

Mike and Pat Pocock in BLACKJACK



Fortunately both Mike and I were very keen on the whole idea of sailing round the world. We were lucky to have the opportunity, time and just enough funds to do so. But, more to the point, we had the right yacht, Blackjack, a 38 footer designed by Mike for Rodney Barton and in which they competed in the 1981 Double handed Transatlantic race. Mike & I also competed in this race a few years later, before sailing south down the Iberian peninsula, calling at many ports and heading out for the Atlantic islands and over to the Caribbean.

Panama was the next objective, followed by the delightful Galapagos islands, where we very much enjoyed all the wild life. We had never seen iguanas, sally-lightfoot crabs, Giant Tortoises or even sealions before, Leaving by way of Isabella island we managed to view the Flightless Cormorants on the shoreline drying their wings.

Next we sailed for the Hawaiiin islands, this proved to be 32 days at sea and 4,200 miles of very empty ocean. We visited nearly all the islands, amazed by the numbers of Japanese honeymooners in Hilo, the surfers in Lahaina and the whales breaching off Cape Kana on Lanai. Leaving from Kauai we set sail for our real summer destination of Alaska, arriving in Kodiak towards the end of May. The usual means of transport were the ferries and the ubiquitous float planes, cars were many, but their owners could only go to the start of the hunting trails as few shore based towns were joined by road to the next.

From Kodiak to Prince William Sound we made only day sails in mixed weather, the good days were quite magic, the bad ones best forgotten. From a cruising point of view the one thing Alaska has to offer is a constant supply of exquisite anchorages with tiny deserted coves, perfectly sheltered; pine trees down to the shores with boulders, salmon streams and, maybe, deer, foxes, bears and rufous humming birds to be seen.

For us, the words 'Prince William Sound' bring back memories of warm sunny days, great tidewater glaciers, beautiful snow-capped mountains and some superb light weather sailing. We had had to book a visit Glacier Bay where even the cruise ships looked small against the towering scenery. We had a friend in Juneau, who was flying float planes over the glaciers and he kindly took us both up to view to view the Taku glacier from above, which was fascinating.

We now made our way down the inland passages, every other post topped with a bald eagle's nest, into Canada at Prince Rupert and. slowly, to Vancouver Island. After spending the winter back in

Lymington for Mike to design Mary Falk's QII, we returned to spend a second summer enjoying British Columbia and going far enough north to see Sitka, the old Russian capital. Salmon fishing at slow speed became a considerable culinary interest.

It was now time to cross the great Pacific ocean, so we sailed away from our last Mexican islands arriving in the Marquesas at the end of March 1991. Here one visits Gaughin's grave and admires copies of his vibrant paintings. These islands are high with spiky, rocky heights and fringing reefs that give shelter to wide lagoons where there are beautiful, colourful fish and amazing coral gardens. Lots of other cruising yachts of all nationalities were to be found particularly in the Society Islands. Tahiti was very sociable with the yachts all stern on to the quay.

Nukualofa, the capital of Tonga was our next major stop, where we pretended not to watch the King taking his exercise by rowing his skiff the length of the harbour, helped by no less than 12 attendants. The very best snorkelling of the whole voyage was found in the incredible coral gardens to be found among the many islands.

Strong head winds were then encountered before arriving in Suva where we so enjoyed the cheerfulness of all the Fijians that we met. Whilst on passage across the Pacific we found that we were able to catch tuna, Spanish mackerel and mahi mahi which were a welcome addition to the menu. But, naturally, we never touched the poisonous fish that live around the reefs.

After a short time in Fijian waters we were off to New Zealand for the southern summer. We had a refit in Opuia before sailing northabout down the west coast of North Island, enjoying the flying skills of the royal albatrosses and prions on the way to Nelson and Picton in South Island. Returning up the east coast we naturally called in at Auckland to see friends, stock up and, more importantly, to buy new sails which were badly needed.

There followed a nine day trip from Whangerei back to Fijian waters, where we had a three month cruise among all the islands, including the Yasawas, before heading for Vanuatu and, subsequently, New Caledonia. Thence to Gladstone in Australia and, with many stopovers, to Sydney where we were thrilled to see the Sydney harbour skiffs racing hard.

Whereas most cruising folk go north to Indonesia, we had relatives we wanted to see in Perth on the west coast. Crossing the Bass Strait with 45 knots behind us made for a fast passage to Tasmania. We were in Hobart when the Sydney to Hobart race came in followed by the British Challenge fleet where we knew two of the skippers. It was worth beating into a strong southwesterly to go round the south of Tasmania to reach Port Davey and Mcquarrie Harbour on the Gordon river. Next came the south coast of Australia where we enjoyed the easterlies to be found in February and March, calling at many ports, but finding anchoring difficult in some places owing to the thick beds of kelp. No swimming on this coast as there are just too many sharks.

After a refit in Freemantle, we sailed from Carnarvon across the Indian Ocean by way of the Cocos Keeling islands, the Chagos archipelago, where certain yacht owners were avoiding the taxman, to Rodrigues, Mauritius and on to Durban. We had decided against the Suez canal route home, owing to the political situation, also the heat and light winds in the Red Sea did not attract us.

From Durban we had a rough sail to Knysna and round to Cape Town. Having a yacht designed specially for going to windward in strong conditions, we decided not to call in at any of the

intervening ports, as we did not like what we had heard about them. But it was a rough ride, followed by more of the same as we rounded the Cape of Good Hope at night amongst all the big ship traffic.

In Cape Town, after going up Table mountain and friends showing us the realities of life there, we left just after Christmas for St. Helena. Here we viewed all the Napoleon artefacts, before heading off for the Caribbean, followed by a cruise up the east coast of the States, finally leaving from Newfoundland for Lymington.