And so began the Odyssey. It started as a dream many years ago that we would sail off to New Zealand and who knows – perhaps sail back again.

Lymington May 2006

As retirement approached, we started looking at boats with a more objective purpose and Rupert Knox-Johnston, nephew of Sir Robin, persuaded us of the virtues of an Oyster. This was more than four years ago now, but it was not until late last autumn that we saw an Oyster 55 which was to become ours. The previous owner wanted to keep her name, so we decided to re-christen her Moonbeam, which is an anagram using the children's names, or Moonbeam of Dartmouth, to be more precise.

I had fallen in love with her because she was undoubtedly the most pristine Oyster 55, we had seen, and I had seen lots of them. Her level of equipment, recent new engine, generator, and rigging were powerful reasons. However, just like buying a second-hand house the plan was to be vetoed by Sarah unless I agreed to a new kitchen, bathrooms, and curtains throughout.

In accordance with the Seaman planning model, we managed to buy Moonbeam whilst we still had Bagatel, our trusty Moody 34. The trouble was that Bagatel was lying in Vila Real de Santo Antonio on the South coast of Portugal on the border with Spain, and Moonbeam needed to go home to Fox's in Ipswich for the refit of her galley and heads.

Moonbeam was lying in Lymington where she had been out of commission for over 18 months. This was because her previous owner collected Oysters. In addition to Moonbeam, he had a 62 in Berthon's marina and a 72 in build.

It took ten days in the worst weather in May to get her ready for the water, as all the sea cocks needed servicing, new safety gear installed, along with 101 other things, but when she was finally put back in the water, the sun came out – what a good sign!

Several days passed before I worked up the courage to move her from the tightest berth in Berthon's marina, with the previous owner's 62 wedging us in. However, it was done with Sol Blytt-Jordens' help. Sarah and I recognised that we would have to get used to her size whist being short-handed and therefore decided to dispatch to Ipswich via Brighton and Dover, ourselves.

It had been many years since I had sailed anything bigger than our Moody and with just two of us on board my heart rate didn't spend much time under 160. It was worse than learning to fly a 747.

However, when we called Brighton for a berth one of the advantages of having a big boat became apparent. We were told to berth on the hammerhead just inside the entrance. Once we were safely tied up, Sarah met another yachtsman on the pontoon who said, "that's a big boat for just the two of you to handle – but I expect you are used to it." Little did he know!

Ipswich

Anyhow, two days later she was safely berthed in Ipswich and so started a four-to-five-week refit that took four months.

Meanwhile we flew down to Vila Real to bring Bagatel home. Needless to say, that we had timed this so that we had to beat into the Northerly Trades that settle in on the West coast of the Iberian Peninsula at this time of year! However, we got her home with only two unplanned diversions in time for Moody's, (now Premier Yachts) autumn sale. I spent a week polishing her and giving her new lines and anti-fouling and she sold at top price within three weeks. This supported our long-held view that if you look after a boat she will look after you, or maybe the Gods were smiling on us….

When we arrived back at Fox's at the end of July, it was to find that only the forward heads had been completed and the galley stripped. Essentially it looked as though they were afraid of stripping the aft heads without my oversight.

I had asked them to put the shower/heads module from the Oyster 53 into the rear heads. Fox's had obtained the mould tool and made the module, but it was still in the workshop. After we gave the go-ahead and I moved onto the boat after I had finished working on Bagatel, I asked Ralph Catchpole, the manager for his help and things started moving apace. The module was cut into pieces with only the bottom 16" remaining intact. It was then re-built in situ. Jordan did an amazing job, and if you didn't know where to look you would not believe it wasn't built in when she was first constructed. This was a brilliant success as other 55 owners are considering the same refit. The galley looks superb in its new blue Corian, which has brought it up-to-date and when the new curtains arrived the expenditure was well worthwhile, even though it ran to £15k over budget!

Whilst this was going on, I polished the hull, re-painted her lines, and eliminated the lower boot top because she obviously sat low on her lines. Jonathan Baker, owner of Arabella, another 55 which was also in refit helped with lots of useful advice and good ideas. She was anti-fouled, the instruments re-fitted in alcantara, a new computer and GPS installed along with an Iridium sat phone that proceeded to give problems from the outset.

In addition, I re-vamped my fibre-glass skills, last used when fitting out our first boat 'Pooh Bear Too' and spent many, many hours upside down in the bilges getting to know her insides intimately. I replaced all the hatch covers; the engine and generator were serviced, and numerous maintenance tasks completed with the only happy interruption of going to our daughter Gemma's marriage to Simon.

At last, we were (nearly) ready and we finally departed Fox's on 5th October bound for Boulogne (actually any destination outside the twelve-mile limit because I did not want to overstay my time in the UK). David Barker, Sarah's brother, who planned to sail the Atlantic with us and our son Tom, made up the crew. Sadly, the pleasant start to the week, whilst we were getting her ready deteriorated into an un-forecast gale and we abandoned the trip when Dover coastguard put out an imminent storm warning. So, after seven hours and 40 miles we were back in Ipswich having picked up a buoy in the river.

France

However, by Saturday, the weather forecast had improved, and we set off again and made a fast passage to Boulogne, during which the crew had lots of opportunity to refresh themselves on light recognition as we transited the TSS in the Dover Straits. An excellent seafood lunch was a just reward.

We routed to Benodet via Cherbourg and L'Aberwrach over the next week, where we stayed for a couple of days, reminding ourselves of the charm of this delightful seaside town on the Odet.

Spain

Our plan was to cross the Bay of Biscay via La Rochelle, but the winds were southeast, so we crossed direct to Gijon. So, although we had crossed the Bay twice before, this was the first direct crossing. It took us just under three days. We celebrated in a Sideria where locals drink cider that has been poured for them by the bar staff. They look you in the eye whist pouring the cider from the bottle held high above their heads into a glass held below their waists. Needless to say, a visit to a Sideria is best made in welly boots.

From there we went on to La Coruna and sheltered from the storm that caused damage to 'Ecover' and forced Knox-Johnston to return to Gijon for repairs to his mast. When he was interviewed in Gijon, he was asked to rate the storm between 1-10 and he replied 11! For once our timing seemed to have been right. We all flew home from Oporto, so that we could attend my niece's wedding. I returned with Tony Ferguson on the Sunday afterwards, and we sailed her to Oporto via a pleasant stay in Bayona, where Tony had me up and down the mast half a dozen times completing tasks that had been on the do-list for too long.

Portugal

Nothing in Lexios, the commercial port of Oporto, recommends leaving a boat there, particularly unattended. It is open to the S-SW winds with a real slop building up in the rather dirty marina. There are few shops and restaurants nearby, but the city of Oporto makes up for that. Tony and I flew home as I had promised to help David move out of his flat in Kuala Lumpur. When Sarah and I arrived back on 14th November, having paid Ryanair £85 for excess luggage, it was with great relief that we found Moonbeam undamaged, but in the following gale, even the pontoon was uncomfortable.

David arrived back on the 15th and Rory McCleod on the 16th. Rory had kindly offered to join us for the trip to the Canaries. The weather was awful, so we had lunch in Oporto and got drenched waiting for a taxi to take us home. Saturday was no better, so we spent the afternoon sewing jack stays, with Rory taking the sewing prize for neatness. We finally left for Cascais on Sunday and then had the best sail so far down to Lagos, where again we needed to wait for a better weather window.

We waited two days in Lagos before we decided that the weather was good enough to set off. I lost track of the number of forecasts we printed off! However, when we did get going

it did not take long to get into a routine. David and Rory took a short while to get their sea legs but by the end of the second day our trial watch system was voted a success. It ran from 2100 to 0900 in 3-hour slots, one crew member on standby before going on watch themselves, followed by six hours sleep and nine hours every fourth day. By the time we got to Gran Canaria we felt as though we could go on as long as necessary and I have to say that I was a little sad to arrive! This was the longest leg for all of us so far at 643 nms. We are now over 2100nms from Ipswich.

Canaries

At last, after 15 days we left Las Palmas. It was a great interlude with a visit from Tom who came bearing spare parts for the generator and water maker. The Yankee UV strip was repaired, and the generator start problems eventually run down to a faulty earth connection on the start circuit. The water maker primary pump was replaced, and the system re-configured to two tubes pending more spares.

It has been fun here, not least because we were parked alongside 'Calypso Flyer' owned by a retired SIA captain (Mike) who left Singapore with his partner (Shiho) 5 years ago. He was full of good advice, not to mention being very amusing, and we have monitored his progress as he made his way back home to Trinidad. Having arrived, he advised that the best way to cross the Atlantic in a yacht was to do it only once, and to ship it! Maybe we will visit him in Trinidad in due course.

We had a lovely day with Tom driving around Gran Canaria although the west coast road was a nightmare of short hairpin bends with articulated HGVs coming the other way. We stopped off on the way home and bought 4 new batteries at 200 euros each – nothing is cheap in yachting or aviation!

We watched 'Beebopalula' depart as the final straggler to the 2006 ARC. They had a hammock of fruit that was turning into fruit salad as they continued to delay their departure. However subsequently, we saw that they were able to rescue the crew of another Bavaria that lost its rudder on the way. Needless to say, that this news caused the Moonbeam crew to demonstrate the fitment of the emergency tiller!

Armed with yet another set of Xmas lights and a climbing Father Christmas, we launched off for Lanzarote to await the arrival of the kids for Christmas. Our original plan was to have been in the Caribbean by then, but Gemma and Simon managed to get a few days off over Christmas and Annabel was able to fly out too. In addition, Simon's parents decided to take a villa in Playa Blanca and spent a week here with Alex, their youngest daughter.

Meanwhile, Tom had completed a number of job interviews and returned with yet more spares. All-in-all this meant that we were able to spend a family Christmas together for the first time in a several years – Brilliant!

We oscillated between Marina Rubicon and Puerto Calero for nearly a month with only one night at anchor, but we had great fun and laughed a lot. We cooked the Christmas turkey in

our oven because Simon's parents' villa did not have one and the following day tried our hand at a suckling pig.

We explored the island and really felt that it did not in any way deserve the slang 'Lanzagrotty' that it is so well known by. Most of the development seems to be controlled with no high rises and everything kept in a smart condition. The weather was generally fine with the temperature during the day rising to 21C+ and when the sun was out, which it was most of the time, it was very pleasant. David's daughter, Jules, arrived on 28th December and stayed until 3rd January, so we loitered in Lanzarote a little longer. We did some research and acquired a fishing rod and lures. We have deluded ourselves that this would be a good investment when we caught fresh Tuna to augment our diet across the Atlantic. However, hope springs eternal!

Having returned to Las Palmas we were ready to go. We started the detailed planning of the provisioning that although had been occupying our thoughts almost continually, now needed to be turned into concrete purchases. We ran a virtual menu for seven days and multiplied the result by three and then added a contingency. I have every confidence that we will not starve!

The meat is to be vacuum packed and frozen, and the vegetables packed in special green vegetable bags. Our vacuum packer will be well used this trip.

As far as the boat is concerned, the 'grab bag' needed attention and the dinghy needed to be put to bed on its davits, but otherwise she was basically ship-shape. Gemma and Simon gave me an air-to-air radio for Christmas so I will be able to call up passing "Speedbirds" (BA aircraft) on the way. The weather forecast was monitored daily, sometimes hourly, but it looked as though the Trade Winds had settled in and so my plan was to set course for Antigua direct. A small (but no doubt expensive) repair to the spinnaker and the purchase of courtesy flags for the Caribbean was all that remained to be done for the vessel. We allowed four days for this. I gave notice that we will be leaving no later than Tuesday 9thJanuary, (weather permitting) regardless!

Our First Atlantic Crossing – Destination Antigua

I am informed by Sarah that it will not only be the first but also the last! However, we duly started in the late evening of the 9th in a good forecast of NE winds and smooth seas. We had a good start for the first two days averaging 6.5kts. Our weather forecasting was obtained by sending an automated email created on the computer, which is returned quickly with the required data from the US weather centre. We ask for wind, surface pressure and wave heights for an area approximately 200nms N and S of us and 600nms W of our position. This is done at least once per day given a successful connection to the Iridium network. As a result, we were aware that there was a forecast hole in the winds and duly experienced flat calms for a period on the third day. It has been frustrating but good for the soul.

Tom was ill but the rest of the crew quickly settled into the routine of keeping the boat moving and at the same time doing all the domestic chores. We (I) have been baking fresh bread every morning for our wake-up bacon rolls and have adopted our menu which we wrote down on the back of a 'fag packet'. It was a distillation of all that we have read about blue water cruising, to give us an idea of how we should provision for the crossing. We decided that the mornings should start with a bacon roll; a light lunch should follow after the noon-day salute was observed (a can or two of beer) and an evening meal served at 2000 before the night watch started at 2100. The pressure is on as I write this because Friday is fish night and although we have had a strike at sunset on the last two evenings, I have failed to land a fish as yet so we might have to rely on the freezer.

We have run the generator for two hours in the morning and one at night for battery charging, water making, running the main fridge and freezers, and heating the domestic water. So far that seems adequate as the food in the freezers is rock hard as is most of the stuff in the domestic fridge!

We have a reasonable data link through the Iridium sat phone, although it usually takes several attempts for the computers to handshake. Given the cost of the calls, I shall be investing in the network as soon as we reach Antigua!

It is late afternoon at the moment and David and Sarah are asleep, Tom is reading, and I am writing – there is never enough time to get things done, especially when it takes us 45 minutes to fly the chute! I must get back to the grind.

890 miles up after 6 days and I write this whilst taking the first watch at 2100. We are now well into the tropics and the Trade Winds have set in at 15-20 kts as advertised for this time of year. We landed three fish today and lost the lure to a fourth. We had one for lunch – there is no better tasting fish than one you caught yourself. Maybe our investment in a rod and reel was not pie in the sky! Our book on marine life has left us with some uncertainty of what we have caught, but the general view is that they were female or young Dorado.

There is no time to get bored or even to read a book at the moment. Yesterday started with the need to fix the vang because the shackle had parted. This required heat and brute force to separate the sleeves. Once this was done, we flew the cruising chute whilst goose winged. Unfortunately, David accidentally let the sheet go and the consequent wrap around the forestay resulted in the sail being wrecked. At least we were eventually able to recover the remains without resort to me ascending the mast. All-in-all, this was not a good day.

Our other challenge is that the water maker high pressure pump motor decided to stop working overnight. It is heavy and awkward to get at (it is in a boat after all), and when tested it looks as though the start relay electronics have packed up. Everyone is on short rations for washing until I can sort this out one way or another. We have more than sufficient bottled water on board and 700/900 litres of potable water, but it will be disappointing not to be able to take a shower whenever we feel like it. However, my problem is that the last time I 'did' AC motors was at school, so I just hope that Nigel Calder's book might help!

The days seem to melt into one another in that we seem to have been at sea for ever and yet only just left – it is very strange. Otherwise, we have been lucky that dolphins have come to play on several occasions and the odd shearwater has passed by. We saw a tanker pass a couple of miles away last evening but other than that we have been on our own. We have decided to run a sweepstake on our arrival time at a waypoint 100nms out of Antigua. It has got everybody concentrating on their navigation. Meanwhile, I continue to practice my skills with the sextant. The noon sight is relatively easy, but the star shots are more challenging from a constantly moving platform – not least because you have to identify the stars before you shoot them! Luckily, we have Starry Night on the computer and apart from being a source of wonder for everyone on board, it has been a planetary education. At night there needs to be some light to see the horizon – moonlight or twilight being the best source. That said, as ever, the more I practice the luckier I get! However, I wonder what we would do without GPS in this day and age. I hope the Americans don't decide to turn it off!

Our first 1000 miles was achieved yesterday afternoon and we celebrated with some bubbles in the evening whilst eating the fish that we caught the day before and that David cooked. This was his first culinary adventure since he has been living with us since October. Our decision to run an arrival sweepstake at a point 100 miles out from Antigua has revealed that Tom and I think we will arrive on the 26th, Sarah and David on 27th, Gemma on the 28th and Annabel on the 30th. The ship's clock was formally retarded one hour to mark 30W at noon on 17th January. Jet lag is not going to be a problem this trip! I managed to jury rig the HP water maker pump so that I could start it by turning the shaft by wrapping a cord around it like an outboard motor. It runs for about 30 minutes before getting too hot but that makes sufficient water (30ltrs x 3 x daily) to keep up with our domestic usage more or less. Showers are once again approved!

We are going to use the laptop to update our position on Yotreps/Shiptrak from now on to see if it works properly. We have been sending it regularly from the boat computer, but it does not seem to have been updating our position. However, we heard from Gemma today that we have had our first success and our dot has moved from the Canaries!

We are currently 1250 miles down track at 1820N 3135W and have taken the decision to go further S as there is a low forecast in the next 48 hours to the N of us. Tom advises that the hurricane season is over so there is nothing to worry about!

It seems that Murphy's Law abounds in the high seas also. This year we arrived (intentionally) in Las Palmas just after the ARC had left. We then had planned to be in Lanzarote because all the children could be with us for Christmas and this would be the first time we would be all together for a number of years, albeit that they came and went when we were skiing in all of the previous years.

According to all the information we have on the Trade Winds, they should have settled in by December. However, this year's ARC had record crossing times and I am still searching for wind! I do not want to go further south because, at least here we have the lift from the North Equatorial Current which is pushing us on at 1.5 kts. It would make more sense to change

our destination to Barbados - but I promised Sarah many years ago when I took her on a trip to Antigua when I was flying B707s, that one day, I would bring her in a big yacht to English Harbour, and there is no time like the present! We are drifting along under main and poled out Yankee making just 6kts over the ground. It is 0230L as I write this with nothing other than the stars and phosphorescence to light our way. A wonderful lesson in patience!

Our 'back-of the fag-packet' menu calls for fish today but since our success with 3 Dorado ten days ago we have not managed to reel in any of the numerous strikes we have had. We seem to have left a trail of fish requiring restorative jaw surgery across this part of the Atlantic. So, once the sun comes up the pressure is on. I should have bought a book about fishing!

We have celebrated each 500 miles with a bottle of cava and each 1000 miles with a meal cooked by David or Tom and our track shows how we have tried to chase the winds. We alternately pole out and run, put ourselves on a broad reach, even set the spinnaker but nothing is going to stop Annabel from winning the sweepstake. Just occasionally Moonbeam picks up her skirts and shows us how she likes to cruise at 8kts, but this is going to be a slow crossing. Every cloud has a silver lining and of course, a slow crossing means slight seas. Given that this is our first long passage, I am more than happy with the result.

After spending a day repairing the ratchet on our reel, which had cost us a number of lures and many metres of line, we got a strike from a Dorado, which we fought close to the boat, only to lose it yet again. However, a little later we heard the reel screaming and Tom took the rod and fought a seriously large fish. When he got tired, I took over and fought it to the boat so that David could gaff it and bring it aboard. He was a magnificent Dorado measuring 1.30m, which we killed by pouring the ship's best vodka into his gills. We cut him into steaks and some fillets and put the rest back into the sea to become 'sea snow' in due course.

