The Iberian Peninsula in *Hero*

William Garnett

The arrival of Easter saw us recommissioning *Hero*, which had spent the winter with Alfredo Lagos in Vigo. After two days we were set to go and Good Friday was spent in the Islas Cies, in gloriously warm weather and Easter Saturday back at the Monte Real in Baiona. I had expected the commissioning to take longer and had allowed a week for us to get to Porto. As things turned out, we left early on Easter Sunday, foregoing the Easter processional and the ubiquitous *Pimientos de Padron*. A northerly saw us goose-winged and gliding past Viana do Castelo and arriving early evening in Povoa de Varzim with a fresh northerly behind us. Sadly the marina was disappointingly run-down and boats that had wintered in the marina were forlorn. We had made the dash as a westerly gale was due in the following day. The newish marina in the Douro is very efficient, with good security and charming staff, but it is quite a walk into Porto. Alternatively there is a passenger ferry. There is free access to the Churchill’s port tasting tour. We had an interesting time talking to Johnny Graham (ex-Graham’s port). All port suppliers used to agree whether or not to declare a vintage. Now different agents declare their own; they are more common unsurprisingly.
Unfortunately we were gale-bound for three days. With the Douro continuously on the ebb, this made for a very uncomfortable stay in the marina. I would be loath to leave my boat there unattended. Friday saw us desperate to get the two miles up the coast to Leixoes to leave Hero for three weeks. At 1100 the harbour-master formally opened the entrance. Exiting when the harbour is closed leads not only to refusal to rescue you, but is a criminal offence. Leaving Hero in Leixoes gave us considerable concern because the three-day gale had kicked up a big swell bouncing around the marina. She was probably also too big for the single berths. We created a cat’s cradle of warps and fenders and were assured that they would keep a careful eye on her.

Returning three weeks later with William and Serena Ansell, the beach sand kicked up by a further gale, had not only covered the boat, but worked into the fender socks. Awlgrip - All scratch. The marina is miserable and neglected. After a peaceful night anchored in the Douro just north of Pedras do Lima we left early to catch the fortuitous northerly that had returned. The NW swell made downwind sailing uncomfortable; one larger wave saw an inadvertent luff and we found ourselves with two, shorter, carbon spinnaker poles rather than one.

Arriving in Figueira da Foz marina we had our pick of pontoons. Fortunately there is a branch line to Coimbra which enabled us to drop off Serena. The hot weather and afternoon northerlies remained with us, and after a brief detour to Ilha da Berlenga, we tied up on the visitors’ wave break at Peniche. Whilst there is a fine fort, Peniche has little to offer other than the wash from the fishing fleet leaving early in the morning.

Once again we were blessed with the northerly and made good speed down to Cascais. It is easy to see why so many yachts stop there. Not only is it almost directly on the route south, but it offers excellent facilities, provisioning and shopping and a sense that the Mediterranean is just around the corner. There has clearly been
considerable investment in the town and the use of white and black polished cobblestones has brought brightness to the attractive, narrow pedestrian walkways in the old town. Having arrived ahead of time, we spent the afternoon at Sintra wandering amongst the palaces and private houses of this historic spiritual hillside. Of particular interest was the Palacio da Regaleira estate which was acquired by Portugal’s richest man, Carvalho Monterio who commissioned an Italian opera set designer to design a series of extraordinary buildings. A combination of Christian images and masonic icons led to us humming pieces from *Die Zauberflöte*.

Having waved goodbye to William and with our minds focused on how to repair our spinnaker pole, we left for Sines, with a NW afternoon sea breeze building behind us. Off Cabo Espichel we set our cruising chute in 16-20kts averaging 10kts downwind. We arrived at sunset and anchored in the north-west corner of the bay next to the fishing fleet. We were a small, eclectic group of yachts at anchor, Finnish, Swedish, Brit and Belgian. The following morning saw us in the company of the British yacht motoring towards Cape St Vincent. As we closed it, the fog descended and it was pleasant and reassuring chatting on the radio. Just as happened in 2009, on arriving at the Cape the skies cleared and a NW 23kts whisked us into the Algarve with the best sail to date, reaching across to Portimao. We anchored for the night off Ferragudo and had a first-class fish supper on the quay.

