

‘I know where the wild thyme blows....’

Surgical Spirit’s Last Mediterranean Cruise

Gillie Green

It blows on a bank at Kas Marina on the south Turkish coast. It may not be wild thyme, but thyme is planted on a bank next to the sea and it epitomises the magic of that beautiful inlet, the fine marina, the lovely old town, the kindness of the people, the grand sunsets and bright mornings.

Kas is an enchanting place and my brother, Alan Gardner (RCC), and I are incredibly sad that our Mediterranean odyssey must come to an end, but that is how it is. We have arranged for *Surgical Spirit* to be lifted on to the deck of a ship in Fethiye at the end of October. She will be lifted into the water in Southampton where Alan’s sons, Edward and Nick, both previously RCC cadets, will take over and put her on their mooring on the Hamble.

We had a week in May with David Dale and Nick Gardner to get her ready for the season. *Surgical Spirit*, the last Starlight 35 built by Sadler with a wing keel, is now 24 years-old, but she is still the same safe, fast cruising boat. First we sailed over to Kastellorizon, but were warned off



Thyme growing on a bank at Kas Marina

Kastellorizon, but were warned off



Gillie Green

by a yacht that had been charged € 60 just for anchoring at Mandraki Bay. So we sailed round to the SE coast of the island for Nick to swim into the stunning Blue Cave. Then we headed for Kekova and enjoyed the warm hospitality of Hassan's 'Best Kitchen' and decided that Sea Bass is more delicious than Sea Bream. Locals warned us that an impressive storm was brewing, so we headed back to Kas and were glad to be in port when the lightning flashed all around us and the heavens opened. A week goes very quickly when one is having fun.

Our old faithful crews joined us in September and we had a rollicking time visiting old anchorages and enjoying warm Turkish sun and hospitality. First Simon Wilkinson (RCC) and Robin Whiteside came for ten days of laughter, swimming and pure self-indulgence. It's such a joy



Turtles fighting in the harbour at Kastellorizon

to wake to the smell of Simon making toast each morning. The weather was very kind and we mostly floated eastward under our big genny on the westerly wind that gets up in mid morning. Returning eastwards was mostly a motor-sail in the morning or evening calm. The only testing times were at breakfast,

when we spat out the shards of glass in Robin's home-made marmalade; the jar had smashed in his luggage and it was far too delicious to throw away. Few yachts can boast an 80-year-old marmalade-maker who swims ashore with a line to tie on a rock, as Robin loved to do.

We decided not to sail over to the nearby Greek Island of Kastellorizon, as regulations there were apparently still very tight, so we went over in the regular ferry. We hoped to meet the officious woman who arrested me last year and taunt her with, 'I bet you can't find our boat,' but she was not about. Eighteen migrants arrived that day, mainly women and children hoping to follow their menfolk who had entered Europe last year. Three turtles entertained us as we enjoyed lunch on the quay, one even being fed by hand. They then had a little spat; the clashing of turtle shells makes a noise like a gong.

The political climate in Turkey seems repressive, for example the newspapers reported that 170 new prisons will be built to house the raft of the middle class recently arrested. In order to access the internet one has to sign a document to say that any material accessed 'does not infringe the laws governing, but not exhaustively covering, copyright, trademarks,

'I know where the wild thyme blows...'

pornography, or any other material which is slanderous, defamatory or might cause offence in any other way'. Tourism in Turkey has reduced by over 40%, but Kas people are still cheerful and say it doesn't affect them.

Kas Marina is a favourite of RCC members so we have kindred spirits to eat and drink with: John and Helen



Fleming on *View from the Lycian Way of Surgical Spirit* anchored at Ufakdere *Flame of Gosport*, Peter and Catie Whiteley on *Firemoose*, Luke and Jane Valner on *Sherry Spinner*, Nigel and Maggie Kay on *Sunbird* and others passing through.

Chris Elliott (RCC) arrived on 4 October with more booze, much talk and much enthusiasm for finding new excitements. On our last visit to Kastellorizon we saw yachts anchored in Mandraki Bay, so we did the same. We went ashore in the dinghy and no one hassled us. The beautiful dinner of huge barbecued prawns at Lazarakus' restaurant was well worth the risk. Then we had a great sail with a steady westerly to the Kekova

area and visited our favourite haunts.

We were disappointed in the snorkelling in Woodhouse Bay as it seems that there are fewer fish and less sea life than in previous years. However, the reduced number of yachts in the area is a bonus and we had the beautiful fjord of Karaloz all to ourselves overnight on Friday 7



The author on a perilous path

Gillie Green

October, with just an owl hooting, a barking fox, a bleating goat, and a heron, which flew in to roost and drink from the fresh water spring among the rocks. But we were driven out by a swarm of wasps very early next morning. The sun rose as we left the fjord and we motored eastwards in a heavy swell.

We anchored at Ufakdere and walked a short length of the Lycian Way, keeping a cat at bay that was determined to drink our beer. The Lycian Way is a 540km footpath that links the ancient ports of southern Turkey: 'One of the world's top ten footpaths' according to the Sunday Times. Next day Chris used his electronic wizardry to find an even better stretch of the Way at the south end of Bayinder Limani that entailed scaling a vertical cliff. So we sailed to Bayinder, mooring stern to at a beach resort. Alan and Chris were like mountain goats scaling the rocky path up the cliff, but I struggled and was glad of a rope threaded through pitons to haul myself up. Black clouds and encroaching darkness prevented us from completing the circuit, so we turned around and I was mighty glad not to have to descend slimy, wet cliffs in the dark. Chris's various electronic gadgets even enabled us to hear and watch the Presidential debate in California, live.

Next day we had a rollicking sail over to the empty Greek Island of Ro. Only a few soldiers are stationed there. The last inhabitant, an old lady, died 15 years ago at the age of 80. There is a lovely, sheltered bay on the south side of the island and we anchored in 8 metres of exquisite turquoise water, in spite of Heikell's warning that no anchoring is permitted. Chris then spied a soldier hiding among the rocks with a 'light' machine gun. The soldier and the General happily eyed each other through binoculars, the soldier kept in touch with his unit by radio, but maybe he was just talking to his Mum. He didn't shoot us when we swam. There were no other signs of life except one goat. After lunch we sailed back to Kas on a good westerly.

Then we heard that the ship, which we had been told would pick *Surgical Spirit* up in Fethiye, would not be coming after all. The shipping company were apologetic, but held on to our large deposit. Coincidentally we also heard that our next crew, Tim Davison, had ruptured a disc in his back and was in too much pain to be able to join us and sail with us to Fethiye. Edward and Nick Gardner are very disappointed not to have *Surgical Spirit* on the Hamble, but will patiently wait until next spring.

So after all, this may not have been our last cruise in the Mediterranean. We have asked two shipping companies to arrange shipment in April or May next year. As our marina contract does not run out until 4 June 2017, *Surgical Spirit* will spend another winter in the warm, clear waters of Kas Marina, with teams of mullet keeping her bottom clean and with the scent of the wild thyme blowing.