

Sarah and Colin Seaman



We departed Fox's Marina in Ipswich on 5th October 2006 and returned to La Roche Bernard in Southern Brittany, which was to become our Home Port on 25th August 2012, 44,000nms later. We crossed our outbound track after 5 years and 3 months and 39,200nms.

We followed the Trade Wind Route (as I had promised Sarah that we would only sail with the wind abaft the beam and in sunshine!) to New Zealand and returned home from Australia via South Africa. We had decided to abandon a plan to join the Blue Water Rally routing to the Mediterranean because of the increased substantial threat of piracy that year.

Yacht: Our home for this adventure was 'Moonbeam', an Oyster 55 constructed with Kevlar. She was well equipped for Ocean sailing, with a powerful generator, good electronics, electric winches, in-mast furling, water maker, bow thruster, two big freezers, air conditioning and a washing machine. When everything worked, she was easily handled by a crew of two and on several occasions by just one. However, when something did not, she could be a bit of a handful.



Our best passage was without doubt the 3077nm between the Galapagos and the Marquesas, which took 19.5 days during which we changed tack just twice and almost resented Hiva-Oa appearing over

the horizon. The worst was in the Bay of Bengal where we encountered an unseasonal, un-forecast Tropical Revolving Storm. We started to take on water that was being forced over the top of the forward bulkhead from the submerging anchor locker, and whilst using the engine bilge pump to clear it, the fuel injection pump suffered a sheared drive causing the engine to fail. This was the only mishap in our voyage that could not be jury-rigged at sea.

Highlights: There were so many highlights to choose from, but perhaps the most special was our arrival in English Harbour in Antigua in our own yacht which I had promised to Sarah on a trip there in 1975 when I was flying. Similarly, our arrival in New Zealand which I had promised to myself throughout my career, along with the many friendships made along the way. It had quickly become apparent that a landfall in any anchorage would be an opportunity to meet up with cruisers previously befriended or new ones yet to get to know. What a privilege to visit so many countries, meet so many people and spend as much or as little time as we wanted, to explore everywhere we went. The genuine hospitality, welcome and helpfulness of everyone associated with yacht clubs and marinas was absolutely outstanding. My visit to the Chagos group in the British Indian Ocean Territory covering a marine conservation area of 54,500 square km was a salutary lesson of what happens to fish stocks if they are left alone.

Low Points: Of course, there were low points: Whenever the children left us after their many visits. Recognising the folly of joining the Blue Water Rally in Darwin without our usual due diligence, which resulted in sailing in Indonesian waters without proper clearance and therefore risking both forfeiture of our liberty and the boat. Suffering a dislocated shoulder when I failed to have one hand for me and one for the boat coming down the companion way and when we were 300nms from the nearest hospital.

Disciplines: Moonbeam did not and still does not move unless she has a relevant paper chart opened on the chart table. An hourly position fix is routinely recorded in the ships log, and the interval only extended on occasion when deep into the ocean. We had a plotter and four GPS's one of which lived in the microwave in case of a lightning strike, but even so, I took sun and star shots on a regular basis to ensure that I kept my hand in just in case the GPS's went down. Most importantly, Sarah and I had an agreement that if either of us became uncomfortable with any aspect of our passage plan or trip then it would be abandoned. This saved us from putting Moonbeam on the reef as we entered Fiji at night in bad weather. We were quite accustomed to map shift on the plotter not least because in Tonga it showed us, at anchor, a mile up the high street. In this case we were following what looked like the leading lights which had us adrift from the plotter, and in fairness not quite on the charted bearing, only to find once Sarah had declared that she didn't like our approach and we abandoned it, that when we called the pilot boat, Fiji had changed the colour of the leading lights. The pilot boat was good enough to lead us in.

Some of the things we learnt: Firstly, the longer you stay in a place the more difficult it is to leave. This is especially true of England. Secondly, there is absolutely no such thing as too many spares or too many tools or for that matter too much rope. Thirdly, it helps if your sewing and boatswain skills are up to scratch. Fourthly, if you are planning to undertake a circumnavigation and budget carefully for how much it will cost, whatever number you come up with, my advice would be to triple it. This exercise is not cheap. Lastly, you need to recognise that when you come back, if you ever do, you are forever changed. In my case, Sarah might not say for the better but changed you are. The unique experiences, the highs and lows, the endless sunrises and sunsets, the night sky with no light pollution and occasional terror leave behind an indelible mark.

Different next time? Avoid the low points! Replace the 4 metre Avon GRP RIB with its 25HP Yamaha which was so heavy it was almost impossible to beach, with an aluminium RIB with a 6HP Yamaha that we can lift.