After discussions with Selden in Gosport, they agreed to assist us in arranging for the carbon section to be delivered to Portimao, where the agent would arrange for the repair. The following morning as we planned to go to see the agent, we had one of those fortunate moments that only happen amongst a remote cruising community. I spotted *Ellie Grey*, a replica 60 tonne Bristol pilot cutter, built in Mylor in 2012, belonging to Vail Clewley. We tied up next to him and he told us to go and see Paul Wells. Paul had owned a composites business in Essex and had retired to the Algarve. We were warned that Paul was not interested in earning an income, and might well turn down the work. Susannah charmed him into submission and he shared his knowledge. Part ordered from Selden, we left for Alvor, a tiny river just to the west. We anchored off a magnificent private house on the north side of the tiny estuary to the west of what is a rather popular English holiday resort. As the tide fell, we were surrounded by kite-boarders roaring up and down in the prevailing north-westerly. Some of them must have leapt 10m up and travelled 40m before landing. As they left the waders arrived and we spent a happy evening...
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twitching.

The problem with the Algarve's narrow estuaries is that you need to enter or exit at half tide or higher. Alvor is shallow and Faro whilst deep is not an entry you want to do on the ebb. Planning to leave on the first of the rising tide from Alvor, and hoping to get to Faro before the high water, I realised time would be tight. Waking early, I assured Susannah that nothing could go wrong and that we would nudge out two hours before low water. The challenge was ascertaining where the channel was. With an hour and a half to LW, we ran out of water and spent a frustrating 2.5 hours aground. The only consolation was that we were soon joined by a French boat. Despite the delayed departure, we did get into the Faro entrance reaching in on a fresh westerly sea breeze against the 4kts ebb.

The Canal de Faro is narrow and shallow at the top end of the old city. We were keen to sail as far as we could, as we had a leaking stern gland which, with revs over 1,000, was spraying the generator and gearbox. Susannah is remarkably patient with my maritime foibles, but at 0.2m on a falling tide things became a little strained. Fortunately we got it right this time and anchored amongst the moorings for a glorious sunset, but twitching we weren't, with aeroplanes roaring in to the airport west of the anchorage.

Faro was a treat: not only the old city with the mix of Moorish/Islamic/Christian architecture, but the restoration and pedestrianisation of the small streets outside the old city, creating a light, airy, attractive environment. The afternoon was spent anchored off the north-east end of Culatra where a beach walk morphed into a sea-plastic haul. On this one glorious beach we collected a large crate of plastic.

Once again we left early the following day on the remnants of the falling tide to arrive at Tavira shortly after low water. We agreed that if we got down to 0.5m under the keel we would anchor and wait for the rise. We got to 0.5m and decided to press on. Unfortunately we once again nudged into the wrong type of bar. I had always wanted to deploy our collapsible aluminium fortress, and in laying it up tide we were able to winch ourselves against the current with far more power than the engine could give us.

Fortunately we were ‘present and correct’ for the arrival on bicycles of the Seaview Yacht Club Commodore and his predecessor. Tavira is an ancient and historic city. It retains the only ancient Greek inscribed stonework in Portugal. It is another town in which considerable investment is being made, largely to attract
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well-heeled tourists. Many of the buildings were rebuilt in the late 18th century after a catastrophic earthquake in 1752. With the wind finally dying, and the cloud that had hung over the hills from the north clearing, Susannah went round the boat with her bottle of nail polish painting over the scratches in our Awlgrip ‘flag-blue’ topsides.

We left Hero on the west, Spanish, side of the Guardiana at Real San Antonio marina. We were disappointed to find that despite booking months beforehand, they expected us to leave Hero on the inside of the wave break. There was no way that was going to happen. After pleading and some rather frank exchanges with the marina manager, they moved two resident small boats on a hammerhead to make space for us.

A week prior to our return, I called Paul to ask for an update on the repair to the spinnaker pole. He told me that the part had still not come from Selden. After a fairly strained conversation about their failure to deliver it, I believe a young man was sent on a plane with the part (FOC) on a day-return. Hiring a tiny rental car, we drove back to Portimao to collect the pole. Paul had achieved a spectacular outcome. The pole was better than before. Lashed to the roof we charged, torreador-like to Real San Antonio.