We have seen shearwaters, frigate birds, tropicbirds countless flying fish, occasional visits by schools of dolphins and at last a yacht! Steinlager 2 appeared from our port quarter under spinnakers and overtook us en-route to Antigua. We took some great photos of her and perhaps we will meet up with them at some point - just 375nms to go.

Our last clock change took place on 31st January, having clocked up 3000 miles the night before. At last land ahoy!

We anchored in English Harbour at 1830L on 31stJanuary 2007 with 3184nms on the GPS clock. The trip from Las Palmas has taken us 22 days 4hours and 30 minutes. A well-deserved bottle of champagne was gratefully shared between the four of us. What a fantastic feeling – truly a dream come true. I think a rest is in order!

The First 2700 miles of Caribbean Cruising, February – August 2007

So much for a rest! Sitting here in Martinique a month after the official start of the hurricane season, it seems a very long time ago that we first arrived in Antigua. Before David left us to return to England, we were moored stern-to on English Harbour's Dockyard Marina when we

were hailed ‘Are you really from Dartmouth?’ It turned out to be neighbours of ours, Colin and Angie Campbell, who were visiting their daughter – a small world indeed!

Our plotter has a log on it and when it prints it looks like a child’s scribbling over the Lesser Antilles as we seem to have been up and down like a yo-yo. We set off initially towards Tortola via Nevis and St Kitts as we had never before visited the BVIs.

Both Nevis and St Kitts were laid back, friendly islands with high mountains dropping into the sea. On Nevis next to the up-market Four Seasons Hotel an enterprising guy called ‘Sunshine’ had set up a beach bar and his speciality rum drinks called ‘killer bees’ were just that! We didn’t linger long before setting off for Road Harbour and as we sailed into the Sir Francis Drake channel, Tom said “it looks like the Solent during Cowes week” – well true enough but at least 20C warmer! Our first impressions were that we had arrived in the Bahamas because everything was very American – especially the prices! I don’t think we had appreciated just how active the charter market was here but then Moorings alone had a base with over 200 yachts.

Inevitably this put pressure on good anchorages and moorings and contrasted significantly to what we had experienced previously in the Caribbean. It meant that in order to find special places it was necessary to ‘read between the lines’ of the cruising guide. This is something we will be better at next time around. A visit to the BVIs is apparently not complete without eating lobster at Anegada. This is an island that is first recognised by palm trees growing out of the sea, because it is so flat. The approach is quite shallow for us with a draft of 2.3m and we duly anchored in the bay showing less than 3m. Now it would be true to say that I have largely ignored tides since departing the Canaries because the tidal range is generally so small in the Caribbean. It was only after we touched bottom that I looked to find that the tidal range in Anegada was in excess of a metre. No harm done other than to the skipper’s pride! However, Sarah was most displeased when Tom told her that George Clooney was dining at a table behind her but didn’t do so until after we had left the restaurant.

After a few more days we set off for St Martin for some French cuisine. We had chartered previously from here and were delighted that it was much as we remembered. The contrast between the ex - English islands and the French Antilles is stark. As we were later to confirm in Guadaloupe and Martinique, to all intents and purposes you have arrived in France. The supermarkets are well stocked, the roads are covered with tarmac and for the most part it is like being home in Mougins.

We spent 3 pleasant days in Marigot bay before it was time to head back towards Antigua for Tom to fly home. It was a rough ride overnight into the teeth of the trade winds but in the morning, we were rewarded when Sarah spotted a pod of whales. We anchored in English Harbour so we could have a final meal together in ‘Abracadabra’, an Italian restaurant that is just outside the dockyard and which had survived there for 17 years.

Tom left us so that he could attend interviews and he subsequently accepted a position as a trainee accountant with a London firm starting the middle of August. Sarah and I were on the

boat together by ourselves for the first time since June last year and although we missed Tom's company, it was not going to be for long!

We set off for Guadeloupe and spent a couple of days in Deshaies where we hired a car and drove to Point à Pìtre via a magnificent coast road and then through the rain forest. As advertised in the cruising guide, Point à Pìtre has a huge marina with lots of facilities and, of course is the finishing point for the Route de Rhum transatlantic race. There were several big trimarans both on the hard and in the water, having stayed here after the last race. We decided it would be sensible to come here to affect some repairs, and so we booked ourselves in.

Anyway, we set off in the interim with the intention of visiting Basse-Terre, the capital, but we gave up after a number of unsuccessful attempts to anchor off the town on a ledge a few metres wide with a vertical drop-off to a depth of over 200 metres. This worked to our advantage because we sailed on to Les Saintes. These are an enchanting group of small islands just south of Guadeloupe with daily excursion boats from there just like the islands off Brittany. It was then a short run back to Point à Pìtre for repairs to sails, spray hood, dinghy, davits and 101 other small items.

After a week it was time to return to Antigua to pick up Sarah's sister and brother-in-law, Joanna and Tony Ferguson. We had invited them to join us for a cruise to celebrate their 40th wedding anniversary. When Tony had been looking at flights out to the Caribbean, I had glanced at the chart and suggested they arrive in Antigua and depart from Tobago. After all it was only a couple of inches on the chart. However, when I started working on an itinery for the 15 days they were to be with us, it was destined to be a longer cruise than I thought!

Anyway, we moored stern-to in English Harbour and collected them from the airport, having got the journey down to a fine art. There is only one signpost on Antigua as far as we can make out, but the road map helpfully identifies the position of the two sets of traffic lights and all the gas stations. It being a Thursday, we took them up to Shirley Heights for a rum punch, steel band and the spectacular view of the harbour. We decided to make the most of the hire car and so the following day we drove through the rain forest to Jolly Harbour for supplies. Later in the evening we had a celebration meal in 'Abracadabra'.

Our first sail was back to Deshaies in Guadeloupe so that Joanna, Sarah, and Tony could visit the lovely botanical gardens situated above the town. We lingered a day and then drifted on down to Dominica and anchored in Prince Rupert Bay. The choice of Portsmouth for our first visit to Dominica was not one of our best as the town is rather seedy and run down. So, after a quick look we decided to move on, but I needed to clear in and out. By now, of course, I was well used to the bureaucracy of checking the boat and crew into and out of each island. Without making fun of the formalities, there seemed to be a number of rules common to all the Caribbean islands:

1. You have to hit an opening time for customs and separately immigration, which were often not in the same offices, and which could be situated some distance apart.
2. You needed to plan not less than half a day for the exercise.
3. You had to keep a sense of humour at all times (for example: in Antigua the six copies of the form required for the boat inbound and outbound, and two each for every crew member had to be stamped by both customs and immigration. So, a visit to Antigua resulted in two passport stamps, 24 stamps for the boat and four each for the crew customs and immigration forms, all individually initialled).
4. The rules change from day to day depending on the whim of the customs and immigration officers on duty.
5. The rules are different port to port on the same island and completely different on each island.

I explain this because in Deshaies the customs window was open for about half an hour three days a week, and although I had a departure clearance from Antigua, on this occasion I had neither an arrival nor departure clearance from Guadeloupe. Whilst I was filling in the forms in customs in Portsmouth, a skipper from a French yacht who was ahead of me was asked for his departure clearance from Deshaies which, of course, like me he didn't have. An unbelievable conflagration erupted with the customs chief shouting at him that if he came into his port, he must obey his rules. Failing to do so was going to result in a large fine and he was duly led away never to be seen again! I was very sad for his plight but extremely grateful that whilst all this was going on I had enough time to cross out Deshaies as the departure point on all of the forms and substitute English Harbour before it was my turn for interrogation.

We moved on to St Pierre in Martinique and as a contrast we were able to check-in in an internet café – but this is France! In Fort-de-France a couple of days later, we hired a car for a tour around the east coast and found a disused rum distillery. We had a pleasant lunch there amongst the farm animals that were free to roam around the open-air restaurant – very French! The drive back through the rain forest was spectacular.

Onward to Bequia which we would not have made if I had not altered course to avoid being run down by Sea Princess, who turned across us in open water. We were sailing and showing the correct lights and had right of way or in technical terms we were the stand-on vessel. Having asked on the radio if she could see us on her port quarter and ascertained that she could, I made my displeasure plain on channel 16, so I have no doubt that the officer-of-the-watch had some explaining to do to her Captain.

We stayed in Bequia for three days. The Yankee had torn on a seam and was repaired by Whitfield sails. He did such a good job that we left the cruising chute with him for an estimate and later, subsequent repair. But the nicest surprise was finding Jonathan Baker on Arabella, our sister Oyster 55, last seen in Ipswich. Apart from being a really nice guy, Jonathan had provided all sorts of sound advice having owned Arabella for nine years and made several Atlantic crossings. He used his diving gear and replaced our prop anodes, one

of which was missing and the other loose. We enjoyed the first of several pleasant evenings together.

We left to spend a day in the Tobago Cays and then departed for Tobago as time was running out for Joanna and Tony. We arrived in Scarborough at 0145 and were disconcerted not to see any other yachts at anchor. This is because all the visiting yachts anchor in the beautiful adjacent bays. We didn't know this because needless to say it was not until we had set out for Tobago that we discovered our cruising guide ran out at Grenada, and we needed another edition for Trinidad and Tobago. Actually, our paper charts didn't cover it either although, of course our electronic ones did. The entry procedures were the most complex yet and in fact when Sarah and I checked much later and were standing in the queue, we were advised by a local to "be patient and send out for food and water".

We moved around to Store Bay which is quite beautiful and had a lovely farewell meal in the prestigious Coco Reef Resort. We saw Jo and Tony off having had lots of fun and laughed a lot, hoping that they will be able to join us again someday.

Sarah and I were alone again and after another couple of days set off for Grenada. A trip to St Georges underlined the devastation caused by hurricane 'Ivan' in 2004. The three major churches which lost their roofs in the hurricane sadly had still not been repaired and were open to the elements.

We then returned to Bequia via Union Island and met up again with Arabella, and subsequently left on Easter day bound for Martinique. We stopped overnight in Marigot Bay having arrived after customs had shut and departed the following morning before they opened. However, we were sadly disappointed to see that the development around the bay that has occurred in the 15 years since we were last here has substantially destroyed the magnificence of this natural harbour.

Our destination was Le Marin yacht harbour. This is a place where you can buy an engine off the shelf – a worthy substitute for the skipper's contentment to a Sears hardware department! We spent three days cleaning and polishing the stainless steel and topsides in preparation for the Oyster Antigua Regatta. By the time we left (exhausted) Moonbeam sparkled. She sported new mainsail and yankee sheets as well as fuel and oil filters for her machinery. It was now time to return to Antigua to pick up Chrissie and Rory Macleod.

Oyster Antigua Regatta

What a fantastic week! The Oyster Antigua Regatta was hardly the sort of racing that was about to start in the Antigua Sailing Week, but nevertheless, I hadn't 'bashed the cans' since we were in Scotland nearly 20 years ago. Rory had not raced since dinghy racing at school and the girls had never raced. Each race was to be to a different Bay/Venue for evening entertainment hosted by Oyster. We assembled stern-to alongside Arabella on the dockyard with the 23 other Oysters and registered the following day and had drinks in front of the Copper and Lumber store in the evening.

The first race was to Green Island and apart from a (very) near miss when the topping lift parted as we rounded the first mark, all was well. I had eventually got over my apprehension of sailing Moonbeam in close proximity to 24 other big yachts on the start line, once I stopped thinking about the consequences of racing our home! The dinner in Harmony Hall was in an outstanding setting.

Race 2 was to Ffryes beach for a barbeque and Thursday was a much-needed rest day in Jolly Harbour as a result. Race 3 ended in Deep Bay with the evening entertainment in the Andes restaurant and Race 4 was back to Marmura Bay for prize giving in the magnificent Docksider restaurant. We had beaten Arabella for the first time!

Moonbeam came 6/11 which in predominately light airs was a creditable performance, but she took the prize for Concours d'Elegance for the best presented Oyster in her class. This was no doubt a consolation prize for all the work I did in Ipswich polishing her and painting her lines! There are some stunning photos of the week (many taken by helicopter) on photoaction.com. But the spectacle of the evening was when the waitress staff and chef got on to the dance floor for a jump-up. The female chef, who was not a small lady, managed to dance so that her buttocks moved up and down in the vertical plane independently - much like Ballou in Jungle Book!

Sunday took us back to English Harbour where we had to say a sad goodbye to Rory and Chrissie. They had been the perfect boat guests and real fun as racing crew. We wished them well sailing their Oyster 'Barefoot' in the Mediterranean and hope they will join us again. On Wednesday we said a fond farewell to Jonathan and Mike some very special friends from Arabella. Alone once more!

It is a mystery to me that something that spends most of its life sitting on the water all day doing very little requires so much TLC – not to mention cash! It had taken a week to track down the cause of air bubbles in the generator fuel line which appeared after I changed the fuel filters. You would (well I would) have thought that 2+2=4 and that there was a problem with the filter bowl seal etc. No – it turned out to be corrosion in the fuel line and fuel pump, a co-incidence that has taken days to sort out. Luckily, I had a spare fuel pump – I wonder if I should get another one.

Other than that, it took several days to recover sufficiently to set off again for Deshaies as we wandered slowly south again to meet Simon and Gemma who planned to join us in Grenada. However, when we dropped anchor in the bay, the first of some very expensive problems presented itself. The windlass overheat protection tripped and on further investigation the motor had burned out because the gearbox was stripped. Now it is true to say that the windlass and winches were on my list of 'scheduled' maintenance, but sadly they had never got to the top of it. This is because there never seems to have been the time because I always have to fix things that break or have mysteriously stopped working, and these have a higher priority.

Although we swiftly got quite adept at lifting the anchor using a jury rig and a primary winch, it was clearly necessary to replace the windlass. Needless to say, Lewmar did not make this

model anymore and in any case could not source the replacement model in the Caribbean. So, when we reached Le Marin, I replaced it with a Lofrans X3, which I was able to purchase for a £1000 less than the Lewmar. It did not precisely fit the holes but then neither would the replacement Lewmar, so some adjustment and making good was required.

We now had only five days to get down to Grenada, so we decided to return to Bequia which had become a favourite spot for us. Another Thursday evening at the Frangipani which included a barbeque and jump up was, as ever, a delight. Of course, having been bitten by the windlass problem, I decided to service the electric winches. Too late! The starboard primary winch needed a new gearbox due to salt-water ingress resulting in a bearing seized and the gearbox partially stripped. It came as no surprise that Lewmar don't do that spare any more – you have to buy the gearbox with the motor attached at £750. That was finally sourced in Connecticut and arrived after 3 weeks in Grenada. As I write this, we still await some £500 worth of parts for delivery in the UK to finally make the winch serviceable. Lewmar have a ridiculous and hopeless 12- week delivery schedule, if they are nil stock on an item. This means that we have been without a primary winch for two and a half months. This is pretty poor service for winches that cost £12k a pair! In both cases of the windlass and winch, a timely replacement of a £5 deck seal would have prevented the damage from the salt-water. A very expensive lesson!

We met Gemma and Simon and spent the first day touring Grenada by car. We found a rum distillery employing 90 local people and manufacturing rum traditionally using machinery made in England in the seventeenth century. The waterwheel and crusher looked as though it still had many years of use left in it. We then drifted up to Cariacou where we had a lovely dinner overlooking the bay in Hillsborough. We stayed off Petit St Vincent for a day. It is an up-market resort and is surrounded by a picture book beach and then we spent a few days in the Tobago Cays. We wanted to keep the passage making down as Gemma was newly pregnant and still suffering a little from being unwell.

A visit to Mustique enabled us to have a beach barbeque where the island staff came to clear up after us! Then we sailed back to Clarkes Court Bay marina, via Bequia and Canouan. Canouan boasts the Raffles resort along with much Italian investment. They are in the process of demolishing a hill and using the spoil to reclaim land to extend the runway in order to take heavy jets. It will be interesting to see how the island develops once this work is complete.

Sadly, it was time for Gemma and Simon to return to work and so they left us to fly home via Barbados on the 27th May. It had been lovely to have them with us. In the meantime. we un-bent the sails, cleaned the dinghy, and generally tidied the boat before leaving Moonbeam ourselves for a visit to the UK. We got home in time to celebrate my sister, Linda's 60th birthday party which was held on a boat on the river Thames on a glorious summer's evening. We visited with Jane and Willem Westermann, who plan to sail to the Galapagos Islands with us next year, and to celebrate his 60th birthday party which was held in their garden also on a lovely summer's day.

Our trip included a flying visit to Malta to take possession of our new flat and to arrange for the completion of our Maltese tax affairs. We dealt with piles of paperwork that had built up since our departure as well as the accounts for the block of flats at Woodsome Lodge, as I am still chairman of the association. Sarah's birthday was celebrated in Kew, where we were joined by Gemma, Simon, Annabel, and Tom for dinner. After 17 days, it was time for us to return to Grenada, so our visit seemed to have flown by.

Moonbeam was as we had left her with the exception that she had grown a garden of weed and barnacles. When Tom arrived a couple of days later, our plan was to sail north back to Martinique. This was because we had been having all sorts of problems with the anchor chain not matching the gypsy on our new windlass. In addition, I wanted more chain than the 60 metres we had to be sure that we had enough when we went through the Pacific. However, when we set off, we had to divert back into Prickly Bay with the engine overheating. This was tracked down to the prop being covered with growth whist trying to drive the boat covered with weed (after changing the impeller and washing out the cooling system – of course).

We took a leisurely eight days to return to Le Marin without incident via Cariacou and Bequia. However, our decision to break the trip from Bequia to Martinique by stopping overnight in Chataeubelair bay in St Vincent resulted in a visit by a cat burglar. Fortunately, the only thing that happened was that he robbed us of Sarah's telephone and camera, my leatherman and a sea-sickness relief band watch that had served the crew well for many months. We emailed Chris Doyle, the author of the cruising guide, who replied that he was recommending locking yourselves in at night in Chateaubelair Bay in the next edition. All-in-all it was a lesson to be more careful.

We spent 10 days in Le Marin, where we replaced 20 metres of our existing chain with 60 metres of new 12mm chain which was correctly sized for our gypsy, before we returned to Bequia. This was so that we could spend a few days in the Tobago Cays as Tom had not been there for over 15 years. We decided to plan ahead a little and concluded that we would be missing out if we dashed off to the ABC Islands.

This was so we could return to Tobago and explore it some more. This turned out to be delightful. We were in Plymouth for the local heritage festival which is a celebration of the island's cultural and artistic history. We hired a car and drove around the island before moving further up the west coast. We anchored in the beautifully unspoilt Englishman's Bay with no other yachts and just the Pelicans to provide entertainment - an occasion never to be forgotten.

When we returned to Store Bay it was with a heavy heart to have a final meal with Tom in the Coco Reef before he returned to start his training later in the month. So, we are alone once more! I had noticed that the propeller anode was missing again and decided to do a PADI refresher course. I had not been diving since I did my original course in 2001 in Mauritius. This was so I could rent some diving equipment in order to replace the anode and to scrape Moonbeam's bottom. I enjoyed the refresher dive very much, but I was surprised that I needed two tanks of air to complete the tasks under the boat. I have to say that we were

growing our own coral reef down below, but hopefully this will keep her clean enough until we lift her when we return to the UK when Gemma gives birth. We plan to get some diving gear of our own.

