

Martin and Elizabeth Walker - Hookey of Hamble

We were on our way to the 1992 Earls Court Boat Show when we saw an invitation for coffee and champagne from Jimmy Cornell who was promoting a Europa Around the World Rally.



Over coffee we realized that others with a vague interest in a circumnavigation were a pleasant and 'normal' crowd of sailors - jobs and elderly parents were ok to leave for a couple of years, and we soon signed up. That August (1993) we left Hamble having (in six months) finished building a house in Cobham, let it, sold our Sadler 34 and bought a 1986 Oyster 435. Months of hard work followed to get her ready for a long trip – the only thing we trusted to the Hamble Yard and the local agent was fitting a new generator; this proved to be the one mistake we made and it took years to resolve.

We sailed directly for Gibraltar and continued the main fit-out there. At first we were unsure about the idea of a Rally – about 20 boats were with us in the cruising/racing class which were permitted a very limited number of hours under engine on each leg. The rules were simple – if you could not keep up, and missed more than one start for any reason, then you were left behind. In practice a few boats fell by the wayside, and some joined in, but the Rally concept was excellent. An HF safety net meant we could help each other out if needs be (we passed glass-fibre repair items to a boat in Mid Pacific, slung across antibiotics to another boat as we headed for Darwin, and dived on another boat with a suspect fouled rudder in mid Indian Ocean). Safety was in the background but we sailed completely independently and rarely saw other boats in between times. Where we gained: was the ease of check in and out at some 24 or so stops, numerous formal and unexpected parties, never waiting for a spare part (as someone would have one and could resupply the provider by the next stop) and the ability to leave the boat for extended periods with a fellow sailor to look after. This all allowed us to explore very much more of all the countries we visited than would have been possible on our own – we went on a mini charter trip to nearly all of the islands of the Galapagos, dived a lot, after a course in Vanuatu, and, hired cars to extensively explore northern Australia, Bali, Malaysia and Sri Lanka in addition to all day trips and coastal exploration that we did as we travelled.

Although GPS had just arrived this was still the era of paper charts – often surveyed many decades before and with odd datums - and satellite communication lay many years in the future. Electronic Chart plotters and AIS had not been invented, sextant use was normal, radar came into its own, and Portishead remained the HF gateway to occasional calls home.

We left Gibraltar in January 1994 and sailed the milk run from Palma to Saint Lucia, Panama, via the Canal, Galapagos, Marquesas, Tahiti and the Society Islands, Tonga group, Fiji and Vanuatu ; had we felt we could leave UK for longer we might have stayed for a season in Australia and New Zealand; but we had to keep up with the trade winds as we explored the main Pacific island groups before cruising the Barrier reef and then the north coasts of Australia. Then Bali beckoned, followed by Singapore, Malaysia and the Kings Cup racing at Phuket. The Indian Ocean trade winds gave a 600+ mile spinnaker run across to Sri Lanka, followed by a short stop at the isolated atoll Ulugamu at the top of the Maldives before heading for Djibouti and the Red Sea. Then it was to Sudan and Egypt and the Suez Canal; to Crete (where Heraklion saw the first snow in 100 years) Malta, Palma and back to Gibraltar.

We crossed our out-bound track to complete our circumnavigation in May 1995, visited UK and then cruised the Spanish coast and Balearics before crossing the Atlantic again that November. This trans-Atlantic trip gave us time to explore the Leeward and Windward Islands, and the BVIs before heading up through the thorny passage to cruise the Abacos and then to Fort Lauderdale. Here we moored up at a friends' dock to refit, tour Florida by car and then sail up to the Canadian border, including the intra-coastal waterway, Chesapeake, New York and Maine before heading back down south. A easy run back through the Bahamas to the BVIs and Antigua followed before we headed for Bermuda, the Azores and home by mid 1997. We had been away for some 5 years, had numerous friends on boards for about half the time. Hookey had looked after us well; after a check over by Oysters, and rerigging, we headed for the Mediterranean in 1999 to explore the countries to the east and also the Black Sea.



Hookey rounding Europa Point to complete her circumnavigation



Routine Maintenance on a calm passage



Anchored off a Thai island



Normal downwind rig



Approaching Colon with Monitor in control



Fish for breakfast



A welcome in the Pacific