Hero was in great shape and we left the next morning to return to El Rompeido, a few miles east. Once again a challenging entrance, but having got through it, we spent the night at anchor. The level of development since we were last there in 2009 was remarkable. Midday the following day saw us leaving on a pleasant reach down to Rota. The marina was both friendly and impressive. A popular place to leave a boat for some time, Rota is an attractive town and well maintained. The old fishing village blends well into the modern surroundings. The churches, but particularly the council offices, based in a 14th century castle are remarkable. The internal courtyard still has the remnants of Islamic murals.

Having anchored in the bay between Rota and the Franco/US naval base for lunch, we set sail for Sancti Petri, 15nm south of Cadiz. On a rising tide, we worked our way up the channel, preceded by a dredger and picked up a mooring off Sancti Petri. The village owed its history to the tuna industry. Rows of small staff houses remain, some occupied in the summer, but there is little else in Sancti Petri, the factory closed many years ago. We had evening drinks on the Punta del Boquerona very large sand dune, looking north towards Cadiz and after supper sat with the heavens above and the phosphorescence below.

The following morning we motored to Cadiz, and spent the night at the Marina Puerto America. Based in what looks like a half-built ocean cruise liner terminal, a
good walk out from Cadiz city, it is not the most attractive of marinas. After supper in Cadiz we waved goodbye to the Neills and the following morning motored across to Marina Puerto Sherry, as we had heard that there was a good engineer there who would help us get our Whisper 3.5 generator going. The Mastervolt agent explained to me that Mastervolt and Whisper had been a single company. Sadly Mastervolt and Whisper no longer speak to each other. After 3.5 hours on the telephone the conclusion was that the black box was defective and I needed to post it to Belgium for reprogramming.

I was determined that we should actually go for a sail and so we sailed back up towards Rota, returning in the evening once again to Marina Puerto America. Just as we needed to go firmly astern onto a pontoon, against the breeze, the engine died. Frantic throwing of ropes and teasing the engine briefly back to life got us alongside. The following morning looking into the primary filter there was a nasty mixture of water and thick black gunge. Having replaced the two filters on the engine and on the generator, bled the system and put in some diesel bug killer we had enough of the hot marina and returned to the bay just to the east of Rota.

A quiet night at anchor was followed by a morning walk on the beach. As we walked along the beach toward the naval base, we were stopped by two naval policemen asking Susannah for 'her papers'. A pretty tricky conversation ensued with me pointing out that there was nothing on the chart to show that the bay was closed to the public and part of the secure base. I was sent to Hero to collect our papers whilst Susannah was effectively held hostage on the beach. Fortunately the incident was de-escalated by the arrival of their boss (a woman) who was charming and we returned, having apologised, to Cadiz.

The following morning the Birchenough’s joined us and after half a day sightseeing, we motored 35nm south-east to anchor off the beach at Barbate. En route we took the inshore passage round Cape Trafalgar paying our respects. We swam as the Barbarte sardine fleet left en masse just before nightfall.

An early start the following morning found us motor-sailing to Tangier, which we had visited in 2009 in Elixir. Just 10 years ago we were adventurers. We were the only boat there and I had picked my crew carefully to deal with any political problems and negotiations. None of that was necessary this time. The old fishing harbour has been relocated outside the port. The huge new port has been built at Tangier and as part of that the world class Tanja marina. Despite the bureaucracy of police, marina staff and customs, the facilities at the marina were outstanding, clean efficient and new. The investment is being led by the King, but we suspect there is EU funding going into Tangier as
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support for Morocco, such a key bulwark against the political uncertainties to the east. Despite new high rise blocks all around, the Medina retains its charm. The warren of back streets in the shade and with the breeze blowing was delightful as were many of the shops and restaurants which reflect the French influence. It remains one of the great fishing harbours of Africa, and the fish market is remarkable for the range of fish, all caught reasonably locally. We were sad to see porpoise, it seemed to break a taboo.

Champagne sailing saw us on a close reach north to Ensenada de Bolonia, recommended by Alexander Dobbs. Although not shown on the navionics chart, the Roman ruins, including a small coliseum, in the north-west corner are worth visiting. An evening’s sail south-west took us round to Bago la Surta opposite the Rock, to anchor.