Caribbean Cruising, towards the Pacific

Updated 22 March 2008

So, after a few more pleasant days in Store Bay we departed for Trinidad. Even the taxi drivers in Tobago warned us that Trinidad was dangerous, and we had to take great care.

The sailing guide said the passage was rich with fish and true to form we caught 4 tuna in the first hour of fishing, so with the freezer stocked we took in the line and had a magnificent sail on a broad reach. We headed for La Vache Bay with a plan to risk the wrath of customs and overnight there. However, when we saw that we were the only boat in the bay and that due to the steep-to nature of the shore that we would have to anchor a few metres off the beach, it did not take long for us to abandon the plan and make direct for Chaguaramas.

After clearing customs, which was a breeze compared to Tobago, we spent a night on a buoy and then moved to Coral Cove Marina nose-to between wonky piles with a short concrete finger. This is only relevant because a few days later the wind went into the southwest and built up a vicious and dangerous swell. Happily, the boat on the other side of the finger was much smaller than us and we had no one in the adjacent berth. This was because once the swell had built up, we were trapped and the rolling was sufficient to have caused terrible rigging damage if the masts had touched. The rolling was sufficient for Moonbeam to relieve the concrete finger of a substantial cleat, but otherwise there was no other damage.

Apart from that we had a pleasant stay which was longer than we originally planned. We met up with Mike and Shiho on Calypso Flyer, last seen in Las Palmas and who were still living on their boat awaiting their house to be finished. They had been recently married and we met them for a shark and bake, a dinner on Moonbeam and as a guest of a friend of Mike's. They were very kind to us and shuttled us around and showed us where to provision etc. Now it is true to say that Chaguaramas bay is filthy but apart from that extremely convenient for getting things done and getting spares etc. Moonbeam was properly placarded at last, her generator and engine serviced. Repairs to the dinghy and davits were completed and even the oven ignition made to work (it needed a new battery)! Her hull was cleaned with gunk to get the diesel stains off her and after much dithering Scuba equipment was acquired and a kayak ordered for collection in Curacao. One really nice surprise was filling the tank with diesel priced at 25US cents per imperial gallon!

After three weeks of indecision, we finally made up our minds to give Venezuela a miss and leave Trinidad direct for the ABC islands. A number of things conspired to arrive at this decision. Firstly, the dangers alluded to in Trinidad were real. Even around the busy marinas it was not recommended that you go out of the security gates at night unless in a taxi. In fact, one of the staff of a nearby restaurant was gratuitously murdered on the way home whilst we were there, and much the same sort of threat was evident along much of the Venezuelan

coast. Secondly, we had both spent time in Caracas when I was flying and the hassle of checking in and out for what would be a short stay did not appeal.

In the end it turned out to be a good decision. Our email to friends and loved ones is re-printed:

"Just a quick email in case you saw or heard in the news about the weather in the Caribbean.

To quote from Chris Doyle's cruising guide for Venezuela and the ABC islands:

"This whole region is considered to be south of the hurricane belt, which is why many people visit during the summer. However, one or two have hit during the last few hundred years……."

We have just experienced the passing of hurricane 'Felix' whose eye passed 45nms to the north of us a few hours ago! So, we should be OK for the next 50 years or so. We are remarkably lucky. We had lingered in Trinidad longer than we originally planned before setting off for Curacao to meet Annabel who is due to arrive next Wednesday. Part of the reason for this was so we could experience a long sail (475nms) on our own to see how we would manage short-handed. The other issue is that it seemed like a real hassle to go via Venezuela for a short stay, and we could spend more time on the way back to Trinidad if we wanted.

Initially we set off for Bonaire and picked up a buoy off Kralendijk on Thursday evening. However, next morning, we could not start the outboard motor for the dinghy and at the same time we were met by friendly 'yachties' who were talking about the adverse wind reversal that was expected later over the weekend. Faced with the thought of paddling the dinghy and standing off for the wind reversal, we decided to forget Bonaire for the present and head off for Curacao. We had a quick look in the cruising guide and booked a slot in Seru Boca marina in Spaanse Water.

After a quick crossing we duly tied up in the marina and when I did my daily check of NOAA's web site for the weather was horrified to see that the tropical disturbance that was due to cause the wind reversal had developed into a tropical storm 'Felix'. This later developed into a hurricane which we tracked continuously on the website.

Now as luck would have it the cruising guide happens to say "……Seru Boca is seen as a protected hurricane hole in the mangroves……" and here we are safe and sound, albeit that Moonbeam has had a severe deck wash!

Of course, the only downside to this story is that I cannot say that I planned it!

Will be in touch shortly once we have dried out!"

In fact, the anemometer at the top of the mast never registered over 30 kts although we could hear the wind screaming at over 100kts above us. However, apart from the deluge, Curacao and Bonaire came through remarkably unscathed. Nevertheless, it is as close as I ever want to be to a 'named storm' if I can help it!!

After this unexpected excitement, Annabel arrived on time, with luggage and bearing spares and we spent a few days exploring the Island before setting off for Bonaire again. Annabel completed her PADI course and Sarah the theory but only two confined water dives. She had a major confidence problem which will need lots of time to sort out.

All too quickly it was time to return to Curacao so Annabel could go home via JFK. On our way back she caught a dorado, but as she was reeling it in it was taken by a much bigger fish together with the lure and a 100mtrs of line. We were able to check the Law Society's Register before she left and were delighted to see her listed as a solicitor. Qualified at last!

We returned to Bonaire because our kayak had not yet arrived on the Island. We knew this because when I checked in at Seru Boca, the manager told me I had come to collect it – a small island indeed! Also, there was no need for a car in Bonaire whereas being without one in Curacao was inconvenient to say the least. However, on 5th October, the anniversary of our departure from Ipswich, we returned to Curacao to become proud owners of a kayak. We had come to the conclusion whilst we were trying to land the dinghy in the surf in Antigua and Tobago that we would not be able to manage to pull it up with just the two of us. It weighs 90 kilos without the 25HP Yamaha on it. We knew from our reading that dinghy docks in the Pacific islands are few and far between, and apart from that kayaking is fun!

With the kayak on board, we returned to Bonaire only to experience total autopilot failure. This was, of course, to remind us of how difficult it would be to sail a cruising boat for long distances without one. Fortunately, I have a spare a/p computer and a spare linear drive unit, of which there are two on the steering quadrant. After a couple of telephone calls and much troubleshooting, the problem was revealed as stripped gears in one drive unit and a failure of a drive pinion in the other. One problem had probably been hiding the other for some time. The upshot was that I was able to rob the spare drive unit to get both working again whilst spares were ordered up from England.

We had lots of fun with Nigel and Chelsea from 'Amuri Mina' and Tony and Heidi from 'World Citizen'. Chelsea was a marine biologist and took me for a dive which helped raise my confidence level a fraction. We had lunch with Louise and Gary from 'Lulu' last seen in the Oyster regatta in Antigua. We shall always remember their opening question when we met them – "do you sail?" They had just returned from a two-month trip to China and had had a great time. It was good to meet up with them again.

Finally, it was time to return to Curacao. We had booked Moonbeam to come out of the water at Curacao Marine in Willemstad for early November. Sarah wanted to fly home on 31st October so that she could be with Gemma for the last few weeks of her pregnancy and to greet Eloise Poppy on her safe arrival into the world on 19th November and I planned to go home at the end of the month. On the way back we were just saying that this was about the place where Annabel lost her fish when the reel screamed, and we had a strike probably from a tuna. Whilst I was reeling it in the rod bent double and the line snatched off the reel. This time a huge Marlin jumped out of the water. Now how weird is that?

During our time in the ABCs, we had to come up with a schedule so that Willem and Jane Westermann could book flights. They had planned to join us for the trip through the Panama Canal and out to the Galapagos islands. By now a long-term plan for us was what we were going to do after lunch, so looking further afield was somewhat of a challenge. We came up with the following:

The Moonbeam Pacific plan for 2008

Cyclone season is December to March. Very occasional cyclones reach the Marquesas in March but have done so. According to the Hawaii cyclone data bank very few have reached the Marquesas in the last ten years (didn't help us with Felix!!!!!!)

This means that we should plan our arrival in the Marquesas in the beginning of April 2008, to maximise our time in the South Pacific before we have to run for New Zealand to miss the start of the cyclone season in December. Galapagos – Marquesas (Cruz – Atuora) = 2971nms which is approximately 20 days sailing +/- @ 150 nms/day. This means departing Galapagos not before March 10th, 2008.

Allowing seven days for touring the Galapagos Islands this would mean an arrival there on March 2nd 2008.

Panama – Cristobal = 912nms which is approximately 6 days sailing +/- @ 150 nms/day, or 91/2 days @ 100nms/day. The cruising guide advises that the weather can be varied at this time of year and that we should leave with full tanks in case the wind does not appear, also that south or southwest winds are common, and if time permits, we should wait for the ITCZ to move north, however this is not a viable planning criterion. If we allow 9 days for the passage Balboa – Cristobel, then we should plan to leave Balboa on 23rd February or thereabouts.

Transiting the Panama Canal is any bodies guess by the looks of it but being optimistic I would suggest that we leave ten days for the transit (a week hanging around and three days to get through). By all accounts the hanging around is made most pleasant by visiting the San Blas islands. That would mean that it would be good to arrive in Panama on or before 14th February 2008.

Now before that I think we shall be there for at least a week to ten days so that we can be sure that we are organised – well as much as we ever are!

I wonder how the log will compare to the above????????

Refit

Once Sarah had returned home, I re-varnished the galley, Tom's cabin, and the companionway. Varnishing is not easy when the daytime temperature is over 30C. During this time a gin palace in the Curacao Yacht Club caught fire and was set adrift Happily the wind was kind enough to blow it onto rocks on the island a few hundred metres away,

because the damage it could have wreaked in the anchorage in Spanish Water doesn't bear thinking about.

Once Moonbeam was ashore, her lines were scrubbed, rubbed down and re-painted. Her hull was cleaned and polished and 4US gallons of Awlgrip antifouling applied to her bottom. The antifouling had stood up fairly well in all but a few places, but her waterline areas were in very poor condition. I was able to download some pictures of my new granddaughter. I was yet to feel the joy of holding her as I was not returning until the end of the month.

The sea cocks were serviced, and the strainers renewed, and new hoses put in the aft heads. They had become calcified, and we had only just discovered why boats in the tropics carry so much white vinegar. Subsequently, the forward heads were serviced; all the stainless cleaned and polished. The max-prop was serviced, and new anodes fitted before I flew home to greet Eloise and have Christmas at home.

We returned via a Miami night-stop in style on 4thJanuary, laden down with spares once again. Repairs to the sea cocks, heads etc. were completed, the hull and topsides polished and the galley sole re-varnished. The immersion heater was found to be the cause of an earth leak and the replacement flown out from England by Fedex cost more than our Miami night-stop! At last Moonbeam was ready for the water and she was re-launched into her natural environment on 11th January 2008 – in the sunshine!

A few days in Spanish Water allowed us time to make up our minds to miss out on Cartagena on the promise that we would visit on another occasion. So, on 19th January we set off for Panama with a benign forecast for the next five days.

How wrong! This was my email to family and friends on our safe arrival in the San Blas Islands with 10,000 miles on the clock. Congratulations Moonbeam!

"We are safe and sound in the San Blas Islands in Panama. We arrived last evening after an exhausting 4 days having left on a good forecast weather window. However, we have done gales for this year, 2008 - I hope. Running before force 7 -9 for 36 hours was not much fun. There is a comment that hereabouts there are square waves. Nonsense I thought. Well wrong again! I have never seen such a confused sea. We were falling down a mountain in complete control and got side swiped by a monster from abeam – but regularly! Moonbeam doesn't care and behaves impeccably but the rolling in the confused seas of Columbia has left its marks on our bodies in the form of multi-coloured bruises. It is said to be one of the 5 worst passages in the world – lived up to its reputation in spades and makes me determined not to attempt the other 4! For us, I learnt that the storm boards should have been in. Nothing should be left to secure 'once we get going.' Our tried and tested prepared meals for the first 3 days is essential, even with a cook who has a cast iron stomach. For the skipper we know that we should expect that 'shit happens' but I am proud of the courage and resilience of my crew and hope that she will take confidence in the experience. This passage has made me feel older and wiser than any before. I recognised that Sarah was frightened (she was not alone) yet she did really well. I think it will add to her confidence downstream. For us - thank you Oyster Marine for a sound hull and rigging."

Notes: Running on bare poles in force 9 = 5 – 6 kts. A pocket handkerchief of Yankee in these conditions is much better for autopilot control than staysail alone. Mainsail, even with preventer is – potentially lethal. We had an uncontrolled a/p gybe, that was so powerful that it stretched the preventer to allow the boom to gybe – not nice and we now need some stainless repairs for the bimini!

A delightful few days were spent in Paradise amongst 'Man Friday' islands populated by Kuna Yala Indians. This was certainly one of the most beautiful areas we have visited this trip and deserved a much longer stay. We spent a few fruitful hours replacing the satellite cable for the third time in the vain hope it would improve our connectivity with the Iridium network (it didn't). But, as the end of January approached and we had to be in Colon for the arrival of Jane and Willem Westermann on 7th February, we decided to leave the San Blas islands and set off for Portobello.

One short stop ashore revealed a very, very poor town even though it is on the world heritage site listing. Even the locals take their outboards home with them at night. On then to Colon, to Shelter Bay Marina to see the departure of the Blue Water Rally yachts and the haphazard arrival of the World ARC yachts. Moonbeam's previous owner was amongst them on Kealoha 8. Kealoha means 'I love you' in Hawaiian and was Moonbeam's previous name.

It was time to start provisioning for the Pacific and particularly dry stores were acquired to supplement those obtained in Curacao. We also made contact with Toto in the Panama Yacht Club. He was to provide us with rental ropes and tyres for our transit of the Panama Canal. But that is for another story.

Into the Pacific

When we arrived in Shelter Bay Marina, we were advised that they could only put us up for a couple of nights because they were expecting the ARC boats. The Panama Yacht Club was full and so it looked as though we would have to move to the assigned anchorage off Colon. However, with the departure of the Blue Water Rally boats and the non or late arrival of the ARC boats, we were able to stay until our own transit was scheduled.

The downside of Shelter Bay Marina is that it is 15km from Colon. The road routes via the Gatun locks which have to be crossed so if a ship is arriving or departing the locks, up to 45 minutes could be spent watching them. This, of course was fascinating to observe how the lines were attached to the locomotives and how they manoeuvred them into the lock. The marina ran a courtesy bus at 0800 every morning to the main shopping area and supermarket on the outskirts of Colon. It returned at about 1130 but the taxi fare was only $15 and was more convenient when laden with provisions.

We were determined not to use an agent if we could avoid doing so. Consequently, we reported to the Port Captain's office and duly waited whilst a new Zarpe was handwritten. This was free of charge, but only got us as far as Balboa, the other end of the canal.

The general advice not to wander around in downtown Colon was probably well founded because much of the area appears to be very poor and rundown. As a result, we went everywhere by taxi which was a very cheap form of transport. Anywhere within the city cost $1. Lunch at the Panama Yacht Club enabled us to meet Tito who was to hire us 4 x warps for $60 and 12 tyre fenders at $3 each although a collection charge at the other end in Balboa was a further $1. He advised us that we would have to have the warps on board for the Admeasurer's inspection.

Duly laden with the warps we set off next day in search of the Admeasurer's office. Now it would not be unfair to say that both the sailing guides we have for Panama are a bit short of useful information regarding the location of the Port Captain, Admeasurer and Immigration offices. This was no doubt because most people give up and use the (expensive) services of an agent, and they know where to go! Anyhow, after several wrong turns and misdirection, we finally found the Admeasurer's office located in the Cristobal Signal Station. A very helpful American black woman who manned the counter took our details and told us to expect the Admeasurer on the following day, Saturday.

He turned up as promised and determined us to be 60 feet from pulpit to davits which meant that we were to have an advisor rather than a pilot which would have been assigned if we were more than 65feet. He spent an hour on board, mainly filling out forms, but he did ask to hear the horn blast even though he did not look at Tito's warps. Having passed muster, we then needed to present ourselves at Citibank just across from the Port Captain's office and pay the transit fees; a job planned for Tuesday.

However, the banks were closed on Tuesday for carnival and were not due to open again until midday Wednesday. I had already returned the warps to Tito pending confirmation of our transit, but we decided to have lunch at the Panama Yacht Club in any case and go to the bank afterwards when it had re-opened. Towards the end of our lunch, we were approached by two mature American ladies, hailing from Texas, who introduced themselves as Doris and Alethea, and who enquired if we needed line-handlers. Now it is a requirement for the transit that there are on board a minimum of four line-handlers plus the skipper, so given that when Jane and Willem arrived, we would still be one short. They appeared very pleasant and were clearly very keen to join us for the transit. Alethea had her own sailing boat, so we agreed. It would be true to say that I wasn't really expecting to need them as the Admeasurer had indicated that we would almost certainly go through 'nested', or alongside a tug. In either of these events only two line-handlers would be active.

Needless to say, by the time I had explained the procedure for getting a scheduled transit time, and trying to get Doris's mobile phone to work, we arrived at the bank in time to see it closing for the day. We had hired a car earlier on in order to be able to drive to Panama to pick up Jane and Willem, so we decided to return the following morning when the bank opened for business.

With the transit fees paid we set off for Panama and located the port and shopping malls. Our guests arrived on time together with their luggage having had a very long day transiting

via Madrid and Guatemala. The following morning, I telephoned the scheduler and was offered a transit on Sunday 11th February, in three days' time, which we were delighted to accept. We needed to alert Tito for delivery of the warps and fenders and as we had the hire car for another day we went into Colon and explored the municipal market before having lunch once more at the Yacht Club.

On our way back we decided to follow the signs to Lorenzo fort and so began the first of what were to become known as the 'Westermann Adventures'. The drive to the fort was through a tropical rain forest forming part of a national park. The fort itself, originally built by the Spaniards to defend the mouth of the Gatun River and hence Panama itself commands a fantastic view over the approaches. Although the fort itself has been sacked and re-built a number of times the ruined remains are spectacular.

The last use of the fortifications was by the Americans in WW2 and the gun emplacement still exists (it was never fired in anger). We discovered a George the First canon amongst the Spanish armoury around the fort – no doubt a left over from one of the English occupations. After tiring of this we then went for a walkabout in the rain forest under Jane and Willem's expert guidance. We were rewarded with a troupe of howler monkeys crossing from tree to tree over our heads. Later on, amongst the fascinating flora we found leaf-eater ants and an agoti.

