

## A Halcyon cruise in the Adriatic ....

... until the Gremlins came aboard

Lionel Hoare

Caroline and I rushed to rejoin *Alcyone* in Civitanova in late June, just before the Italians imposed quarantine restrictions on travellers from the UK. We found her in good shape with all works done, including the installation of a water maker.

The only hiccough on fitting out was that in hoisting the genoa, with the wind from behind, the sheets flicked off my hat, my glasses and the starboard nav light. All three floated into shallow water before sinking; the glasses having miraculously landed inside the hat. A trout net, taped to the boathook, recovered the lot.

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Brief overnight stops were made in Ancona and Rimini, en route to Ravenna under gentle winds and hot sun. The log book reads; 'Always be on Starboard when going north-west under a hot sun. Shade all day!' The NE coast of Italy does not offer much in the way of shelter except in the marinas of major towns, so the anchor remained idle. Ravenna has a remarkable history

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Passing St Mark's and (below) our mooring at St Giorgio, Venice  
as the capital of the Western Roman Empire after the decline of Rome and the spectacularly beautiful surviving mosaics were very rewarding to see, particularly without crowds.

Thence to Venice, entering the lagoon by the southern entrance and spending a night at Chioggia; before taking the inside route to La Serenissima, making up at San Giorgio, courtesy of Gianpietro Nicoletta, the RCC Honorary Foreign Representative, a remarkable character. It is very special looking from one's cockpit to St Mark's; but even more special was enjoying Venice without the crowds and



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never having to queue. A blissful week was spent exploring the city and taking *Alcyone* to the islands in the lagoon. This has to be the highlight of our five years in the Mediterranean.

The coastline NE of Venice is one seemingly endless beach resort with high rise hotels and then another lagoon before you arrive in Trieste to enjoy the imperial splendours of the Austro-Hungarians. It was horribly hot here and I must confess that I wished that the Archduke Maximilian's Miramare Castle was further away, because the taxi there and back was air conditioned.

We left the extreme heat behind in Trieste and entered Croatia in Umag, getting into trouble for making up in the marina before seeing the port police, customs and immigration on the other side of the harbour. Visiting them by dinghy did not go down well. Thereafter the anchor was busy and it was good to be able to stop for lunches, to swim and to shun marinas.

In Porec we explored the old town and the 5<sup>th</sup> Century Basilica (built over a 2<sup>nd</sup> Century one) with more stunning Byzantine mosaics. 'Good to be on a mooring, with the wind scoop working. Not so good to hear the loud throb of music all night'. In Pula we enjoyed the Roman amphitheatre and the Temple of Augustus, but did not enjoy the European Cup Final!

Apart from some heavy rain in Rab, leaving yellow stains needing much scrubbing to remove, we had fine weather and gentle winds to explore the northern Croatian islands and the Kornatis.

The walled towns of Zadar and Trogir are extremely attractive, immaculately restored and completely made over to the tourist trade. It might be better to go anti-clockwise around the Adriatic to enjoy all the Venetian towns before seeing Venice itself.

Pula amphitheatre





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In Milna, we took on crew; Paul Thompson, a 'carry boy' as he was described on a shopping trip in Vis, but also a good sailor who had and intimate knowledge of the islands south of Split. He was able to show us where to go and how best to avoid the charter fleets, out in full force in July. Vis was crowded, with anchor space only, but we enjoyed an excellent dinner in Kut with friends and found a lovely anchorage for lunch in Vela Budikovac, an island to the SE of Vis.



Looking down on Trogir, one of the Venetian towns

Lastovo was our favourite island; a beautiful nature reserve, undeveloped with superb, remote and beautiful anchorages. Also furthest to go for the Split charterers.

The boat was laid up ashore in Kastela Marina, Split, on 25 July; after enjoying five weeks of easy sailing, the joys of Ravenna & Venice among other cultural splendours and the beauties of the Croatian Islands.

Returning to Split in the middle of September there was heavy rain to dodge as we refitted the sails. Well, we didn't. North Sails did. A costly luxury. Thereafter the weather was perfect, except for too little wind most of the time. Other than to visit Diocletian's Palace, (better to go by cab) Split Marina should be avoided; noisy, crowded (we were there on charter changeover day) and very expensive.