It is a shame with all Gibraltar’s history, and with the decline of the naval presence, that there has not been greater investment in marinas. Marina Bay is always full and Queensway Quay does not appear to welcome visitors. We therefore left Hero at the Alcaidesa Marina just north of the border. There were a considerable number of foreign boats and again it is clearly a place where many people choose either to over-winter or to leave their boats for moving into the Med. It provided a very secure place to leave Hero for three weeks as we returned for Amelia’s wedding.

Amelia’s wedding to Tyler at our house on the Isle of Wight was everything that we could have dreamed it would be. Glorious weather, so many young people so full of hope for the future, left us inevitably deflated once they all left.

We returned to find the boat in great shape. It was a Monday and we thought it easy therefore to re-provision. We were wrong. After a seven-mile walk round La Linea, we were told that it was the morning after a Feria, one of so many, and the only thing to do was to grab our passports and go to the Eroski just across the border. The Levanter was blowing 15-20kts, but due to fall away the following morning.

After a night in the excellent anchorage immediately outside the marina we left at 0500 expecting the dawn to have arrived. The one hour time difference and the fact that we were further south meant that sunrise was not rise until just before 0800. As we motored down the west side of the rock, the phosphorescence on the bow was lime green and almost electrical in its brightness.

We were keen to miss as much of the ‘Costa Del Crime’ as we could. The only place that had been recommended to us was Marina Del Este, 35nm east of Malaga. We arrived in the evening and anchored at the west end of Ensenada de la Herradura, a bay of which the locals are rightfully proud, with its crystal clear water and dramatic limestone cliffs. The following morning I installed the black box for the generator and to our delight it started; then it stopped. More time on the telephone with Whisper and all sorts of steps taken to get it going, we resigned ourselves to getting it sorted out in Palma.

The following afternoon, and having booked a berth with the extremely friendly staff, we arrived at Marina del Este. It is exquisite. We went to Almunecar the following morning to visit the Moorish fort and old town. Almunecar sits on a cliff
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with a verdant floodplain to the north. Evidence of habitation going back to at least 1000 BC is well displayed in the local museum and the Phoenician trading was evident with alabaster urns from Egypt and bronze knives (copper from Crete and tin from Spain). It is a town that has been fought over for nearly 4000 years.

Susannah is keen on us staying fit and so she persuaded me that we should walk back along what we were told was a beach path. It is, until you get to the final headland where there is a testing climb up over the Penon del Lobo back to the marina. Immediately on leaving, with a light westerly behind us, we bathed in the clear water immediately outside the marina. Most of that afternoon was taxing. The heat outside was considerable. With the engine room extractor on and the doors off the engine compartment, in order to avoid any overheat, it really was rather grim. Then the freezer failed. Everything in there started rapidly to defrost; it was clear that the condenser was not running. Hours of fiddling did nothing.

Having come up for some air we both heard a loud bang and saw a puff of smoke come out of the transom locker. I immediately cut the engine whilst Susannah went to the stern to have a look at what had happened. So far on our trips this season we had snapped the spinnaker pole, failed to get the generator to work, lost the use of the freezer and now the liferaft in the transom locker had exploded. We are not clear how this happened, but it was warm in there. There are times when owning a boat does not seem like a great idea. We dropped the hook in the dark just east of Punta de los Banos, immediately west of Almerimar having had a sunset supper and calmed down. We felt vulnerable with things going wrong.

We had known for days that a westerly was due and mid-morning the following day, it arrived. We roared off goose-winged. In a stiff westerly we passed Cabo de Gata, arriving in the Costa Blanca, and anchored in the Ensenada de Genoveses.

From Gibraltar we had seen very few yachts on the move. We found ourselves in a glorious bay with a number of other yachts, including a dark blue Hylas 46, three years newer than ours and owned by a delightful American couple, Will and Dotty. We swam to them to share our excitement and to compare notes and they returned for drinks with us. We found much in common including the fact that we were all working full-time, and we planned to rendezvous with them in the Balearics.