We returned to Moonbeam to find a note announcing that Doris and Alethea would be joining us at 1700 on Saturday. True to his word, Tito arrived bearing tyre-fenders and warps and we set about protecting our topsides from the possible damage in the locks. Our line-handlers pitched up as promised and we installed them in Tom's cabin and over dinner we started to get to know our new guests. Doris and been through the canal before on a cruise ship and as we were later to discover thought she was going to repeat the experience. She had a heart of gold and gave birth to a new Moonbeam expression – 'being Dorissed'. We were left with the impression that we were a charter crew and Sarah, and I should really have vacated the owner's stateroom for the duration of her visit!

Sunday morning was spent practising safe winch handling and throwing lines. Having been in the marina I had rather switched off, so when I ran the engine, it was to find I needed to drain and change the racor fuel filter. I then thought I had better check the navigation lights – only to find that the starboard light had gone open circuit! I had to do a quick jury-rig to get it going. Even so we set off after lunch in ample time to meet our scheduled rendezvous with our pilot who was due at 1600. He actually arrived with a colleague under training at 1800. The schedule had slipped, and we were not due to go through the first lock until 1930. There was much confusion because we had the impression that we were to go through in a nest, and indeed that is what our pilot was trying to negotiate with the two other pilots on board the other yachts. On the run into the first Gatun lock the nest was on and off half a dozen times and it was only as we were approaching the lock gates that it was finally confirmed that we were to go through individually in centre chamber, This meant that all four line handlers would be needed.

My concentration was tied to the tanker in the approach channel that I could almost touch on my port hand side. At the same time my pilot was insisting on a speed over the ground to make good the timing into the lock. All this was done with rather poor communication because his English or my understanding of his English was not very good. Nevertheless, we arrived in the first chamber and as we approached all that we had read (probably too much) about needing hard-hats to protect us from the line-handlers' monkeys proved to be nonsense. The line-handlers threw their monkeys over the boom and foredeck with skill, and they were easily captured, and our warps attached. Our reading had created an unwarranted level of concern.

We moved sedately under full control through all the Gatun locks into the lake and overcoming some language difficulty we subsequently moored to a buoy to await the arrival of the next pilot due at 0600. It was very late by now and so by the time Sarah had served the coq-au-vin we were all exhausted. I rarely see Sarah incandescent these days but her response to Doris's "I don't eat dark meat" was a moment to savour!

Well as luck would have it the next pilot arrived at about 0800 and was just brilliant. His English was excellent and his knowledge and enthusiasm for the canal and environment was very evident. We gently meandered through the Gatun Lake and saw our first sloth in the most unexpected, fabulous virgin rain forest. What a treat! We joked that we would demand a refund if we did not see an alligator. I don't think that any of us had fully appreciated that most of the canal is in fact a lake formed by flooding the rain forest. The amazing thing is that you round a bend in the channel and come face to face with an enormous tanker or container ship. By this time, we had read 'The Path between the Seas' which had been recommended by Tony from 'World Citizen' who had a one-time been a canal pilot. The history of the building of the canal is fascinating – all the more so when you are in transit..

As we approached the Miafores lock our pilot alerted us to the fact that we would be on the canal's webcam. Frantic telephone calls were made, and text messages sent but in the end we were 30 minutes late into the lock and only Gemma got to see us going through. Two more down locks and WE WERE IN THE PACIFIC – how fantastic is that? We cruised around the Balboa Yacht Club and our fenders and warps were duly collected. Eventually we were able to tie up on their fuel dock and say fond farewell to our Texas line-handling guests.

We bunkered some diesel and set off for the anchorage because there was no room either at the Yacht Club or in the new marina. When we finally got into the marina, I was pleased they had been full because their charges would put Berthons to shame!

Onwards to the Galapagos Islands

Much of our thinking to date had centred on the passage through the canal, but now it was time to plan the next part of our voyage in detail. A planning meeting was convened, and a

decision was made to route via the Las Perlas islands having firstly explored one of the Rias to the east near the Columbian border. We allowed ourselves a few days to discover Panama City and took a forest tour early one morning that routed alongside the canal. Provisioning went on apace as we tried to forecast our needs given that we would be a crew of four until our departure for the Marquesas after Willem and Jane left us in the Galapagos, and we would need to plan for at least three weeks for that passage.

Willem and Jane went to the fresh fruit market and returned with a barrow full of fruit and vegetables which were so fresh that we were still eating some of them when we arrived in the Marquesas. We filled the freezers based more-or-less on what we had learned on our Atlantic crossing and obtained as much beer at $12 a case and wine as our forecast consumption calculated. However, it was during one of these forays that a casual conversation with some yachties caused us to scrap our planned routing and re-think it. They had not been as impressed with the Las Perlas as the sailing guides indicated they should. The water was cloudy and there were prettier places to go to. They suggested that we routed to the west to Isla Coiba which was anyway en-route to the Galapagos Islands.

I popped into the (Admiralty) chart agents near the quay and purchased a paper chart covering that area along with some tidal atlases and the nautical almanac for 2008. I had, of course largely ignored tides for the best part of a year. Our plotter chart already covered that area and also included the Galapagos. I had already brought out most of the charts we needed to get us as far as New Zealand in January but did not realise that the Galapagos was known as the Archipelago of Colon, so we had been missing coverage of the entire area of the Galapagos! However, Willem and Jane had brought it out with them and so we were now ready to go.

We had a wonderful meal in the city and several good lunches around the marina complex and so once we had topped off our fuel, we finally set off to cross the Pacific on Tuesday 19th February.

The winds were very light as reported that they often are at this time of the year and we consequently had to motor most of the way. This voyage was the first for Willem and Jane to be out of sight of land, so we decided to split the night watches, me with Jane and Sarah with Willem, to settle them in. During daylight hours we were offered a taste of what was to come. Firstly, we spotted a whale prior to a send-off fly past of pelicans. Willem caught a fine mackerel tuna, and this was all on the first day!

As we were approaching Isla Jacobon just south of Coiba where we planned to spend our first night, we were welcomed by a school of dolphins corralling their supper with a magnificent display leaping out of the water and hitting the surface with their tails. We had seen manta rays jumping out of the water – they seem to either jump in pairs one after the other or make two separate jumps so if you miss the first one you catch it on the second. The water was alive with sea snakes and turtles – what a treat.

We set a second anchor in about 10m and the following day discovered the outboard had water in the carburettor again. It had started giving problems in Panama so whilst I was stripping it down, Jane and Willem took the kayak ashore to the beach and set off for a nature walk. I suppose I should have alerted them to the state of the tide (which was coming in). It left me with a race against time to fix the outboard or don mask and fins for a long swim so I could reach the kayak before the tide!

The following day we crossed to Coiba escorted by dolphins once more. We anchored off a glorious bay which Willem and Jane explored in the dinghy (now working) and reported finding a marked trail into the forest.

Now you would have thought I had got into the swing again of making routine tidal calculations, but when we set off for our walk we tied the dinghy to a stake and waded ashore to find when we returned that it was aground about a mile away from the water's edge! But our walk into the forest was spectacular and once again we were privileged to enjoy Willem and Jane's encyclopaedic knowledge of wildlife and vegetation.

Isla Coiba is a national park and in the evening some park rangers came to see us. We told them of our intention to make our way up to the Ranger Station the following day, but we stopped along the way at Granata d'Oro to swim and snorkel in some lovely clear waters. The rangers visited us again in the evening to check up on us but more probably in the hope of another beer, and we duly turned up at the Ranger Station the following morning. Sarah, Willem and Jane went in to pay the park fees and found to our delight that it included a guide for a walk across the island through the rain forest.

I had followed them ashore in the kayak, but not without incident as I managed to turn turtle on boarding it. As a result, I lost my shorts, T-shirt, belt and leatherman in about 7m. The water was crystal clear, so I marked the spot and planned to search for them later on. So, for now – no leatherman! We had not gone ashore prepared for a walk, so I returned to the boat to retrieve some more appropriate kit. Once we had changed, we set off with our (garrulous) English speaking guide, who himself took along a local Indian guide. This was just as well because he clearly didn't know the way through the forest! Coiba had until recently been a penal colony and so once we were off the track, we were in a spectacular virgin rain forest, where we spent the next few hours crossing the island. The wildlife and vegetation were absolutely amazing. We finally walked through some mangroves out to a bay fed by a small river. You should know that the park rangers had previously advised us of the flourishing crocodile population on the island, and we knew that a couple had spent the night in the mangroves here having got lost a few days before. In addition, our guide's radio with which they were trying to raise their colleagues to arrange for a boat ride home was receiving only static.

By now, of course, it was getting late – the tide was coming in – no one was talking to us on the radio and our English-speaking guide was clearly a bit rattled. Willem was completely unfazed by this, but you know what I am like. It is just not in my nature to be comfortable

relying on other people – particularly since there did not seem to be a contingency plan. The ranger's assertion that we needn't worry because their colleagues would come to look for us just didn't seem to be very reassuring. Well, it was obviously too late to walk back through the forest so if we were not picked up we would have to spend the night in the mangroves with the forest creatures not to mention the crocodiles for company. I caused much hilarity by making a bow to turn a stick to light a fire, something I had seen done but not tried myself. This was not easy (no leatherman remember) and Willem thought I was just fashioning an arrow with which to shoot the guide!

However, happily my efforts were not needed as we eventually heard an outboard engine in the distance and we were duly picked up and taken back to the Ranger Station. It is interesting that none of us would have set off in the right direction if left to ourselves as we had become totally disorientated in the forest. The guides invited themselves for a beer and a Moonbeam T-shirt in the evening and we set off for Isla Cebeco the next day. Isla Cebeco was about 30 miles away and had its own whale and a ship parked in the bay from which we could bunker some fuel before setting off for the Galapagos.

The 750nms Isla Cebeco – San Cristobal took us 4 days 20 hours in predominantly calm winds and glassy seas, and we had to motor for a total of 73:45 hours. We caught one dorado but lost three lures, so it was as well that we were not relying on our fishing skills to survive. We crossed the equator on 2nd March at 2242 UTC at W088 19.8 and celebrated with a glass to Neptune, a glass to Moonbeam and a glass to us! Apart from the marine life, escorting gulls, a half-sunk wreck and a couple of ships we had been alone once more. When we anchored in Wreck Bay, Isla San Cristobal, it was 0900 on 3rd March and there commenced our Galapagos adventures.

An update to our journal is many months overdue, but for some reason I just haven't felt in the mood to sit down to write it. However, at the moment we are confined in quarantine here in Suva, Fiji until we can be cleared in after the weekend and so there is no better time to catch up.

We anchored in Wreck Bay close to 'Mariah' which is a large catamaran on a leisurely delivery trip from the Seychelles to Tonga and last seen in Panama. We were amused to see a sea lion fast asleep on the sugar scoop of one of their hulls. This was to become a common sight and we were soon to have several of our own squabbling over who had sleeping rights on Moonbeam's sugar scoop.

In fact, as soon as the dinghy was in the water it was adopted as a sleeping platform by anything up to three of these fascinating creatures. They were most indignant if we wanted to borrow the dinghy to go ashore and one of them when shooed off one side of the dinghy promptly swam under it to endeavour to climb back on the other side. It was wonderful entertainment throughout our stay in Wreck Bay – that is apart from having to clean up after them! They were obviously doing very well on San Cristobal, because there was a large colony resident on one of the beaches and indeed draped all around the small town of Puerto Baquerizo Marino. You had to step over or past those of them choosing to sleep on the dock

when going ashore. They are such ungainly creatures on land but so graceful and acrobatic in the water.

When we went ashore, we were met on the dock by Fernando and his two camp followers. Fernando was San Cristobal's Mr. Fixit and he was to be tripped over anywhere and everywhere we went. We had already talked to one of 'Mariah's' crew about the snorkelling trip that he had been on to Kicker's Rock and swimming with sea lions and so we duly booked a trip with Fernando's brother/cousin/other relative who ran a dive shop for the following day.

I was anxious to check-in and so started our interaction with Ecuadorian bureaucracy. The Port Captain's office was staffed by Ecuador navy personnel, none of whom spoke very good English, so we had to manage on Sarah and Jane's Spanish. We were sent away until after lunch and on our return were confronted with a flat refusal to check us in without an agent. Consequently, the rest of the afternoon was spent tracking down one of the two agents reported to have offices in town.

Eventually we made contact with Johnny's sister who had a desk in a small grocery store. Now Johnny operated out of Puerto Ayora on Santa Cruz, and we had exchanged many emails over the previous six months as he tried to persuade us to use his services, and we tried to make up our mind whether or not to use the boat to explore the islands. This had been discounted as an option when we discovered it would cost at least $1000US per day. His fee for agency was $300US to act for us and obtain a Zarpe (cruising permit), which I was unwilling to pay. We settled after much haggling on $150 which was paid to his sister. For what was actually done by both him and his sister rather than by me, it proved to be $150 too much!

However, having engaged the services of an agent, we arranged a rendezvous at the Port Captain's office for the day following our snorkelling trip. Meanwhile, Fernando had taken our passports to immigration and returned them to us duly stamped for a small fee when he found us having a beer at a café on the front. The dive boat duly picked us up the next morning. It was a combined trip with the four of us snorkelling and eight or ten others going for a dive. The dive boat was a catamaran with two (different) outboard motors and a cabin fore and aft of an open well in each hull. It had a large flat deck between the hulls forward of the cockpit which was situated in a well aft. We had a good trip out to Kicker's rock with a stop for us to go snorkelling whilst the divers did a weight check.

Kicker's rock is a small island 100m or so high, split into two by a cleft which was 15 to 20 metres deep. The divers were briefed that they would be dropped on one side of the island and to go through the cleft with the tide and the boat would pick them up on the other side. We were to follow the same guidelines but on the surface. Sarah was not keen on this but Jane, Willem and I set off for a magnificent treat. Below us in crystal clear waters were white tip and hammerhead sharks cruising amongst shoals of reef fish and rays – what an incredible sight!

On our way back after lunch and a second dive the wind picked up sharply and water started to break over the boat. No problem for the flat deck between the hulls, but as the anchor locker in the starboard hull had no cover and sufficient water was coming aboard to fill the wells in between the open cabins and spill into them, we duly started sinking with a marked list to starboard. At first the dive master (Fernando's relative) seemed unconcerned, but he suddenly woke up to the danger. Although the divers all had BCDs, I couldn't find any life jackets in the area so marked and the bilge pump had a capacity of about a litre a minute, so the cockpit was filling up too. Now don't forget that we had come 11200nms in Moonbeam, a thousand of which Jane and Willem had been with us, so the thought of being shipwrecked on an un-seaworthy dive boat was unappealing to say the least. The dive master had the good sense to slow right down and head towards the shore which although rocky could have been a refuge in extremis. At the same time, we all moved aft to the port quarter whilst the crew bailed with an energetic urgency seldom seen in the natives. Others held cushions up at the bows to try to reduce the inflow of water and we finally made it back to the cove where we had stopped on the way out. Not to be phased by this (and after all it was on the itinery) we were dispatched overboard to swim with the sea lions whilst the crew continued with the clean-up. The sea lions were wonderfully playful and so graceful in the water. They did not seem to mind us being amongst them and they would twist and turn very close by, but without touching you. And so, another Westermann Adventure came to an end.

Clearing in took several attempts and the whole of the following day. I parted with port fees, light, harbour, and buoyage fees together with a fee for the fumigation certificate even though no one had come to the boat let alone fumigated it. This was all done with Johnny's sister in attendance but not actually doing anything!

To lighten things up we watched the antics of a heron perched on the anchor chain picking off fish as they swam by. Pelicans also had a use for the boat by swimming alongside the hull and scooping up fish in their bill when they were corralled against it. We had arranged with Fernando for a large delivery of fuel, and he duly pitched up with his entourage and a selection of battered containers from which the fuel was siphoned into our tank. It was just as well that I had a good stock of fuel filters!

The next day was spent on an island tour, firstly through their coffee plantations and then on to a conservation area to see giant tortoises. An effort to breed them in captivity was having some success and when they were big enough, they were due to be released and returned to their natural habitat. When they were little, they were protected in the conservation area from predators (such as rats) that had been introduced to the islands. Next stop was for coffee at a plantation house. Unfortunately, there was no hot water for coffee because the plantation owner had run out of matches to light the gas. You will remember that Willem had been laughing at my attempts to light a fire when we had been abandoned on Isla Coiba, so it was with great pleasure and endless amusement when I was able to rummage in my rucksack and find a lighter! Coffee was back on!

Our tour took us next to a 'Swiss Family Robinson Tree House' that the locals were obviously very proud of and then on to the coast near the airport where, when you looked

closely, you could make out marine iguanas camouflaged on the black lava rocks. These pre-historic reptiles were sunning themselves to warm up sufficiently to be able to go into the water to feed until it was necessary to return to the rocks to warm up again. Finally, we were taken on to Fernando's house where his mother, wife and half a dozen other relatives provided us with lunch. All-in-all it was a very interesting day to end our stay in Wreck Bay.

It was only 40nms or so to Puerto Ayora so we departed at 0230 and dropped our anchor in Academy Bay at 0900. The bay was crowded with ARC boats which were shortly to leave and so we put out a stern anchor in common with most others. We tried calling Johnny, but it was a weekend, and we got no response so we spent the day exploring the town and watching the antics of the pelicans and the extraordinary aerial display of the blue footed boobies. Ashore, Jane and Willem booked a dive and we all dined at the Red Mangrove on the recommendation of a local resident. We had a magnificent sushi and sashimi meal which turned out to be Jane and Willem's introduction to this Japanese feast.

On the Sunday, Jane and Willem returned from their drift dive saying that it was the best dive ever. They had been among white tip and hammerhead sharks and Willem had taken some amazing underwater photos. Meanwhile Sarah had made some new fender covers from the material that Jane and Willem had kindly brought out with them from London. As she was sewing the last cover the sewing machine caught fire and when I took it apart, I found that the electronics had disintegrated. I planned to use it as a spare anchor or at least send it down to Davy Jones's locker, but Sarah insisted we should take it to New Zealand with us and find an Elna repair agent. I wonder if we will.

We went in search of Johnny on Monday morning and the only really useful service he provided was to change Jane and Willem's booking so that they could leave a day later. We found the municipal market where meat, fruit and vegetables were sold and the open-air fish market which was on the front. The fish market was surrounded by waste disposal facilities in the form of a flock of pelicans that fought over the discarded remains as the fish were cleaned. The fishmongers also had what looked like a tame Labrador under the fish counter, which on closer inspection turned out to be a resident sea lion greedily scooping up scraps.

We booked to go on a tour to Bartolome Island and caught a water taxi at the crack of dawn to take us into the dock where we were picked up by a coach to take us across the island. From there we were taken out to a boat and given a welcome breakfast before a three-hour trip to Bartolome. This was the first opportunity to get a close look at one of the tour boats and like many others we saw, it had seen better days. That said at least it had life jackets aboard! Our guide led us up the wooden walkway that had been built to shepherd the constant flow of visitors and protect the wildlife growing on the lava rock to the top of the hill overlooking the lava flows. It was the picture featured in all the Galapagos literature and looks like a primeval moonscape. There were three or four other tour boats in the vicinity, and we couldn't help thinking that we were being herded from place to place. We caught sight of one penguin when we went snorkelling at the appointed time and place on a nearby beach and after lunch on board, we were returned to the dock by 1630.