A fun week was then spent cruising in company with Bruce and Sara Mauleverer (RCC) and crew, aboard *The Graduate*, finding new anchorages on Brac and Hvar, where we were serenaded by sea eagles in Uvala Nordhvar. Vis was re-visited. This time all the moorings were unused and we made up stern-to on the town quay, a decision somewhat regretted; 'Superb, if rather windy dinner with *The Graduates* at Fort George; well restored into a fine restaurant, highly recommended. A spectacular setting for the sunset and moonrise on the equinox. Good grub and a jolly party, followed by nightcaps on *The Graduate* and more on *Alcyone*. Nasty swell causing a vicious surge and making it very difficult to ride the gang plank. Some crew not happy. Vittled a.m. Reports of hangovers from crew'. The town quay in Vis is certainly not a good idea in a northeasterly. Luckily no damage done except for a lost fender sock, the new one.

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Leaving the Kornati Islands

After anchorages in the Pakleni Islands and to the east of Trogir, we used the jetty at Split airport to drop off friends who had had spent the past week sailing with us.

The RCC rally in Montenegro having sadly been cancelled again, there was a week in hand, which was spent briefly revisiting the Kornati Islands, as lovely as ever, then a brisk sail to a mooring at Komiza on Vis, followed by an anchorage to explore Korcula.

Mljet was as enchanting as the pilot book says it is and provided a beautiful solitary anchorage in Luka Polace and a fine dinner ashore in Luka Saplunara.



Korcula

In Dubrovnik Caroline left to go home for the hunting season and Christopher Dobbs joined. He is as much at home under the water, as on it, having been an archaeologist on the *Mary Rose* for the last 40 years, possessing skills which were later to come in useful, because the Gremlins had also come on board. The good weather we had enjoyed for so long also abandoned us, with heavy rain, gales and thunderstorms for the remainder of the cruise.

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Before we got wet

was seen lying serenely at her anchor. A heavy rainstorm kept us in Cavtat for a late lunch and returning to the anchorage in the dinghy it was clearly apparent that *Alcyone* was not there. An Austrian on the nearest boat confirmed that she had dragged and that he had gone on board to run the engine to keep her off some rocks.

He could not raise the anchor, but had been helped by crew from the superyacht anchored a mile off. They had taken her round to Cavtat and there we found her, made up alongside the restaurant where we had lunched. One more drink and we would have watched her come in! The superyacht tender, 50' of it, appeared later and we were able to thank the crew, three of sixty, apparently. They couldn't say who the owner was, but thought

As it was heavily rumoured that changes to the Red List would mean that Montenegro would come off it. So we lingered for confirmation of this in Cavtat, where we had our first misadventure. Anchoring in Uvala Tiha we dug in well, as the holding is said to be poor. The anchor held happily all night and we left the boat to go ashore in the morning. Cavtat is an attractive small town facing an adjacent bay. At midday *Alcyone*

*Solaris* to the rescue





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that he may be coming out soon, if he was not going to one of his other boats. A quick Google search of yacht *Solaris* told all. How do I thank Roman Abramovich?

Tired of the town quay, we tried to re-anchor at dusk in Uvala Tiha, but the anchor would not set, the rain came and we retreated, soaking wet, to the same place on the quay, to find that the Webasto wouldn't work and the electric heater gave a bright flash and expired. "Ah you are the boat" said the harbour mistress on checking out of Croatia.

"Many, many boats drag their anchors. It happens all the time."

We sailed in strong head winds to Montenegro and, in a roly sea and heavy rain, went through the labourious check in at Zelenica. Worth it for the Gulf of Kotor, which did not disappoint; three inland seas surrounded by mountains.

The log book reads '...about 30 years late in Perast. This enchanting



Lionel hoisting the Montenegrin courtesy flag, *Alcyone* alongside off Perast



and charming place, on closer examination is over manicured, over developed and over expensive. Boarded Saturday morning by a beautiful Russian blonde, who wanted to be photographed by the blue ensign. Tried to swap crew! Kotor v. splendid. Like a mini Venice.' Not surprising; as the Venetians ruled

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Islands of Gospa od Skrpjela and Sveti Djorgje off Perast (above and below)

it for 400 years. A walled town with narrow lanes, small squares, palaces and churches. No canals; but surrounded by water on two sides and by mountains behind. The climb up 1,350 steps to the fort on St John's Hill was well worth it for the spectacular views.

It was hard work walking up, unencumbered while wondering how Captain William Hoste's crew dragged their ship's guns up the mountain to bombard the heavily fortified town and secure the surrender of the French garrison in 1813. He then repeated the trick in Dubrovnik.





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A headwind meant motoring most of the way, under rainstorms, south to Budva, where, alongside hideous developments, was another attractive walled town, exclusively for tourists. The bow thruster died while making up.