Despite planning to leave the following day the attraction of the beach and the surrounding arid hillside was too much to leave. There were no ‘catholic inhibitions’ on this beach. A remarkably free and non-sexual environment prevailed. The westerly gale blew all night and the following day and climbing the hill to the south showed the benefit of the protection from the land. With a white, gypsum hillside to the south and a long sandy beach, it had something in common with Studland Bay save that those wearing no clothes were, for so many reasons, more comfortable in their own skin. The breeze eased over the day and we walked up the arid and stony hillside to the south-west. A flock of sheep munched grass as dry as Weetabix and aside from the odd large and very spiky agave and the sisal trees, the place was remarkably barren, although to our amazement, we found ourselves amongst rabbits and hares. After discrete swimming, we had a return drink with Will and Dotty. We were pleased that the minor defects in Hero are ones that they
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too have experienced.

The following morning we cleared out and in a light south-westerly found ourselves in the late afternoon at Garrucha. The visitors’ marina remains so empty that you moor side-on to the quay. The beach was frequented with Scandinavians enjoying the sun and in the evening we wandered the promenade and found ourselves listening to a community orchestra. The formality with which the conductor went about his work and the way that the orchestra stood up each time the conductor changed and the fact that the conductor had quasi-military epaulets reminded us that there is still a ‘command and control’, rather than free-living and –thinking, element within the Spanish culture; even the traffic police have guns.

A light south-westerly nudged us along the following day to anchor just to the west of Mazarron where we spent a roly night on an oily sea. The sun falling behind the Sierra Almenara was memorable, as was the afternoon swim at Cala Blanca. In the right conditions this would be a charming overnight anchorage and one that we should have adopted. The mix of white rock and sandstone, into which rooms have been carved in the sandstone cliff, was pretty.

Our final leg took us to a bay to the north of Las Chapas. We enjoyed gin-clear water and remarkable isolation bearing in mind that we were in the bay of Cartagena. In the evening we steamed in against a good easterly breeze, the first beat of the season, to take up our space at the yacht port Cartagena. The head Amarre, Christian Melente, was wonderful and fixed us up with an engineer for our generator as well as ensuring that we were supported in moving to a berth further into the marina as we left Hero for three weeks.

Our last task before leaving was to sort out the exploded life raft. The conclusion was to buy a new one. I decided to scavenge bits from the old. Crawling around in a deflated liferaft whilst on the quay was unusual and sobering. I was not impressed by the contents. There was no way the line would catch fish and if it did it would break. I am definitely packing my own supplementary grab bag.

We spent a final day and a half in Cartagena enjoying the tapas bars, but also witnessing the spectacular investment in the city in the last 10 years. The restoration of one amphitheatre has now progressed to another, even larger amphitheatre. Punic and Roman antiquities are all around you. One could not help but feel sorry for the Carthaginians. Hasdrubal, Hannibal’s brother, founded the new city in 228 BC. The Punic Walls were designed to repulse any threat from the
expanding Roman republic, yet Scipio Africanus conquered Cartagena in 211 BC. The preservation of these architectural sites is impressive as is their integration amongst contemporary buildings and those built in the 1920s.

The high points of this trip were the anchorage at the Ensenada de Geneoveses, Cala Blanca and our time in Cartagena. We returned to Cartagena with Jeremy and Caroline Donne who are old friends of Peter and Wendy Whatley (RCC), who with their new yacht Henry happened to be in Cartagena, so we had very happy drinks. The following day we crossed tacks with Henry until Carbo de Palos, at which point we sailed on to Tarbarca, an island south of Alicante.

The following morning we had a glorious sail to Altea, close hauled, anchoring for lunch near Punta de L’Escaleta, just south of Benidorm. A walk up to the old village in the hills the following morning was delightful and we said our goodbyes to Caroline and Jeremy who returned to London and we pushed off to anchor just east of Morayra, which was to be our jump off point to Formentera.

Just as occurred 10 years before, we were surrounded by thunderstorms at anchor the night before we left, but luckily we dodged the thunderstorms the following day on a fast fetch to Formentera where with clearing skies we arrived to join the hoards anchored in the Badia de s’Alga. The mooring and anchoring arrangements in the Balearics are not totally straightforward. There are moorings provided by Ports IB and by Posedonia. There are restrictions on anchoring in certain calas, but people were pretty patient and accommodating.