The next day was spent catching up with chores and packing before our final meal together in the Angermayer Point restaurant, for we were sad to have to get up early to say goodbye to Jane and Willem. We were so sorry to see them go after five weeks together with a shared experience of a lifetime. It had been a lovely way to renew our friendship and we couldn't have had more fun if we tried. It was altogether an outstanding success. They are so knowledgeable about wildlife that it was like having our own tour guides on board. They had been perfect boat guests and most generous in sharing the chores and cooking as well as the expenses of running the boat. We just hope that they will be able to join us again in the future.

As ever we felt very 'flat' to be on our own again and so we consoled ourselves by having several lunches on the deck amongst the marine iguanas at the Red Mangrove, and where we could watch the pelicans and boobies. The mangroves in which the restaurant was set surrounded a small cove around which the pelicans had made their home. It appeared that the cove was a flight-testing area for young pelicans for whenever they came in to land, they invariably tipped forward onto their heads – wonderful! On one occasion a two-metre shark nearly beached itself chasing an unlucky fish into the cove – all overlooked by herons standing majestically and perfectly still.

Our melancholy was relieved by the news that Annabel and Tom had booked flights to Tahiti arriving on the day Gemma and Eloise were departing having spent the previous two weeks with us. What a lovely thing to be able to look forward to. We visited the Charles Darwin research station and saw 'Lonesome George' the last giant tortoise of his gene pool along with many of their conservation activities. Altogether we stayed for another week after Jane and Willem left us and picked up a resident pelican as well as a family of metre long black tip sharks that made their home under the boat. The blue footed boobies put on their flying display most days and especially when the water had been cleared by overnight rain. What a fantastic place! Saturday dawn had us at the farmer's market, but we had gradually got fed up with provisioning and decided to leave with what we had - I am sure we won't starve! We lifted the dinghy, serviced the engine and generator and after many visits to Port Captains, Immigration and the offices of the agent and paying yet more port fees, we were ready to depart with a Zarpe (cruising permit) and a stamp in our passports.

Having read (probably too much) about visiting the Galapagos in a yacht we found the whole check-in/out procedure haphazard and talking to others somewhat idiosyncratic. We were forced to have an agent and, in the end, stayed for nearly three weeks. We were restricted to Wreck Bay on Isla San Cristobal and Puerto Ayora on Santa Cruz and did tours from each place. As far as we can see, it is apparent that the restrictions placed on yachts in the Galapagos Islands are more about getting money than about conservation, so with that in mind I decided to trust my instincts and insisted on paying the park fees for all of us, personally, at the Charles Darwin research station. That way we could at least be sure the funds reached the right place. Otherwise, it seems a most haphazard way of collecting fees from visiting yachts. That all said we would not have missed this opportunity for the world. The wildlife was unbelievable. The fact that we could get within feet of the marine life, animals, and birds without seeming to scare them was a privilege beyond dreams and

apart from the bureaucracy the people we met were friendly and helpful. But now it was time to leave for the next part of our adventure.

The Pacific Crossing

We set off promptly at 0800 on March 20th. The wind was light, but the weather was fine and so we motor-sailed for the first day. This was because we wanted to get below 2 degrees South because it looked as though the trade winds would be more reliable the further south we got.

Our natural apprehension was tempered with excitement at the beginning of a voyage which will undoubtedly stay in our memories as the best sail we have ever had. We settled into what was to become our watch system for all of the voyages we would do on our own. Once we had saluted the sunset and had our evening meal, Sarah would go to bed and try to get some sleep. She would then get up and do the 0001 to 0400 watch until I came on again at 0400 until she woke up again at about 0730. On most days I then went back to bed for a couple of hours unless there was something more urgent requiring my attention. We had no formal watch system during the day but would alternately grab a siesta in the afternoon as the need arose.

The interesting result was our ability to keep a 24-hour watch on the boat whilst at the same time containing our fatigue to the extent that we could have continued indefinitely. These early days on our passage were accompanied by a full moon which helped us no end to settle into the night watches. Tom had downloaded 8GBs of classical music onto our iPods and so even on the dark overcast nights there was something magical to accompany the movement of the boat and the phosphorescence of the wake.

We were treated to a display of dolphins corralling their evening meal on the first day out and we both witnessed the illusive ‘green flash’ at sunset on the second. But after seeing a fishing boat the following morning we would not see another man-made object until our arrival in the Marquesas.

My fishing stayed on it usual track. We had a strike five minutes after I started trolling and lost both lure and line because the reel ratchet was damaged, and we didn’t hear the strike in time. Consequently, I resolved to service the reel and ended up with a dozen bits and no logical or obvious way of putting it back together.

Easter day saw us with only 123nms on the log for the past 24 hours and speaking to Tom and Annabel’s answer phones. Emails from Tom were the harbinger of bad news for selling our house in Dartmouth when he reported on the demise of Northern Rock and Bear Stearns. We were later to take the house off the market and let it once again.

Our fourth day out made us wonder where the trade winds were when we only made 46nms in 12 hours, but this proved to be our last bad period. In fact, the wind picked up and was never less than force 4 for the next ten days and only gusted above force 6 when we were adjacent to a shower.

The first 1000nms was completed on day 6 and we had our halfway celebration on day 10. The South Equatorial Current had set in at about 5 degrees South and was pushing us on at between 1 and 1.5kts. My morning inspection around the boat usually revealed several dead flying fish and on one occasion we found one in the bucket that lives by the wheel in the cockpit. Much later on we tracked down a 'fishy' smell that had appeared in the saloon to a flying fish that had flown into the quarter birth! None of these guys were very large and so we did begin to wonder about the veracity of the tales…….'breakfast was of fried flying fish collected off the deck in the morning'.

The satcom was giving us its usual problem of failing to connect or breaking the connection during transmission. This meant we had a real sense of achievement when we were able to send and/or receive emails and grib files. This proved to be the start of a difficult time for Sarah as Annabel was searching for her wedding dress and starting to plan her wedding in November. Added to this, our granddaughter was developing rapidly.

For the first ten days we sailed with the wind on our port quarter on a broad reach, only reducing sail as necessary in the rain squalls and occasionally for Sarah's night watch when Moonbeam was getting too lively. But on day 11 we set up our 'downwind rig' of poled out yankee and main on a preventer, which was left unchanged for the next six days.

With one thing and another it took me several days to fix the fishing reel, but from day eight we trolled a line most days and (when we forgot) some nights. In spite of the fact that there were endless flying fish and occasional storm petrels for company we didn't land a fish until we were a day out of Hiva-Oa, although we did lose a couple more lures and lines. She was a lovely female Dorado which we had for lunch, but it is just as well we had not assumed that the freezer would be topped up with fresh fish!

One day just seemed to dissolve into another. Sometimes I made some bread - generally in the form of rolls. Occasionally we would have a bacon roll for breakfast, but for the most part we had coffee and orange or apple juice and then something for lunch and our main meal in the evening. Our menu was less formalised than when we crossed the Atlantic and was consequently probably more varied and spontaneous. We had much to thank Kay Pastorius whose book 'Cruising Cuisine' made bread –baking, pie crusts and pizza bases, among many other things, simple to do on passage. For the most part of our journey we lived on the fruit and vegetables that we had loaded in the Galapagos. Onions, potatoes, carrots, green beans and cabbage all stood up very well and we were still eating fresh vegetables when we arrived in Hiva-Oa. All of the produce had been washed in 'Milton' solution prior to being packed separately in special 'green bags' we had obtained in England. Sarah inspected everything daily and discarded the odd culprit that was going off. Our meat supply held up well in the freezers keeping everything nicely frozen and so we ended up with nearly as many tins as when we left.

Battery charging, refrigeration, and water-making meant that the generator ran for approximately 4 hours each day. There is no doubt that the generator is the lifeblood of

Moonbeam because she uses 15 to 20 amps an hour with the autopilot driving the boat, the instruments and computer all running and (at night) the radar on. We used the radar at night routinely – not so much for collision avoidance as for early warning of a rain squall so that we could reduce sail as necessary. Squalls were easy to see by day and if they were isolated on a moonlit night, but with any cloud cover or before the moon was up, they could creep up on you unawares.

We retarded the ship's clock every 15 degrees of longitude at 1200 local time but otherwise watched the sunset get 'earlier' as our daily fixes marked on the chart walked westwards towards Hiva-Oa.

Day 16 arrived with the wind easing and a major decision to be made. We had had the worst day's run (132nms) since day 4 and it was time to gybe the boat!! This involved furling the yankee, stowing one spinnaker pole and setting the other and then flying the yankee again. This was a good half hour's work for the two of us if all went well which it did until we found that the halyard had parted. So now we had to lower the yankee, attach the spare halyard and raise it again. Because these problems never occur singly, the block on the toe rail for the preventer for the main which was now to port also failed. To cap it all the wind died! This led to our worst day's run this passage of just 115nms.

However, the wind recovered and we made a more respectable 133nms the following day and we decided to gybe the boat again as the winds were forecast to remain ESE. This resulted in the second halyard parting and the yankee was raised on one of the spinnaker halyards (with only one left before I had to ascend the mast).

We started the engine to help push us along to ensure a daylight arrival and just after midnight we clocked up 3000nms with less than 100nms to go. At 0930 we saw land and we anchored in the harbour of Hiva-Oa at 1300 on the 7th April. It had taken us 19 days 8 hours to sail 3077nms at an average speed of 6.63kts. We had changed tack only twice in all that time. What an incredible sail!

But the strange thing that marked us for ever changed is that in spite of the euphoria of a safe arrival after sailing so far on our own, we nevertheless almost resented it intruding into our world of empty horizons. How odd!

French Polynesia

Our choice of arrival destination in the Marquesas was determined by Hiva-Oa being one of only three ports of entry. We did not want to risk non-compliance with entry formalities having had a brush with French Authorities over the registration of Bagatel when we were

living in France. We had discovered that once you get on the wrong side of their bureaucracy it is not easy (or cheap) to escape.

However, our arrival marked the start of my (our) difficulty in describing where we were. In particular I found the pronunciation of so many vowels in juxtaposition real tongue twisters.

We had anchored in the harbour, such as it was, of the small town of Atuora at the top of Baie Tahanka. However, when we went ashore the following morning to present ourselves at the Gendarmerie it was immediately apparent that we had arrived in an outpost of France. It was much like we had found the French Caribbean islands. This first impression would be confirmed and reinforced throughout our time in French Polynesia, but for now it was sufficient to marvel at the genuine friendliness of the local islanders.

We had no sooner landed and were setting off on the mile or so walk to the town when we were given a lift together with instructions of where to go and how to get there. We were dropped outside the Gendarmerie and filled out the appropriate forms. Our official entry would not be completed until we arrived in Tahiti so whilst the forms were duly stamped, we had to send a copy to Papeete. This cost us the grand sum of 55cents for a postage stamp and would be the only charge for our stay in French Polynesia for up to three months. What a nice change from the Galapagos!

Being citizens from the EU had the advantage that unlike any other citizens we did not have to post a bond for each crew member. This was the equivalent to a one-way air ticket back to the country of origin and apparently arose because too many crews arriving in Paradise jumped ship and decided to stay but ended up depending on French Social Security.

Of course, to buy a stamp, we needed local currency, namely the Coloniale Franc Pacifique. Needless to say, the ATM was not working so I went inside the bank to change $200US. Flush with 1000s of francs (119CFP=1euro approx) we made our way to the mini supermarche for some supplies. Now we had read that French Polynesia was expensive. In fact, in one of our cruising guides it recommended that the area should be avoided because of the high prices. Nevertheless, it came as a bit of a shock to part with £20 for a bottle of cheap (and corked as it turned out) wine and local beer was not a lot less.

Laden with a few supplies and nearly franc-less we were given a lift back to the harbour almost as soon as we had set foot outside the supermarket. Whilst we had been waiting at the Gendarmerie, we had been chatting to an American couple who advised us that the expected southerly change would make the harbour very uncomfortable, if not dangerous. With that in mind, as soon as we got back to the boat, we slipped anchor and proceeded to Tahuata, an island just 10 miles away and found a beautiful spot in Ainse Ivaina Ai

We spent an idyllic few days here amongst beautiful scenery and completing repairs to the halyards and mast head lights, and whilst swimming we even cleaned the hull. A lovely

day's sail took us the 85nms to Nuka Hiva where we anchored in the Baie de Taiohue surrounded by two-foot-long black tip sharks having a feeding frenzy around the boat. The town surrounded a horse-shoe shaped bay with the dinghy dock (such as it was) at the eastern end. There were three well stocked supermarkets, one of which had a fresh vegetable store outside. We had never thought that buying a fresh lettuce would provide such joy!

We ate in a little Pizzarea on the first night where we came across the first Polynesian, we would see of what the locals called the third sex. These are males that have been brought up as girls. Apparently not all are homosexual but in the most part we saw them in the service industry. Our waiter/waitress looked very elegant in tight shorts and top spoiled only by a marked five o'clock shadow. The pizza we shared washed down with two beers cost just over £50. We clearly were not going to eat out very often!

We followed the east coast around to the north of the island to Anaho Baie where we met a Frenchman who planned to stay there for six months. However, he had been told by the locals not to eat the two splendid red snappers that he showed us that he had caught. This was the first example of the danger posed by eating reef fish or fish that live off reef fish. This is because of the risk of being poisoned by ciguatera. The advice in the cruising guide is to ask the locals not can you eat this fish - but do you eat this fish? Ciguatera is caused by toxins derived from dinoflagellates found on coral and seaweed and passed along the food chain. We were later to meet an American who had suffered from this after eating a fish he had caught. It was clearly not a pleasant experience.

We returned to Taiohae and bunkered some fuel by jerry cans and rewarded ourselves with lunch at Keikahanui Pearl Lodge which is the hotel above the bay with stunning views of it and Moonbeam sitting gently at anchor in the middle. On 25th April we checked out of Huka Niva and the following day set off to complete the 30nms to Ua Pau. Ua Pau is a fantastic outcrop of rocks climbing up to the sky like fire in the distance and close up, near vertical cliffs with lush vegetation clinging on to them. The cruising guide says that it is much like Bora Bora, but in truth it is like so many of the volcanic islands we were to see in French Polynesia.

It was time to set off for the Tuamotu Archipelago which stretches over approximately 1000nms east – west across the Pacific Ocean. Our plan, initially, was to head for Tepoto. We had some dolphins to see us off as soon as we departed Hakehatau Baie and as we looked back at Ua Pau the island stood out on the skyline in the most amazing beauty. A good two day's passage making of 361nms, less one more lure and line to yet another fish that got away, made us decide to miss out on Tepato. This was because our landfall was going to be at night and so we decided to change our destination to Raroia. This is where Kon Tiki made landfall in 1947, and our visit there prompted us to re-read Thor Hyerdal's book once again. I had forgotten what a unique and brave adventure it had been.

We approached our first transit through the reef with some trepidation. Firstly, we had no assurance that the GPS and plotter, or even the paper chart, could be relied upon. Secondly,

the two Standard Ports for the tide tables were 1000nms apart, so the tidal predictions were something of a black art. This was coupled with the Admiralty sailing directions of slack water being moonset +/- x hours being hit and miss, by observation, from place to place. However, we slowed ourselves down and hove-to for nine hours to make our transit at the predicted (best guess) of 0935-1005 local time. As luck (or good planning) would have it we got it about right and we transited the pass without difficulty. In fact, being part of France, the passage was well buoyed, and the GPS and chart was spot on, and when we found the anchorage off the village, we were able to drop our hook in 20mtrs.

Initially we were alone in the lagoon, in crystal clear waters surrounded by sand sharks, but subsequently we were joined by a couple of American boats who transited the pass on the next slack water. We went ashore to explore the village - Sarah insisting we go by dinghy rather than kayak on account of the sharks. Most of the houses were built of wood but some were constructed of concrete. Power seemed to be from solar panels feeding battery banks provided by Total oil and many houses sported satellite dishes. However, the most impressive building was the airport terminal. The airport itself looked as though it had been recently constructed and the terminal building was positioned at the head of the car park adjacent to the apron. The most interesting aspect was that the car park had 35 spaces including one next to the terminal marked for a handicapped vehicle. Interesting and amusing because we discovered that there were only two cars on the island!

We stayed for two days and then set off for Makemo. Our moonset – x calculation was in error by about an hour, but the pass was no problem, if a little entertaining. In addition to verifying the accuracy of the GPS and charts, we could see the reefs at about ten miles on radar. This, of course, would be obliterated in any sort of sea or by a rain squall, but in calm conditions showed up quite clearly. Our hearts sank when we sighted Makemo because there seemed to be dozens of masts and we were quite used to be either on our own or one of a very few yachts. In fact, the masts turned out to be a wind farm!

We had an exciting ride through the pass which was well served by leading marks and arrived to find ourselves alone again. We found a busy little village with no less than five shops and even a mobile telephone mast which linked us to the rest of the world. We were joined in our anchorage by a pleasant Swedish couple on their yacht ‘Roxy’ and with whom we would meet up with from place to place until we reached New Zealand. After four days we set off for Raraka, but the wind died and we missed our arrival time for the pass, so we decided to continue onwards to Kauehi. By this time, we had come to the view that one island in paradise looked much like another!

We navigated the pass and motored the 8nms across the lagoon to the village which we were to discover the locals called Kauehi City! When we went ashore the following day (my birthday) the village – sorry – city was very sleepy and quiet. Of course only mad dogs and Englishmen…….Anyway a lady stopped her car and apologised for the shop being closed even though we had arrived after the advertised closing time. She was wearing the most magnificent black pearls and asked us (Sarah) if she was interested – silly question! We

returned to Moonbeam and watched as our anchorage was shared by a number of arrivals, one of which was 'Robyn' last seen in the Galapagos.

On Monday we went to find our pearl lady who owned the shop to find that her husband, who was also the mayor, ran the pearl farm. They obviously had fingers in many pies because the pearl farm tour was not available on Mondays or Saturdays because of the airplane movements. The mayor (a retired Tahitian policeman) looked like a Polynesian warrior with tattoos all over his body complimented by a dagger strapped to his leg. We arranged for a tour for the following day and returned to the boat to find that the hull had been colonised by limpet fish. These guys, who use suckers to hang on, obviously had mistaken Moonbeam's blue underside for a passing shark!

Our visit to the pearl farm with the mayor (who was also the proprietor) started with a visit to the airport. He was obviously very proud of this addition to the island's infrastructure. It was another example of the design we had seen previously; however, this terminal building boasted a coffee shop that was manned on Mondays and Saturdays by no other than the mayor's wife! The pearl farm was a collection of purpose-built dwellings to house the staff – all of whom were Chinese, adjacent to the 'factory' which was built on stilts over the water.