Delays in getting into Montenegro meant that there was no time to explore Albania and we started trying to leave Budva at 0800 hrs for the 170nm passage to Corfu. I had to beg for someone to come and operate the fuel pump, before we could begin the exhausting process of immigration, customs and port police. One of the missing pieces of vital information was an official document listing the serial number of the engine! We finally got underway at 1115, sailing for only about an hour, before motoring in light wind and heavy rain with a spectacular and terrifying thunderstorm after dark. At 0545 the following morning the engine abruptly stopped, after running happily for nearly 18 hours and would not go again.

We were able to sail slowly until being becalmed 30 miles north of Corfu for about three hours in the late morning. Very frustrating. Then a large tail wind came and we made up much of the lost time. Once through the North Channel we had to harden up, but we had far too much sail up for the 30kt gusts. The furling line somehow managed to jam itself solid and we had to drop the genoa. This was quite a struggle with a 70m<sup>2</sup> sail and only two on board, in a big winds. Approaching Gouvia, under reefed main only, the wind died and we couldn't quite make the entrance channel. Luckily, on an otherwise deserted sea at dusk, we managed to persuade a German yacht to tow us in, until the harbour launch took over, with a push and we made up just before dark. What a relief.

What a mess too; genoa on deck, no engine, no bow-thruster, no heating. Finally the beers were not as cool as normal and we saw that the fridge was also not working. Engineers came aboard the following morning and we missed the last good sailing day, while they cleaned clogging dirt from the entire fuel system, from tank to injectors. Christopher went over the side and took some fishing net off the prop. We rehoisted the genoa and fitted a new furling line. The old one had jammed so solid we had to cut it off.

A second day was spent under heavy rain while the engineers finished their (expensive) job and in the afternoon we were able to move into the marina proper, to find no shore power. Without the Webasto (presumably suffering from dirty diesel too) we couldn't dry the boat and oilskins. However the fridge was fixed (an adrift spade connector) and a new fuse sorted the bow thruster. Could things be looking up?

The forecast for the final day of the season, prior to the lift out booked at Preveza and flights home, was for heavy rain in the morning and a beam reach in fresh winds for the 60nm. Wishful thinking told us that it would be a quick, if wet, passage. Leaving in torrential rain, we could lay our course through the Corfu Strait, but were then headed, with a fresh wind, dead on the nose. Making quite good way under genoa only, albeit in the wrong direction, hoping for the wind to back, there was a crack and the genoa sheet parted. Not a serious problem because, sheeted

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Chris Dobbs, recent day job, diving on the *Mary Rose*!

staysail which we could and should have deployed, but it was a long way down in the locker in the foredeck under the spinnaker, the dinghy, the fenders and warps. The sea was rough and the staysail was last used in Norway in 2014. Returning the 30 miles, downwind to Gouvia was an unattractive prospect, not least because they had made it clear that there was no room for us, in or out, of the water. Preveza without an engine, in the dark, would be tricky at best on account of the currents coming past the entrance from the Gulf of Amvrakia. The only answer was to call on Chris' diving skills and over the side he went, in a rolly sea, to clear the prop. Phew! Unfortunately we had to cut the sheet to clear it.

We decided to motor towards the coast to try and find a lee to rig new sheets. Two now needed. It was slow progress in a rough sea. An hour later the engine died and my heart sank. What next? After a while we realised that the engine had not actually stopped but would only idle. It did not take long to identify a broken throttle cable. Chris, this time armed not with snorkel and mask, but with cable ties and shock cord made a repair and we motored on into a sea which eventually calmed. I was very anxious about berthing in wind and current, but all went well, the cable ties held and we made up in Cleopatra Marina in the dark at 2000 hrs. Phew (again).

We had covered 1,325nm over nine weeks all of it in benign weather until the last fortnight. Although I have no good memories, yet, of the Ionian the rest of our

in on the other tack, a replacement can be fitted. However, in the chaos of a flogging sail, the lazy sheet released itself, unnoticed. How the knot in the end of it got through the turning block we will never know. But it did with the sheet immediately wrapping itself round the prop, the engine having been started to get the bow through the wind. So we were drifting downwind at about two knots with no genoa and no engine. Getting a fully battened main up when not head to wind is nearly impossible. We do carry a

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cruise around the north Adriatic was wonderful, with a happy mixture of history, culture, islands, scenic anchorages, good food, (local) wines and some jolly and erudite company

The next day the boat came out of the water. Rarely, if ever, have I been pleased to lift the boat at the end of a season. This time I was happy to fly home.

*Alcyone* in Venice's lagoon, a highlight from five years in the Mediterranean