Having sailed up the south-east side of Ibiza previously we went clockwise, anchoring for the night between Illa des Bosc on the westerly point of the island. Susannah had finally arrived in her ultimate destination: crystal-clear, turquoise water over glistening white sand, languid young bodies on the beach and amongst the old fishing huts.
and crevices in the rock, and then the call to party once more with drums beating and people dancing as the sun disappeared over the horizon.

The following day we walked to the lighthouse on the north of Sa Conillera and after an abortive attempt to anchor at Cala Salada (which is now prohibited) we arrived once again to a first class sunset and drumming at Port de Benirras. In both Benirras and the previous night’s anchoring off Cala Comte, you are struck by the simple beauty of the surroundings and the uninhibited, discreet and happy people. It was good to see the shared simple pleasures uniting a global and diverse community in age, race and sexual orientation.

After jolly shopping at the beach stalls in the late morning, we made our way to Cala de Portinax with a lunchtime swim in Cala Blanc. In the evening we walked through the forest to the striped lighthouse on Punta des Moscarter and came back a considerably easier route along the cliff path. With supper on board we felt in control, as everything on the boat was working as it should for the first time.

As pride comes before a fall, the next morning we lost the use of the engine completely an hour out from Ibiza en route to Andraitx. I switched tanks and bled the system and cleaned out the water separator, refilled it from our spare fuel tanks and, after a bit of coughing and spluttering, we were once again on our way. But then began the challenge to find the cause of the problem in the other tank. The first step was to reduce the volume. We have a 12-volt fuel pump designed to be dropped in to a fuel tank. We pumped into the spare jerry cans. Having got down to 20l, we opened up the inspection hatch and with a tea strainer we fished out an amoeba of ‘bug’ 6 inches in diameter. We succeeded in clearing the worst of it and managed the situation by using inhibitor.

We arrived in Andraitx in the evening and found a place on the Ports IB Mole. The following morning we anchored in Cala Portals Vells which was packed with yachts, motorboats, swimmers and canoes. After a visit to the Phoenician Tombs we crossed the Bay of Palma to collect Juliet and Hugh, Susannah’s sister and her husband, and motored on round to Cala Pi, passing Alicia, the 1930s steam yacht that has been restored by Ian Wace. We anchored stern-to the cliff face.

The south-east coast of Majorca contains the most famous of the calas. We returned to Figuera de Santanyi-Majorca to moor to the quay. It was just as marvellous as 10 years ago. An evening walk to Cala Santanyi revealed the huge amount of damage caused to the coast in the thunderstorm that had occurred a week before. Large arms of Mediterranean pines lay ripped off in gardens and

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‘Bug’ cleaning
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streets. We were very pleased not to have been tied up in the area at the time, let alone at sea. The following day we took Juliet and Hugh to see the Phoenician tombs in Cala Portals Vells and after a quiet night at anchor returned to Palma to leave *Hero* at the RCN (Real Club Nautico) for a week.

A week later we returned to be greeted by the worst thunderstorms in south-west Spain in 20 years. From Valencia to Alicante flash floods claimed lives and as the Sahara-sand dust-filled rain water ran into the impeccable RCN swimming pool, summer seemed to be slipping from our grasp. We slipped in the afternoon and spent the night in the bay to the west of Las Illetas as the easterly gale raged.

After lunch the next day with Peter and Lesley Jane Nicholson (former Commodore RYS) we sailed west to Cala de Santa Ponsa. The Cala is a wide-open bay in which the combined fleets of Catalonia and Aragon dropped anchor in 1229. King Jaime I of Aragon landed an army which eventually drove the moors from Mallorca. We sailed north-west, the easterly still blowing hard.

The pilot describes Playa de SantElmo as a ‘pleasant bay’, which is an understatement. It is possible to anchor outside the yellow swimming buoys and inside the moorings in gin-clear water above a sandy bottom. Ashore the village is attractive. The off-lying island and Isla Dragonera, to the west, ensure that the anchorage is protected from all but south-west. With guests arriving and lower temperatures, we were able to spend a day on filling the cracks appearing in the deck caulking, resealing the deck, and walking in the arid hills above the village.