Here each oyster was carefully prised open by one of the Chinese girls. A seed of plastic was inserted along with a dye (to provide/assist the colour) and a growth hormone. The oyster was then put in a fishnet bag and returned to the lagoon. This process was repeated three times before the pearls were harvested. It was here that we saw the purpose of the mayor's dagger – he used it to open the oysters and we duly ate them. The shells, of course, were processed for 'mother of pearl' so nothing in this enterprise was wasted. He told us that he regularly flew to Japan and China to sell the pearls. We bought a selection from the many pearls he spilled on the table for us. Added to this sale, he charged for the tour, so it wasn't a bad day for mayoral enterprises! Kauehi City is not an example of a socialist state!

By now, we had already come to the view that one atoll looked much like another; and so, we decided to head for Tahiti to await the arrival of our progeny. We calculated that the ideal time to navigate the pass was 0635 the following morning so we crossed the lagoon and anchored just inside the entrance. We were hard on in 16mtrs with 60mtrs of chain out. However, when we got up with the sun the following morning it was to discover that Moonbeam's pirouettes during the night had tied the chain around a bollard shaped coral head. It took an hour and a half with me in the water and Sarah using the engine and bow-thruster to untangle ourselves. This delay made the transit through the pass somewhat exhilarating!

It was only 270nms to Tahiti but the wind was fickle and light, so it took us three days. It was so calm one night that my 3-star fix was only in error of our GPS position by 2nms! We anchored in a lovely, peaceful lagoon at Tautira on the east coast of Tahiti. It was amazing to be here, and we had a wonderful feeling of achievement with only 2000nms to go to New Zealand. The following day we moved around to Papeete suffering an autopilot failure on the way. This was subsequently tracked down to the computer, which needless to say is no longer supported. However, happily the spare took over the commission.

We moored up Mediterranean style stern-to right in the centre of Papeete. It reminded us very much of Antibes with blocks of flats hanging onto the hillsides above the city. There was heavy traffic around the port which started up at about 0500 and did not stop until late. We had a lazy few days with excursions into the city and we completed our formal check-in to French Polynesia. Our forms sent from the Marquesas had clearly arrived safely. A visit to Carrefour on the other side of the airport re-enforced the feeling that we could have been in France, apart from the prices and the transportation. The local bus service was fashioned from trucks with wooden benches either side below large no-smoking signs which were duly ignored by the locals. The bus fare was paid to the driver either as you got on or off the bus or sometimes not at all.

On our way back to the boat Sarah was saying hello to some fellow yachties on a German boat on the other side of the pontoon and whilst not looking fell down a gap between them. Luckily, she just sustained some very nasty grazes and bruising particularly on her right thigh. It was very fortunate indeed that her injuries were not a lot worse because the pontoons were flat-topped steel barges with a narrow bridge between them and no guard rail to stop you from falling. Although we cleaned the cuts and grazes up and applied Fucidin cream, by the next day it was obvious that she had an infection in her thigh. We started her on a course of anti-biotics from the medical kit and happily, that led to a rapid improvement. Meanwhile, I lost a filling during lunch and went over to the dentist adjacent to the dock to make an appointment to have it fixed. The dentist saw me there and then and when he discovered I was paying his fee in cash; he halved it!

The port filled up with the arrival of the 'Maltese Falcon' a truly remarkable looking ship painted silver with three huge un-stayed masts with crosstrees into which she furled her sails. When she arrived the crosstrees were aligned fore and aft, but later when we saw her under full sail she really was a magnificent sight. We moved out of the port to the anchorage which entailed getting clearance to cross both ends of the runway of Papeete airport. It felt good to have a cooling breeze through the boat once again. We were positioned amongst many others that we had met or seen along the way and there was constant activity with lots of boats going to and fro. Outrigger canoes were extremely popular and were out from sunrise to sunset. Those manned by more than one, were co-ordinated by the helmsman (who also paddled) and on his command the crew would swap paddling to the other side. This was all with the incredibly dramatic backdrop of Moorea only a few miles away.

For weeks Sarah had been on an emotional roller-coaster with Gemma coming to Tahiti then not. Simon was not comfortable with the idea of his six-month year-old daughter travelling to the tropics, but at last the decision was made and they were on their way. We moved into the marina Taina so we could get Gemma and Eloise safely on board with all the ancillary baby clobber. And there they were! AirTahiti delivered them at 0510 from LAX. What a joy to see them both. We had found a little paddling pool which fitted inside the cockpit. Eloise used it alternately as a swimming pool and bath – it was a great success.

After a couple of days we sailed over to Moorea into Cook's bay and were welcomed by some dolphins coming to play alongside. We took Eloise ashore and walked her in her buggy

which was protected from the sun by a cover which looked like a birka. The Mclaren buggy has really evolved since Gemma was in one! I needed a three-week technical course to understand how it worked. We re-positioned ourselves to Baie d'Opunuho where we got more of a cooling breeze and the water was much clearer for swimming. I had obviously used the outboard once too often as a depth sounder because the propeller stopped driving the boat. Unfortunately, I was several miles away from Moonbeam on a shopping expedition at the time. I managed to beach the boat which has no oars; it can only be paddled and walked back along the shore to be given a lift back to the boat. We subsequently retrieved the dinghy by taking the boat back around to Cook's Bay and used the kayak. Happily, we could replace the propeller in Papeete but in the meantime a jury rig using rigging wire would have to do.

After another spell in Baie d'Opunuho where Gemma and I saw some rays whilst we were snorkelling off the reef, we returned to down-town Papeete for a little retail therapy for my wife and eldest daughter. Then a day of really mixed emotions because we had had a lovely time getting to know our grand-daughter and seeing what a magnificent mother Gemma was to her, but it was time for them to go home. However, the tears of farewell were replaced by tears of joy as Annabel and Tom appeared in the arrival's hall. How's that for timing? Luckily, we had brought sun-glasses for the first sighting of Annabel's engagement ring!

We moved around to the anchorage but our plan to celebrate Sarah's birthday ashore was scuppered by a 30kt wind which would have made the dinghy ride soaking wet, so we made do on the boat. The next day we transited to Baie d'Opunuho again and then subsequently set off for Hua Hine. We rocked and rolled all the way – not a pleasant passage but our arrival off Fare was a delightful reward. It is a cosy little town with a supermarket like a Tardis – a tiny entrance into a huge well-stocked store.

It was here that we ran into a retired Naval Officer, Brian who was headed in the same general direction as us. He was solo in a boat called 'Scraatch' and over drinks that evening we discovered he talked non-stop and listened not at all – most amusing.

Brian brought over a couple of baguettes for breakfast as he was leaving as well. We were through the pass by 0900 and had a lovely sail to Raiatea which is the southernmost island of two nestling inside a single reef. We anchored off Uturoa which is the second largest town in French Polynesia, but we were unimpressed. The next day we motored through the lagoon and out through Pai Pai pass on the west side of Tahaa Island to set course for Bora Bora. The surf breaking on the reef looked like a cliff of white water – quite terrifying.

We had plenty of time to admire the view of Bora Bora as we had to sail miles around the reef to get to the pass on the west side. It's not difficult to see why Bora Bora features on so many postcards because the scenery is absolutely stunning. We visited an island near the reef, which was obviously used as an outpost for one of the resort hotels, to collect some shells and then moved to the bay off the Sheraton which is reported to be one of the best resort hotels here. They might be the best, but they weren't very friendly and by the time the

receptionist had consulted with the manager and security to see if I could leave the dinghy on their dock whilst we had a drink in their bar before Sunday lunch, I was so disgusted that we didn't bother. However, our reward for being here was to go snorkelling and see about a hundred rays gliding in formation in the bay – fabulous.

We shifted our anchorage to a position off Bloody Mary's restaurant where we could also pick up a wifi signal and Annabel treated us to lunch. Afterwards we took the dinghy to Viatape which is the island's main township and Annabel and Tom booked themselves a flight to Papeete. So much for Annabel doing her competent crew certificate! The days drifted by and all too soon Moonbeam was like a ghost ship when they had departed literally into the sunset, and we were on our own again. As the saying goes – don't cry because it is over; be happy that it happened.

We picked up one of the moorings off Bora Bora yacht club to do the washing and otherwise get ourselves ship-shape again. It was decided to return to Tahaa and Raiatea to provision and bunker fuel before setting off for Pago Pago (pronounced Pango Pango). We had a bumpy ride back to Tahaa and so congratulated Annabel and Tom on their decision to fly to Tahiti! We couldn't understand why the fuel dock was so busy until we were chatting to Ulf from 'Roxy' – apparently the fuel price increased on 1st July. It had gone up by 12p a litre and we needed 700ltrs! Timing is everything! We also saw Ian and Julia from 'Moasi' last seen in the Galapagos. He had not been well having caught Denghie fever whilst there. They gave us email addresses for boatyards in New Zealand which we would later use as our plans for returning to England for Annabel's wedding, materialised.

We spent a couple of days off Toapuhi and visited the Taravara yacht club to watch traditional Polynesian dancing. Over once again to Uturoa to bunker fuel and top up our supplies and whilst there, we bumped into Wayne, an American on his own (not surprisingly) on 'Moonbreaker' a lovely Irish yacht. His plan was to sail to Rarotonga and perhaps, Nuie on his passage to Tonga. It was a shorter sail by about 550nms than our plan to go to Pago Pago. Additionally, it got us thinking about our decision to miss out on Tonga, last seen 9 years before when we chartered a yacht there for our 25th wedding anniversary. Maybe this would be a better plan and it would avoid the potential problems of entering America.

Back to Bora Bora to check-out of French Polynesia at customs in Viatape. It was amazing to think that we had been here nearly three months. Our only regret that it was so expensive we missed out on some of the excursions that we would have normally done. But then the reward to offset that was the pleasure of seeing our family. So, on July 7th, with the outboard off and the dinghy cover on it was time to leave French Polynesia – destination Rarotonga and then onwards to New Zealand.

Onwards to New Zealand

After long consideration and debate, we decided to head for Rarotonga in the Southern Cook Islands and then to Tonga en-route to Fiji. This is because it looked like we would not get into American Samoa (Pago Pago) because they have decided that the visa waiver scheme no longer applies to blue water yachts or private airplanes. Ulf from 'Roxy' had alerted us to

this information that was posted on the ‘Noonsite’ website which is Jimmy Connors’ electronic means of keeping everyone up to date. However, we later found out that American Samoa was not applying the rules, but it was of no consequence to us because we had changed our plans, which in the end we believe were to be for the better. A couple of days of light winds preceded a flat calm so we furled the sails and put the table up in the cockpit and had a civilised lunch. We then motored for 20 hours or so until the wind was due to pick up. However, when I tried to move the throttle control, I discovered that it was stuck with the engine turning at 2000rpm. I assumed that the throttle cable had become jammed, so I stopped the engine, and as it was midnight and there was absolutely no wind, I decided to let the boat look after herself and went to bed.

Two hours later the wind picked up and we were sailing again and, in the morning, I investigated the control problem and discovered that it was not the throttle cable. There was something broken inside the fuel injector pump which I didn’t want to take apart until we were somewhere where I could get a spare if we needed one. So, it's either full ahead or full astern and having to stop the engine in between! Not ideal for manoeuvring a short-handed yacht this size in a small harbour which is all Rarotonga has to offer. As a consequence, we decided to head on to Niue and if we couldn’t get on a buoy (knowing that we couldn’t anchor there), we would continue for another couple of hundred miles to Tonga where we had previously chartered a yacht for our 25th wedding anniversary.

Six days out and we should clock up a thousand miles tonight - the third longest sail after the Atlantic and Pacific and it has not been a pleasant sail. We have had to wear our oilies and it has been so very cold. The wind has been in the south force 4 - 6 and has obviously come straight from the Antarctic. To add to that it has been mostly overcast. We have even had to resort to sleeping under the duvet! Brrrrrrrrrrr! Finally, we raised Niue at 0200 and hove–to until the sun came up and then sailed onto buoy No.4 which we picked up at our first attempt! There is no mobile signal here so that is not a very good start!

What a delightful place! From the moment we called up we had the warmest of welcomes. We took the dinghy to the dock and lifted it out with their crane, there being too much swell to leave it in the water and no real protection around the dock. We were taken by car to the yacht club which was really a room in a small business run by Jim (a Kiwi) and his wife Mamata (a local Niuean), who were so helpful and full of useful information. Having cleared customs we explored the interesting little town and found that we were in a whale sanctuary where humpback whales came to breed. To our delight we had two swimming through our anchorage no more than 10m from the boat. My word they are big from this distance! What a sight!

Of course, on our visit to the yacht club, I had shared the engine problem that had prompted our arrival in Niue. So it was that the following morning we were hailed over the radio by Keith, the commodore of the yacht club who was offering to organise some assistance. Keith was a retired headmaster from Dunedin whose wife had accepted a two-year contract to teach mathematics here, four years ago. Keith’s main occupation appeared to be looking after visiting yachties. What a star he was! As you know, I am usually ‘allergic’ to assistance

however well meaning, but I did not have a workshop manual for our Perkins M92, and I was unsure of how to release the injection pump. Well, Keith located Willy, whose trade was engine re-build. Willy had lived (as so many Niueans do) in New Zealand for 27 years, before returning home to set up a number of businesses. Apart from his engineering shop, he owned two coffee shops, one of which he had built out of surplus plastic water tanks.

Willy supported me for two and a half days. This was whilst we got the injector pump off, discovered the problem to be a seized governor due water corrosion, re-fitted it twice because the local injector 'expert' left out an 'o' ring and finally got the engine to operate normally. During this time, he gave me quite an insight into life on Niue. Willy was frustrated that the island, which was blessed with such wonderful natural resources, was still dependent on handouts from New Zealand taxpayers. He resented that millions of dollars had been spent on a new government building to centralise the various departments rather than on infrastructure that would enable the islanders to create wealth. Niue did not feature in Air New Zealand's destinations in their timetable because; quite simply there were only 39 holiday beds available on the island. His point was, of course, that if the money had been spent on developing a holiday resort hotel, then tourist dollars would provide long term prosperity for the Niueans. To me it sounded just like the Labour Government's devolution fiasco. How sad it is that the blindingly obvious appears to be more complicated than rocket science. Bureaucracy is almost as damaging as Generals who need a war. Willy would only accept $100NZ for all his time and effort - what a gentleman!

In the meantime, we attended the yacht club 'sausage sizzle' and met everybody. There were about 7 other yachts here, all on moorings, as apparently the seabed is full of cracks that tend to swallow up anchors and invariably yachts used to lose them which was expensive. There was a lovely French family, Caroline, and Pierre from 'Carrumba' with their young – all teenagers and dog, bien sur! They have spent a year in Papeete to put all the children into school. Being part of France, the syllabus and examinations are all common. They loved it, but they had to leave, or they would be taxed as locals and having already had to pay taxes in France they felt they had to go. They are on their way to New Caledonia – also French – so the children can go to school there. Apparently, that is another wonderful place to visit. However, when we met them there later on, they were nowhere near so enthusiastic but that is another story.

Back on Moonbeam we could hear the whales huffing and puffing throughout the night. It really is a privilege to see them swimming so close to the boats in the anchorage. Sometimes they were so close that you would be able to reach out and touch them. But despite their huge size they seemed to be in perfect control so that although they were close they never touched us or indeed anyone else in the anchorage. Jeremy and Megan from Portland, Oregon, on their yacht 'Madeleine' joined us for a tour around the island. I had attended the police station and am now in proud possession of a Niuean driving licence so we could hire a car. We had a fascinating day visiting all the sites that we had been

directed to by the yacht club which included caves, chasms and rock pools complete with resident sea-snakes.

They were a young couple who were both engineers, Jeremy was able to work whenever he had a wifi signal because he was a software engineer and his previous company still used him from time to time. Megan, however, was looking for a teaching job somewhere. They had an interesting tale to tell because a neighbour of theirs who was unfortunate enough to bear the same name (probably Abdul) as someone who was a suspect in the 9/11 atrocity disappeared. He was not even a Moslem but a second generation American lawyer. Now, if they are to be believed, and they had no reason to lie, he did not re-appear for nearly a year during which time his wife was not told where he was being held, he had no access to a lawyer and no rights to be heard in a court. He had been held under the laws introduced under the Homeland Security Bill. So much for the rule of law!

Now on a good recommendation we had had a fish and chips supper at 'Jenna's' restaurant and spied Jenna who was rather a large lady, having her hair done in the kitchen. But the real joy was going there for the Tuesday night feast. This was a Niue institution for which booking was essential. It was a buffet with a variety of local dishes, all of which were delicious. I sweet talked Jenna into sharing with me the recipe for the herb encrusted, seared tuna that was to die for – what a taste sensation!

We have had a wonderful time here in Niue but it is now definitely time to move on. The engine is fixed and the halyard replaced and the water-maker in perfect working order again; so we have not been idle! It has been an amazing experience having the whales swimming around us, so it is very much a visit to store away in our memories for ever. Everyone has been so kind and helpful and we have met some interesting people - a nice New Zealand couple here on holiday that live in the South Island, we shall certainly try to visit them when we are there. So, tomorrow we are off to Tonga which is only 230nms away.

The whales came to see us off last night – they were grunting and groaning just the other side of the hull. I am glad it is made of Kevlar! However we only did 119nms on the first day but we were in no hurry and in the evening of the second day we were rewarded with the sight of the green flash. It is only the third time I have seen this phenomenon in all the sunsets we have watched. Another extraordinary thing happened on this trip. We lost a day of our lives. July 27th 2008, is missing because we crossed the dateline.

We arrived in Vava'u on the fisherman's wharf in the town of Neiafu awaiting customs clearance. We had visits from Immigration, Health, Quarantine and Customs. Quarantine confiscated fruit and vegetables that I am sure we could have bought back the following day in the market. We traded a length of rope for the promise of a courtesy flag with 'Loofy' who had helped us tie up on the wharf. The rope was apparently to be used to tether his horse. However, when he spun the same yarn to Jeremy and Megan when they arrived a couple of days later, they spotted their rope in the market the following day.

By now, we were used to what for us, unassuming 'Brits', is an amusing phenomenon. It would appear that American and Canadian yachties were not happy unless they had someone to talk to on the radio. First thing in the morning you would hear the challenge "Gingi, Gingi are you up yet? What are you going to do/ wear this morning? Shall we meet for breakfast/elevenses/ lunch? Have you heard the forecast? Etc. Etc". Maybe there is a difference between the DNA of the descendants who went out to discover the New World and the descendants of those sent out to colonise it. It is so funny to listen to. It is as though they need to check in to check up that no disaster has overtaken them during the night. However, one of the interesting aspects of this is that in any group of American and Canadian yachts there is a group review of the weather forecast. In my view, the best description of what happens is a form of 'Chinese Whispers' whereby at the end of the day, the pleasant force 4-5 Trade Wind has become a full-blown hurricane. This means that we almost never saw a lone North American yacht because they tended to sail in convoys having come to a group decision of whether to set out or not. When we talked about this with Jeremy and Megan they said that when they were in San Diego preparing to depart they met dozens of yachts that had been holed up there, sometimes for years, awaiting a suitable 'weather window'. The reason I am reminded of this is that in 'Tropical Tease' I saw a weather window printed on a tee-shirt. It was an open port hole with fair weather cumulus passing by! I wish I had bought one now.

