Cascais, before Emily's arrival on 1 June. She is an enthusiastic gardener and had wryly noted that May and June are the best months for gardening as well as sailing. So I bought some pots of herbs and set them up in the cockpit, noting in my blog that her first task after arrival was to do some weeding.

We set off again the morning after Emily's arrival after topping up with fuel. This was quite an exercise as it was blowing hard off the fuel berth. However, once underway, we enjoyed



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four days of sunshine and following winds, although it was often F5 or 6. With two of us aboard we were able to deploy the spinnaker when it was calmer, although a wrap when we were approaching the Canaries reminded me that I had been sensible not to use it alone. As I was still in single-handed mind-set, Emily was able to enjoy the days without any anxieties about night watches alone. She would keep an evening watch after supper and then turn in for the night. Sometimes we both slept. One morning we were delighted to find a single, small flying fish on the deck. We never saw another, but it seemed a good omen.

Approaching the Canaries, we had the usual excitement about when we would see land. The islands are mountainous and sure enough we could see the mountain tops when over 30nm away, even



Alternative Gentleman's Rig

though at sea level there was quite a haze. We had obtained a permit to visit Graciosa, which lies just to the north of Lanzarote. There was just one other yacht in the anchorage at Bahía del Salado and this soon moved off, leaving us to enjoy the stillness of a perfect and deserted beach. We did not go ashore, but the following morning headed round to Arecife, the main town on Lanzarote. The marina here is modern and well-equipped, but the prevailing NE wind fairly whips through. Part of our preparation had been to take up Hilary's introduction to Mel Symes who works for the company that runs the marinas at both Arecife and down the coast at Puerto Calero. She has been incredibly helpful, booking us berths and advising more generally about the islands. It was very good to meet her face to face and have her aboard for a drink. After a couple of days exploring Arecife, we made our way down to Puerto Calero where we had a very sheltered berth and where we left *Pemandia* and flew home for other duties.

We returned again in July with Susanna, our regular shipmate and, after a day stocking up, set off to see the other Islands. Susanna had a short week and we were limited to two, so it was inevitably a whistle-stop tour. We had been really keen to visit Gomera and Hierro at the south-west extremity but it was clear that this was too far given the constraints of Susanna's return flight from Tenerife and our return against the wind to Lanzarote a week later.

Our first stop was Gran Tarajal on Fuerteventura, 54nm away. Initially it was calm, but we set our reaching sail once we had crossed the first acceleration zone between the two islands. Approaching Pta de Lantailla, the south-east



Sunset over Tenerife from Puerto de Mogán

extremity of Fuerteventura, we rightly predicted a further zone, so handed the big sail and were pleased we had done so. The name Gran Tarajal seems to suggest something rather more than the reality, a former fishing harbour, now expanded for mostly commercial purposes. We looked at what we hoped might be suitable anchorages either side of the harbour, but they were far from ideal. As we approached there was considerable activity with a tug towing another vessel out of the harbour and with a roped and buoyed off area keeping vessels away from the main eastern wall. Ashore we learned that there had been some sort of accident with a ship sinking and polluting the harbour. The harbour was sheltered from the swell, but quite a wind funnelled down from the hills, so getting ourselves stern to a pontoon was quite a party. An unpretentious cafe served some excellent fish.

The next stop was Puerto de Mogán just over 100nm away on the south-west coast of Gran Canaria, so we were under way just before daylight. For a few hours we used the big reaching sail, but handed it in good time for the acceleration zone between the two islands where the wind increased to



Puerto de Mogán showing marina and beach

28kts. It was fine going downwind, but concentrated our minds about the return. Rounding the southern tip of the island, the wind suddenly dropped to nothing, leaving a sloppy sea, so we ended up motoring the last 15nm.

Some of the tourist developments on the south-west coast of Gran Canaria horrified us, soulless-looking hotels and villa complexes spoiling the wonderful mountainous backdrop. However, Puerto de Mogán was a delight, perhaps our favourite. The marina is sheltered and

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welcoming, even at 2130, when the regular *marineros* had gone off duty. The security staff showed us to the berth we had booked and took our lines. The housing is all on a reasonable scale and in an appropriate style with window boxes and flowers everywhere. There is an abundance of cafes and restaurants and a delightful sheltered sandy beach where we swam.

After a relaxing day ashore we moved on to Marina San Miguel on the south coast of Tenerife: another marina notable more for its convenient location than its inherent charm. Here we hired a car and explored much of the island. It was a delight to see both coastal and inland villages, mostly untouched by tourism. This was Susanna's departure point and we were sorry to see her off to the airport. It was also our turn-around point from where we would fight to windward and through some of the acceleration zones back to Lanzarote.



And fight we did! The contrast and rapid change between the few sheltered areas, where there was complete calm, and the exposed acceleration zones was extraordinary. Never was the wind less than F6 and often more. Tacking up the east coast of Gran Canaria we had sustained gusts of 40kts and neither hugging the shore nor heading further offshore helped. The only way to progress was to motor sail with no headsail. If there is an upside, it is that at least the spray was warm and the sun was shining.

Hairpin bends on Tenerife – tougher than short tacking!

Apart from a visit to Las Palmas on Gran Canaria and a night in Morro Jable on Fuerteventura we were retracing our steps. Las Palmas has a huge marina with plans to expand further, but it was welcoming and is well worth a visit to see the old city, including the Casa de Colón, a museum about Christopher Columbus and the strategic importance of the islands as a centre for trade and exploration. We enjoyed strolling through the pedestrian precincts in the old part of the city.

All too soon we were back in Puerto Calero where we have been given a very sheltered berth. We plan to spend Christmas afloat, then next season to come north to Madeira and begin the long journey home.