After a couple of days at anchor, we went to meet guests in Andraitx. In the afternoon we walked four miles to Andraitx old town and enjoyed a magnificent sunset with the sun falling directly between the entrance cliffs, as a Russian group played whilst being filmed for a promotional video, in which, unless edited out, we will appear in the background floating in rubber rings drinking Aperol Spritzers.

Later in the evening Cally Wagner arrived and the following day we motored to Soller, the only port of refuge on the north-west coast of Majorca. Stopping at Cala Deia, renowned for famous artists and writers and more recently used in the *Night Manager*, we climbed to the village which was disappointingly twee. The following morning we motored to Cala de sa Calobra anchoring with a stern-rope to the rock face. The pilot describes it as one of the most attractive anchorages in the Balearics and it is certainly dramatic. Unusually the closer to the pebble beach on the gorge, the colder the water. The fresh water river runs under the beach draining
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the highest mountains in Mallorca.

In the afternoon, a north-easterly kicked in at 26kts and although we set out to beat up to Pollensa, after an hour and a half, we turned tail back to Soller. The harbour is at least as attractive by night as it is by day. In the evening we had drinks with Tony and Sarah Boas on their Malo, Ione. We had many links, as Tony was a yacht master and watch leader on the Malcolm Miller and subsequently on the later STA/Tall Ships rigs, in respect of which I was a trustee for eleven years. Having arrived in Soller rather earlier in the day, we had been able to secure a spot in the inner harbour so Hero was left well protected for the two weeks that we were away. With cooler evenings, much cooler nights, but water still 26°C and the middle of the day still hot, extending the summer in the western Mediterranean was proving to be as good as we had hoped.

The penultimate part of our trip was to sail between the islands. We left Soller with Alastair and Sally Hardie and after a night in Andraitx, we sailed the following day to arrive at Cala Figuera, having stopped, again at Portals Vells on the way. We were blessed with a broad reach with spinnaker across the Bay of Palma. I was keen to progress up the east coast with a crew change at Port Colom, as the weather was due to deteriorate. We woke to a predicted fresh to strong north-easterly and beat the few miles to Colom. The harbour had a Caribbean feel. Shallow green and slightly ramshackle.

Having stopped at Mitjana for a pre-breakfast swim, we sailed up to Porto Cristo for a crew change. I had forgotten that we had been there in 2009. It is a very charming natural harbour, narrow, with the yacht club dominating the south side of the port. The beach in the Cala is surprisingly attractive and clean.

The following day we and the Laughton-Scott’s took off for Ciudadella, as the pilot makes clear this is a place not to miss. We were again lucky to enjoy a southerly, enabling us to hoist our cruising chute sailing over a sparkling, dark blue sea bubbling with tuna feeding frenzies. As you arrive in the narrow harbour entrance, the dominance of the Cathedral above the town is impressive. As the former capital, the town retains
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an Haute Baroque grandeur.

Sailing from Ciutadella to Mahon requires stopping in at least two of the glorious anchorages on the south-west side of Menorca. We chose Cala Macarella, offering a walk on the well-established footpaths to Cala en Turqueta, and then Calas Covas, with its hundred burial caves cut into the limestone.

We ended this short trip by leaving Hero in Mahon at the Club Maritimo. With the airport just 15 minutes drive from the quay, and with all the facilities available, the historic buildings and later Georgian architecture, and excellent fish, meat and produce markets, Mahon remains a super place to visit or to leave a boat. It is only surprising that with such a huge harbour, they do not maximise the mooring facilities.

We returned in late October to sail to Torredembarra betwixt Tarragona and Barcelona with Cecilia Bottomley, my niece and her 13-year-old son, Oliver, who wanted to sail overnight offshore for the first time. I was praying for good weather and we were blessed. Having stopped in Ciutadella for a final night, we left at midday in a light SW which built so that shortly after dark we began a close reach for 120nm averaging 7.5kts. With no moon I was expecting a long dark night, but I have never seen the heavens so glorious nor the stars exude so much light, such that we could see the sea all around us, and the phosphorescence exploded down the sides of the boat and off the rudder. It was the perfect trip for us all, especially Oliver, and a fortunate ending to a superb season.