Well, Neiafu certainly looks more prosperous than when we were here 9 years ago, with a big new hotel on the waterfront and lots of cafes, shops, and bars. Some things had not changed. The chart was still based on a British Naval lieutenant's survey in the 1790s. It was incredibly accurate given the instrumentation available then, but our plotter, based on the GPS, showed us moored in main street Neiafu not far from the market. There was very little in the way of marks or buoys and the sailing directions had not been updated from the 'Moorings' version we had used before. Telecommunications in Tonga are still a stitch-up by the royal family who own the TCC. Foreign Sim cards do not work here, and Skype is blocked from connecting to phone lines. That said, a local Sim Card was obtained from the TCC in about an hour, the laptop worked on a wifi signal in the cafe 'Aquarium' and another cafe, 'Tropicana' had a good internet setup.

We were to spend three weeks in this tropical paradise, and we were so very grateful that we had changed our minds about giving it a miss. In Vava'u you wouldn't have really known that the King's Coronation had occurred on 1st August, but things were to change when he visited Neiafu just over two weeks later. In the meantime, we needed to send a document to the UK and spent the most frustrating Saturday morning trying to locate the FedEx and DHL offices and then hopelessly trying to impress the staff of the urgency of it. As it turns out, FedEx were going to send it to Fiji and DHL to Nukalofa, but in neither event was the document going to leave Neiafu until the following Tuesday.

We had a lot of fun with Jim and Diane, a Canadian couple from Vancouver, on their yacht 'Prarie Oyster' and were to meet up with them again in New Zealand several months later. Jim was an amusing retired mining engineer who loved talking and my rum punches. He was so impressed that they were topped with fresh nutmeg he complained to the

owner of the 'Bounty Bar', which was a popular spot in down-town Neiafu, that his were not as good! In fact, the owner had only recently arrived and taken over and was still sporting a Waitrose shopping bag. Interestingly, many of the businesses were run by ex-pats who had been passing through and had decided to stay. One such was 'Tropical Tease' owned by Cindy, a lovely American lady, who had stopped off with her husband to run the 'Bounty Bar'. They had arrived on their motor yacht. However, they had since broken up and she had opened the tee-shirt shop. We got Oyster to send us a line drawing of Moonbeam and Cindy made us some great tee-shirts. I wish we had ordered more, especially as she wanted to give us Eloise's which had 'Future Crew' on the arm. There was a 'cruisers' morning radio net run in turn by the local businesses to announce the weather and advertise events. It was very apparent what a disaster it was for the local economy when a cruise ship turned back to Auckland, abandoning her voyage due to severe weather.

I forgot to mention that Loofy did in fact turn up with the promised courtesy flag and we bartered another length of rope for a Fiji courtesy flag and paid him double for some bread. Loofy was obviously quite an entrepreneur.

We had some lovely sails around the islands and did some diving on the hull and cleaned her lines in some of the most pristine crystal-clear waters. It was lovely, easy sailing and we were reminded of just how beautiful this part of Tonga is. When we were last here, we had a very special meal at Mounu Island Resort, which is a small island with half a dozen thatched guest bungalows around the white coral beach. Well, we went back for old times' sake and discovered that the same people were running it. Times had obviously been good because they had extended and had a deck outside the front of the main building which was the reception area and restaurant. We had picked up one of their moorings and taken the dinghy in and beached it so that we could enjoy an exquisite dinner in candlelight overlooking the water. The owners were obviously well ensconced in Tongan society because they had been invited to the King's Coronation Ball and, apparently the King was a regular visitor to the resort.

Back in Neiafu things were developing apace for the arrival of the King. Three arches had been constructed over the roads, and banners, bunting and flags adorned most buildings. Finally, the King arrived in Neiafu and promptly all the international telephone lines went down. On Monday15th August we watched the Kava Ceremony in honour of the King. It was a very slow, drawn-out affair but obviously full of a wonderful tradition. The King sat under a magnificent canopy with a crown on top, whilst everyone else (including us) sat out in the sun. We had previously been instructed on the wearing of the coconut matting skirt which was worn by both men and women. It was worn as a mark of respect – one year for bereavement, but in addition, for a job interview and certainly for the Kava Ceremony with the King. We had lunch at 'Mango' after taking photos of the Navy before they got back onto their boat, amongst some of the Royal entourage, all speaking impeccable English.

That night the King failed to turn up to the planned Church Service, apparently preferring to stay with his boyfriend. He sent out for a takeaway from Aquarium so perhaps he doesn't like local food. Nevertheless, the rest of us had a magical evening because the Navy band

which was on a barge positioned in front of the hotel where the King was supposed to make an appearance and was just alongside us, played beautifully. We enjoyed a drink with Jim, Diane, Jeremy, and Megan. Suddenly the entire bay, which is essentially circular, was lit up by torch light. The torches were held by school children that had been positioned every few metres around the bay. It was quite beautiful.

Our time in Tonga was coming to an end so we bunkered some fuel, topped up our supplies and checked out. We passed the lovely beach at anchorage #8 (Mooring's guide) where the Navy had been preparing for the King's BBQ. Tents and furniture had been laid out and it looked very grand indeed. However, we hadn't been invited so we decided to continue to Fiji. Our sail was uneventful, mainly under the Yankee alone with the wind abaft. Sarah resorted to English Channel gear with about five layers topped with thermal trousers and oilies because it was overcast with rain and drizzle and cold – well relatively.

There was one bright spot: Moonbeam has now completed half her circumnavigation. We have covered 18,000 odd miles in the process. When you say it like that it seems an awful lot of sailing.

Now herein lies a lesson. We picked up the loom of the lights of Suva a couple of hours out. Given that the sailing directions and chart indicated that the leading lights through the reef were red and easy to see, we decided to go against our rule of awaiting daylight for the reef passage. However, when I lined up the red lights, our approach was adrift of the leading line on our plotter. Thankfully, our disquiet at this anomaly prompted us to abandon our approach. This was extremely fortunate because had we followed the red 'leading lights' we would have impaled ourselves on the reef. Having aborted our approach, we followed an inbound container ship and subsequently were able to confirm with Port Control that the leading lights had been changed to blue! In fact, the Pilot boat, who had obviously overheard our conversation with Port Control, stayed on standby until we were safely through the reef.

On reflection, having abandoned our first line of defence – transit by day – we had been rescued by our agreement that either of us could veto a plan if we were not entirely happy. This saved the Insurers a lot of money and very possibly saved us our lives.

We were directed to the Quarantine Anchorage and dropped anchor for a lovely sleep. The problem of arriving here on Saturday was that we were forbidden to leave the boat until processed by the Authorities and that is not going to happen until Monday! Happily, Brian from 'Scraatch' was nearby and he delivered us a case of beer and an internet card, so we were able to communicate with the outside world.

On Monday at about 1100 hours, Quarantine and Health pitched up in a harbour launch. They went around the boats in order of arrival over the weekend and dropped off a ream of forms to be filled out. Then, when they returned about 20 minutes later, they collected these forms and filled out a few of their own, asked what provisioning we had on board, and then told us we could take down our 'Q' flag and go ashore. We duly took the dinghy into the Royal Suva Yacht Club where, once again, we met helpful and friendly staff. However, our mission was Immigration and Customs which were located inside the

main commercial port. More lengthy form filling and then back to another government office to obtain our cruising permit. Back to Suva the following day (happily taxis are cheap here) to pay the Port Captain and we had officially entered Fiji. Sadly, this was not the case as we found out that we had effectively only arrived in the port of Suva, and we had to repeat this process of checking in and out of each of Fiji's ports. What the Fijians did with all this useless paperwork is anybody's guess. But we made the most of our visits into Suva, wandering around the thriving market and visiting the fascinating museum. There was an interesting display of old traditional outrigger canoes, weapons, cannibal forks and the history of tattooing. We walked around the Thurston Gardens which was the original site of Suva village and had lunch at the busy bowling club overlooking the harbour.

We decided to sail around to Levuka which was the original capital before colonisation. So, having checked out of Suva, we set off for a pleasant sail. We discovered why the capital had moved when we arrived in the harbour, which was exposed to the Trade Winds, with the rather run-down town, abutting steep hills behind with no room for expansion. Added to this, the aromas emanating from the fish factory on the wharf made the anchorage rather unsavoury. Happily, when we went ashore the following day, we were able to check in and out at the same time. Levuka had obviously seen better days, and although the (only) front street looked like a set for a Western movie, everything needed a fresh coat of paint. We returned to the boat and after a roly-poly night set off once more to return to Suva. Our arrival back on Saturday meant that we could not check back in until Monday, by which time we had decided to go to the Yasawa Group of islands. For this, we needed to arm ourselves with some kava. A set of twigs held together by string and looking like (and called) a witch's hat set us back about $15. This was sold in the 'grog' area on the first floor of the market.

We met Amanda and John off 'Gingi' and Jim and Diane off 'Prarie Oyster' on a mission to get their visas for Australia, their intended destination. Amanda is English although her home was San Francisco for many years before taking off cruising with John, a jazz musician, some 15 years ago. We had first heard John practising his trumpet scales back in the Tuamotus, but he had entertained us royally in the 'Bounty Bar' in Tonga with keyboard and trumpet. He had been offered a job teaching music back in the States, so their plan was to sell the boat when they reached Australia.

The following day saw us dropping anchor in Momi bay, by Nadi (pronounced Nandi), and then we moved into Vudu point marina, which is an unusual circular construction with boats moored fore and aft against the wall. We had wifi access here and we were able to catch up on a few chores and the laundry. A taxi ride into Latuka, which had the feel of a country town with a magnificent market, allowed us to check in with customs. There is a huge sugar factory here and enormous loads of sugar cane were being transported by trucks and a railway which ran around the plantations. We had come into town with the lone skipper of 'Isis' a 25ft sloop, who was a young fisherman on Salt Lake, Utah for two months of the year. In this period, he made enough money to fund his cruising for the remaining ten. He fished for food that was given to prawns in prawn farms!

Our visit next day to Nadi was disappointing. The romance of the name contrasted starkly with the reality of the town. We had no wish to stay and certainly would not holiday here. No sooner had we put our nose out en-route to Waya Island in the Yasawa Group, we had to reef right down when the wind picked up. The brisk sail was uneventful until I shouted "hang on" at the top of my voice, because two whales broached right in front of the bow, so close that I thought we were going to hit them – we could certainly smell them, but fortunately we missed. We spent a couple of lazy days making repairs to the bimini, which is really on its last legs and went ashore to present our kava to the Chief of the village, in accordance with the custom we had read about, in the cruising guide. The extent of the poverty was quite sobering in contrast to what we had seen elsewhere, and we wished that we had brought much more ashore to give to them. We were taken to the Chief and sat with him cross-legged on the floor of the Meeting Hut along with his right-hand man, whilst the Chief enquired of us, in very good English, about our voyage. Then, together they launched into a greeting in Fijian, where we recognised that he was blessing our voyage and afterwards he extended to us the freedom to wander in and around the village and to stay in the bay.

However, our visit was cut short by me tripping on the foredeck and breaking a tooth on the open hatch. The tooth, which I thought was my implant, went through my lip, and I clearly need some medical attention. We were in two minds as to whether or not it needed a suture, so we returned to the marina and went into town to locate a doctor. I did not plan to seek out a dentist until we reached New Zealand! A couple of days later (Friday) we decided to depart and therefore we needed to check out. What a drama that proved to be! Customs asked where the boat was and stated that we couldn't be processed because we hadn't brought the boat around to the anchorage where they could see it. Additionally, Immigration chipped in that the law stated that once we had cleared out, we had to leave immediately without further stepping foot on Fiji soil. This impasse was clearly not going to be resolved by me losing my temper, which I have to say was my first reaction. So, I grovelled. I pointed out the injury to my face which had now taken on a colourful bruising under my tan and otherwise generally ate humble pie. This was all done in the room where a somewhat faded picture of a young Queen Elizabeth still hung on the wall. After about 45 minutes of this the big Chief of Customs grudgingly signed the forms and then handed them to Immigration. Whilst all this was going on, I had to listen to a series of lectures about how I had transgressed their laws and that if they gave in to me then, they would have to give in to others. I was admonished to return directly to the boat and to depart immediately.

Well, this was all well and good, but we needed to go to the supermarket to stock up on our provisions for the journey. Given that this was Friday afternoon, we had this vision that Customs and Immigration would decide to go home early and trip over us in the town and throw us in jail. However, they didn't, and we arrived back at the marina fully provisioned and ready to set off the following day, for what we anticipated would be an 8 – 10 day passage.

Now, it would be true to say that Sarah had been getting steadily more apprehensive about this final 1300nms leg to New Zealand. It did not help that over the past few weeks we had listened to various 'war stories' about the passage, and that in Jimmy Connor's book of

World Routes, he makes the statement that it could be ‘difficult’. As ever, the longer you dwell on these things, the worse they appear. So, the best thing to do was to get on with it.

It was to be a passage of contrasts. The water temperature when we left was 26.5C and when we arrived, 17.4C. We started out with a lovely sail through the lagoon and then the wind left us and became light but mainly from the south, requiring us to sail close-hauled. Added to this we were in a trough of low pressure and the incessant rain showers made it wet and miserable. By day 4, Sarah threatened to get off, but given that we were 500nms from the nearest land, I didn’t take it too seriously. However, there was an underlying message here as I had undertaken not to sail with the wind forward of the beam and only when it was warm. In that we were beating into a wind that came directly from the Antarctic and we were wrapped up in oilies and only made 44.9nms in the last 24-hour period, I was not doing so well.

It took a week to get just over halfway and because we knew that Quarantine would take all our fresh food, we had not over catered, with the result that we were running low. We had landed a fine yellow fin tuna, it is true, but the fresh vegetables were at an end. The Iridium satphone playing up in its usual fashion had one positive outcome, which was to force me to make the weather fax work using the SSB radio. This meant that although weather from the satellite was intermittent at best, I was able to download synoptic charts and forecasts for +24, +36, +48 and +72hours. However, the main GPS that drives the plotter started announcing that it had “no fix” and after a couple of days I traced the problem to the antenna cable, which I must have disturbed when I was playing with the SSB.

These minor irritations were as nothing when the rudder jammed on full lock. I think that this was the first time I had ever felt insecure on Moonbeam. We were close-hauled with the wind in the south, force 4 and the autopilot had driven the rudder to full lock where it had jammed. Well, we hove-to as best we could and when I had calmed down and started to think through the problem in a logical way, I recalled our conversation of a few days ago. This concerned the change in the ‘whirring’ note of the autopilot that is ever present in our cabin. Essentially, when the autopilot is engaged the electric motors run backwards and forward to adjust the position of the rudder to maintain course. This is presented as a ’whirring’ noise that is only noticeable for a short period before the brain shuts it out: that is unless the noise changes, which it had done. With this in mind I got everything out of the lazarette so that I could get at the rudder quadrant and traced the problem to the left hand drive unit, which I withdrew and subsequently replaced with the spare – what a relief!

We had started out from Fiji with about 500ltrs of fuel which I had thought was more than enough, but in addition to running the generator for battery charging and refrigeration we had been motoring to try to push ourselves on. Consequently, I was beginning to get concerned about our fuel state, so I decided to top up our main tank using the deck supply of 45ltrs which were nominated as our whale deterrent. Sarah had read that if a whale gets too close to the boat, a few gallons of diesel in the water will do the trick and persuade it to go elsewhere. But, by now our only escorts were dozens of storm petrels and an occasional albatross.

Then – joy of joy, eleven days out, "land ahoy" – we could see our destination. Oh, what a feeling! Another 60nms and we hove-to off Bream Head awaiting sun-up and, at 0945, 15minutes short of twelve days, we tied up on the customs wharf at Marsden point for a genuinely warm welcome by Customs and Quarantine for clearance into New Zealand. Once cleared, (we were the first foreign arrival of the season) we went the 15nms up the river and moored at Whangerei Town Basin Marina to start our New Zealand adventure, which is another story. It was 25th September 2008, 10 days short of 3 calendar years since we left England, with 19442nms in the log – what an achievement!

I don't have words to describe our feeling of absolute euphoria. For years, I had declared my dream that, when I retired, I would sail to New Zealand: and here we are. In truth, it has been easy for me. I have navigated all my life, instructed pilots for over a quarter of a century, commanded a crew for over half my career and held positions of high responsibility in a big organisation. I am practical and I can fix things. So, the real achievement is not so much mine, but Sarah's. It was my dream to do this, not hers. I think that if you asked her what she wanted to do with her life after I retired, and she gave you an honest reply, going sailing would not come very high up the list. She has felt badly torn between this adventure and being home to support Annabel in her preparations for her wedding in November, and being there for Gemma, during her pregnancy and the birth of our grand-daughter, Eloise. We have, of course, been fortunate to be able to travel home and even more fortunate that friends and family have visited us along the way. That said, there are not many women who would want to spend very much time alone with me in a yacht, let alone 3 years! I fell in love with, and married, a very special lady.

Nine Months in New Zealand

Arriving in Whangarei was like entering Aladdin's cave without having to rub the lamp! Brian, the manager of the Town Basin Marina, which was owned by the Town Council, could not have been more helpful. All of the local marine businesses ran a cooperative to produce a booklet describing all the services available. There was competition for any and all marine activities and supplies and consequently prices were competitive for materials and spares and labour was relatively cheap.

The Town Basin was right on the edge of the thriving town of about 60,000 people, with a large supermarket 100m away and two others to choose from within a kilometre. There was nothing that could not be obtained here. There were 3 engineering/tool shops, stainless fabricators, countless D-I-Y shops, electronics, and second-hand bookshops. You name it – it was here and all within walking distance!

Of course, the first thing we needed was cash, but unfortunately the ATM in the supermarket swallowed my card. We found the ATM's owning bank in the town, only to be told that the card would be returned to the issuing bank. Since in this case it was HSBC in Malta, I explained that this would cause us a real problem. They, in turn explained that the local ATMs were serviced by Securicor and to locate and return my card, they would have to send a special operative which may incur a charge. We agreed to go ahead, but when we returned to the bank the following day, it proved that Securicor were unable to raise an invoice to an

individual and my card was returned with their compliments. I somehow find it difficult to imagine the same service to a New Zealander in similar circumstances in England but perhaps I am being unkind. However, the last laugh was on me because when I re-inserted the card in a hole-in-the-wall attached to a bank, which we had decided was the safest thing to do in the future, it spat it out with the message that the card had expired – which indeed it had.

Meanwhile, I had found a dentist who, happily was able to advise that my broken teeth were both crowns and not the implant and so over the next week or so I had a root filling and two new crowns fitted. I was able to smile once more and at a fraction of the cost of UK prices! Sarah was so impressed she organised an appointment for herself to get her teeth whitened.

We were able to wash the boat down and get the salt off our foul weather gear. We took the sewing machine to the Elna shop to be told that the electronic control board was more expensive than a new machine, so we decided to invest in a new one. Time was spent up the mast fixing the staysail halyard and then Pelle, who ran the local Doyle sail loft, came to help unbend the yankee, main and staysail and took them for inspection and repair.

Our square search around the industrial area proved unsuccessful in locating an immersion heater to fit the calorifier because the New Zealand standard is different to the UK. However, I managed to get a boss made up in order to adapt the opening to accommodate the New Zealand standard heater and so at last we were back to having domestic hot water.

On the plus side we located a diesel engineering shop who would be able to service the injectors and more importantly the injection pump – something I was to do more than once in the coming months. The first estimate for a new Bimini frame was disappointingly expensive, but the second was attractive, and we decide to go ahead with a plan for a fixed frame, suitably reinforced and at the same time reduce the height of the sprayhood.

I had no joy in fixing the heating system which, of course had not been used since we left the UK (and as it turns out should have been run monthly!) and neither heater would start. Luckily, I found a Webasto supplier in Auckland who should hopefully be able to source spare parts. It will give us an excuse to hire a car and take a trip, but meanwhile we have succumbed to the need to purchase a fan heater because the mornings are still chilly even if the clocks have gone forward for summertime. We took the TV to a repair man, but as with the sewing machine it is more cost effective to buy a new one.

Although only early October, time was running short before Moonbeam was to come out of the water so we could return home for Annabel and Jack's wedding, and still there was a great deal to do. I stripped the oven so we could clean it and get some replacement parts although only some were still being produced. This gave us an excuse to go out for lunch every day for a week, until I put it back together.

Our trip to Auckland surprised us by taking nearly three hours. The road is mostly single carriageway with occasional passing places. Slow it might be, but the drive is through the most staggeringly beautiful countryside. It was good to learn how long the journey was so

that we leave plenty of time to get to the airport. Having found the Webasto dealer, I suppose it was inevitable that we were told that the heaters were beyond economical repair, but new heaters could be obtained at some extortionate price. A decision we decided to put off for now, as summer is around the corner.

We have a problem going home because our 'E' ticket requires a stop in Bangkok, so even though I spoke to staff travel and there is space available on the through flight we will nevertheless have to night stop, something that is not entirely unwelcome to the female part of the crew!

I spent a whole morning doing a five-minute job of installing the new TV into its cupboard. It only just fits and of course had to be fixed so it can't come adrift. This protracted exercise, I see from Sarah's diary, enabled her to smuggle a new dress on board.

After parting with lots of dollars I got the injection pump back fully re-conditioned and was very satisfied when the engine stared after refitting it. The nightmare of losing the timing with the injector removed was over for the time being. The new sewing machine just about coped with making a new wheel/binnacle cover and mainsheet pocket, but it is clearly on the edge of its capabilities.

We decided to take another day off and drove up to the Bay of Islands. It was another delightful drive through magnificent countryside – arum lilies growing wild in the fields and huge herds of cattle not seen at home since childhood. The bay is quite lovely with everything looking well-kept and cared for, so we are excited with the prospect of cruising there after Christmas.

We had already met the pleasant and helpful team that run Norsand, which was the local boatyard, when we visited on foot and so we knew what to expect when we arrived at 0930 to be pulled out. We were met with a reception committee consisting of Kevin, the yard foreman and Victor and Jo, who managed it. After positioning Moonbeam on what was rather a 'Heath Robinson' trailer, she was pulled out, washed off and parked in the yard. Her bottom was not too bad given the length of time since we left Curacao with only my diving on her from time to time to clean her.

Living on the boat when she is out of the water is like living in a caravan park with central loos and showers as any grey water from the boat had to be collected and taken to the sewers. As soon as we had arrived in Whangarei, I had sent the complete Iridium sat-phone to a main agent in Auckland and we were advised that the problem lay on a printed circuit board in the main unit (no longer made, of course), which resulted in the unit's ability to Tx/Rx falling off over a matter of a few seconds. This must have been the case from the outset so I shall collate all the invoices and try to get some compensation. The bottom line is that we need a new sat-phone. Oh dear!

We settled on Sunbrella material in colour linen for the new sprayhood, bimini and UV strips and ordered the bimini and sprayhood from Palmer Canvas in Whangarei. We ordered a new permanent bimini frame and a reduction of the height of the sprayhood from a stainless

specialist, to be constructed and modified whilst we were away. We asked Pelle to do the sails. The last thing we organised was for anchor and chain to be re-galvanised and the max-prop to be serviced whilst we were away. So, on October 20th we departed Auckland for London via Sydney and Bangkok.

Annabel and Jack were married in an incredibly moving and beautiful ceremony in Wells Cathedral and Eloise was christened the week before, so it was a lovely time with our children. Christmas was spent with Tony and Jo together with all our families. Very sadly, it would be Tony's last. His cancer had clearly taken a rapid turn for the worse and the prognosis was dire.

I departed on New Year's Eve direct to Sydney and arrived back on Moonbeam on 3rd January where I found her safe and sound. The max-prop had been serviced by filing the cups and the fixed bimini frame had been installed together with the reduction of the sprayhood frame. The sails were returned, and the anchor and chain were returned. Unfortunately, there was no sign of the new bimini or sprayhood. Nevertheless, I completed the anti-fouling with the local equivalent of Awlgrip which was prohibited in New Zealand.

On 16th January Moonbeam was returned to the water and sailed up to the town basin. Ronnie from Palmer Canvas completed the fitting of the sprayhood, bimini and an insert between the two. Sarah returned to Whangerai on schedule on the 20th of January, having routed in comfort to Los Angeles and discomfort from there to Aukland. Ronnie constructed shade material to be attached to the bimini, which hopefully would be needed to protect us from the sun. He was a lovely man who befriended us and gave me his book describing Captain Cook's voyage of discovery. He envisaged constructing rain curtains to enclose the cockpit in adverse weather conditions.

Five days later, my sister, Linda, and brother-in-law, Norlan, joined us. Once we had completed the safety briefing, we departed the town basin and once re-fueled, spent the night at Tutukaka marina. The following day we had a gentle sail up to a lovely anchorage in Deep Water Bay, at the entrance to the Bay of Islands. This was really fortunate because my sister was not comfortable on a boat. A gentle sail to Robertson Island for lunch where the sand is not quite so white as the picture postcards before motoring around to Russell to anchor off the boat club. As usual, the outboard wouldn't start so it was not until the next day that we could go ashore once it had been fixed. The girls went shopping whilst Norlan and I climbed Flagstaff Hill.

After a couple more days, a visit to the Stone Store, New Zealand's oldest trading post revealed why so many blacksmiths emigrated here. It was fascinating to learn that nails were cut by hand until machinery was introduced, and the Stone Store had timbers sporting both hand cut and machined nails. Shortly afterwards, it was time to say good-bye to my sister and her husband and offload the golf clubs as their holiday was only half over, but the visit was a great success thanks to the benign weather.

Our 35th wedding anniversary was celebrated at Kamakuru in Russell on 2nd February and Richard and Rita arrived the next day. Richard and I trained together, and he was my best

man as I was his. Rita and Sarah also trained together as BOAC stewardesses at a time when female cabin crew were special. We are lucky guys!

For the next few days, we wandered around the Bay and visited Pahia to go to the Waitangi Treaty Grounds to witness the 21 Gun Salute for Waitangi Day and climbed Flagstaff Hill again. Our challenge for this trip was the throttle cable parting and the need to replace the Morse cable. We initially robbed the dinghy, but we were then able to obtain a replacement from Opua Marina and duly fitted it.

On the 8th of February we left the Bay of Islands and headed back to Tutukaka in light airs and brilliant sunshine, which was enough to send them home with sunburn! We watched the amateur Whangerai Angler's club weighing the striped marlin they had caught in a competition. Some had been tagged and released others killed and brought ashore. One weighed 129kgs – it was going to make a lot of steaks! A short trip the following morning back to Whangerai, where after a lovely evening meal we sadly had to say good-bye once more to Richard and Rita, our very special guests who were going home via Sydney.

We spent the next week doing the laundry, servicing the engine and generator. I had to take the cold plate out of the fridge to have it welded as it had developed a leak along the bottom seal and then the local fridge man replaced the refrigerant. We departed Whangerai on the afternoon high tide heading for Rodney point but abandoned the plan when we realised that our ETA was after nightfall and before moonrise, so we diverted to an anchorage in Urquhurt Bay. Next day we had a lovely sail on down to Bon Accord Harbour on Kawau Island. It is a lovely little place, reminding Sarah of Norway where she lived as a child. The forecast storm dully arrived the following day, but the harbour turned out to be a perfect refuge. We suffered an occasional gust of wind but plenty of rain, sometimes reducing the visibility to less than 100m. We had booked a slot in Bayswater Marina across the harbour from the centre of Auckland and sailed down at over 8kts to arrive at lunchtime, as the wind was rising and the sky becoming progressively more overcast.

The marina was exposed to the prevailing wind so we fendered and warped up before coming downwind alongside the fuel dock to check in. We were allocated a berth starboard hand to and again downwind, but the crazy system here had no cleats on the pontoon, so it was impossible to attach the spring (athwartship) line to any part of the pontoon. Luckily, we had help from the marina staff otherwise we would have found ourselves in a bit of a mess. We discovered that most of the pontoons were privately owned and thus set up to suit the resident boats. Not very helpful to visitors!

Auckland

We stayed in Auckland for two weeks, having hired a car so we could explore the city and drive down to Rotorua. Once we checked in to the local IBIS hotel, we visited the Kiwi Encounter where there were chicks and young adults. They are fascinating birds, mainly nocturnal and the female lays an enormous egg weighing over 400g, equivalent to a human

having a 30lb baby!! A tour round Wako, a thermal village where residents cook their food in the natural thermal pools was followed by a show put on by the local Maoris to include the haka. We routed back via the Bay of Plenty on the Coromandel peninsula in time to greet Linda and Norlan for supper on Moonbeam before they left for home. They had been away for six weeks. The remaining time was spent as tourists, visiting the Auckland Museum, the Boat Show in the Viaduct Marina, and an amazing Eric Clapton concert in the Vector Arena, while dodging the gales sequenced every two or three days. We bought some Sunbrella canvas to make hatch covers. In constructing the first one we began to doubt that our new sewing machine was up to the task – we shall see. We found a great Chinese restaurant downtown serving Dim Sum, my only mistake was in ordering chicken feet, but we plan to return when we come back.

The outboard was fixed (water in the fuel again) so we decided against buying a new one, having been sorely tempted by special offers at the boat show. Having bunkered 600 litres of diesel we departed Auckland Harbour on 7th March, heading for the Coromandel peninsula. We had become used to the weather forecast, which was broadcast every four hours, completely changing the outlook from the one issued before. This seemed to be because the progression of low-pressure systems in the Southern Ocean tracked erratically. It meant that 'weather windows' were regularly open for no longer than eight hours. So it was with no surprise that we had to divert to Bon Accord Harbour to shelter when the wind came up. The good news was that we caught a lovely tuna with our new rod and reel acquired at the boat show. This is the first fish since Fiji.

The following day we had a wonderful sail across the Hauraki Gulf around Cape Colville and down through the Mercury Islands to Whitianga and anchored in Maramartotara Bay. A dinghy ashore to a pretty little town to stock up and have lunch. We listened to the forecast and downloaded a weather fax before deciding to cross the Bay of Plenty aiming for Hicks Bay. Needless to say, the wind picked up to a full gale and the penalty for not doing our standard hatch check before departure resulted in half the ocean coming aboard through the open port in the forward heads and flooding Tom's cabin as well. We were heavily reefed but still creaming along when the computer crashed, so no plotter and the need to plot our hourly GPS position on the chart. Cape Runaway lighthouse was raised at 0500 with the wind abating and once we rounded Matakaoa point we anchored in Hicks Bay. Moonbeam had clocked up 20,000 miles. Congratulations Moonbeam.

We sheltered here for three days being battered by SW gales whilst clearing up from the flooded cabin and commissioning the water maker. Once the wind finally abated, we set off for Tolago Bay, anchored overnight before tracking down to Poverty Bay and then into Gisbourne Marina. "Gizzy" was captain Cook's first landing in New Zealand. We were to have a guided tour around his statue by a lovely man, Graham, who had persuaded the council to realign the compass at its base, which had not been positioned accurately.

We were given a warm welcome by a lovely couple, Bill and Margaret Thorpe, who invited us for drinks on their boat, "Fruition" which was alongside us. They collected us and took us to the yacht club and entertained us for supper in their home. Bill took us to his packing

factory and then out to the orchards of mandarins, limes, persimmons and of course, Kiwi fruit. We entertained them on Moonbeam and hope to see them again in the islands as they set off for Vanuatu in June.

So, after a thoroughly pleasant stay we listened to the 0533 forecast which was benign and decided to head straight for Wellington and to visit Napier when we are north bound. We caught two fish that morning one before we left the bay, which we couldn't identify and a blue fin tuna a little later. Sashimi for lunch! We had been out of Gisbourne for less than 12 hours when a NW gale was forecast with winds to 40kts. We were still short of Castlepoint which had been talked about ominously in the yacht club, but in fact we had a relatively quiet night and even had to motor-sail for a while. We got past Castlepoint before the gale arrived with a vengeance with gusts to 50kts. It was not a very pleasant couple of hours but then the wind suddenly dropped to a gentle breeze. However, when we started to round Cape Palliser into the Cook Straight, the gale returned with the wind gusting to 40kts. We had learned in the yacht club that fishing boats would take shelter beneath cliffs known as White Rocks in these conditions and so we decided to do likewise. The charted depths were unhelpful both on the paper chart and the plotter, so we nosed gently in and anchored a few metres off the cliffs. We were safe and secure but had a very uncomfortable night with the wind screaming above the mast. However, by 0600 the following day, the wind had died and by 0800 had dropped to a flat calm, so we motored up the Cook Straight into Wellington. Wellington lies at the head of a superb natural harbour, and we were allocated a slot in Chaffers Marina which is right in the centre of the city.

The following morning was bright and sunny. The waterfront was busy with people sitting outside in sunshine. There was a dragon boat race in the harbor and so the festival taking place along the waterfront was crowded with competing crews, sideshows, and supporters. We wandered through the city as far as the cathedral and then down Lambton Quay to the parliament building and the beehive administrative building designed by Sir Basil Spence, which really works. We also discovered the local department store, so Sarah made plans for some shopping.

On Mother's Day we heard from all three of our children, so Sarah was delighted, albeit really homesick. On the following Tuesday we left Wellington on the high tide because the forecast was for light and variable winds. We decided that these conditions were best for crossing the Cook Strait, and we followed the lights of the ferry crossing from Wellington to Picton and continued up the Straight to round Cape Stephens rather than go through Frenchman's pass. In the morning dolphins came to play with Moonbeam for no less than three hours. It was an entrancing sight. We tracked down Tasman Bay and arrived in Nelson mid-morning and settled into the marina where Moonbeam would be safe and sound when we left her to explore South Island. We celebrated with the first glass of wine in four weeks so our observance of Lent this year was complete. We had discussed the best way of exploring South Island and decided against sailing down the East Coast and consequently hired a car.

Nelson

Before we set off there was a lot of work to be done on the boat. In the first instance the caulking on the teak deck needed to be replaced, and the teak rubbed down and oiled. This proved to be an immense task and had to be interrupted on several occasions by the need to fix the bilge pump and the fridge primary pump and a dozen other tasks.

Nelson proved to be a pretty town and we were impressed by the monument to the early settlers. This is a statue of a family group of three, and which listed all immigrants that arrived from England in November 1841. We had lunch in the Boat Shed where Linda and Nolan had been 7 weeks ago and took a drive to Golden Bay through the most incredibly beautiful countryside past wine and apple growing areas. We went inland around Abel Tasman Park and took the hairpin road to the summit with magnificent views across to Nelson and then down the other side to the ocean front. New Zealand continues to amaze us – the countryside is staggeringly beautiful.

As Easter approached, it seemed to be getting colder by the day and so the air-conditioning was converted to blow out hot air instead of cold. We ventured out into the bay to empty the holding tanks but apart from that Moonbeam stayed in her birth for what turned out to be six weeks. With all the maintenance tasks behind us and, in particular, the bilge pump fixed, we were able to start on our trip to explore South Island.

South Island tour, New Zealand

So, the South Island tour began by setting out initially towards Westport and then on to Graymouth. Once we had got to Westport the rain started and increased in intensity, the sky was unwelcoming, and we found ourselves on the wild west coast. We stayed in a very basic motel and had a curry for supper to warm up. We hoped that this was not a bad omen for our trip.

The following day we set off for Queenstown via Arthurs pass, which was an absolutely memorable drive. Even though it was pouring with rain, and we were amongst the clouds going through. It is amazing to think that this is the one of the main roads crossing east to west. There were huge lorries climbing up sharp hairpin bends and steep gradients. The countryside was just incredible. It leaves one speechless with the magnificence of it all - mile after mile of open country with just the occasional station or barn but otherwise very little human settlement. There are vast stretches of countryside with nothing other than cattle and sheep grazing.

We arrived in Queenstown via Ranfurly and the mountain pass through an amazing gorge. Vines were planted on either side, and it opened up to an enormous lake which was absolutely stunning, surrounded by high mountains. Queenstown itself is very touristy providing all sorts of adventure tours - ideal for the young.

The following day a short drive to Te Anau and a motel right by the lake. Our room on the first floor had a wonderful view. We had stopped on the way to buy some fishing flies for our son-in-law, Jack. The owner of the shop was originally from Scotland in a place called Atholl. Even the scenery around was really like the glens of Scotland.

We booked ourselves on a tour of Doubtful Sound and got up early to organise lunch for a trip which was to last all day. We started with a boat ride across the lake and then boarded coaches to take us deep underground to the power station. The power station supplies electricity to an aluminium smelting plant outside Invercargilk. This aluminium plant provides top quality aluminium that is found in up market cameras. When the facility was built the tails to the turbines were found to be insufficient and the plant could not produce the designed power, so the tails needed to be enlarged. We returned to the coaches for a 45minute journey on a road built especially for the construction of the power station and embarked on another tourist boat. Whilst we sat at our own table and had lunch, we watched the most incredible scenery go by. We saw dolphins and motored out to an island where there was a colony of sea lions. All-in-all a most amazing day through achingly beautiful countryside.

Winter is coming! There was frost on the car in the morning and on the ground and the lake was covered with morning mist with just the mountains visible above. It is time to go north again. We have driven through the most indescribably beautiful country and after having lunch just outside Queenstown we drove through the vineyards of central Otago and onwards towards Fox Glacier where we night stopped.

We woke up to another glorious cool and crisp morning with blue skies and frost on the ground. We drove out of the village to the west so we could look back up at Mount Cook and the Fox Glacier. It was an incredible sight - snow-covered peaks with the glaciers tumbling down the mountain. Once again, just more amazing countryside as we drove past Franz Joseph glacier and continued north before we turned east to cross Alfred's Pass. This time it was in beautiful sunshine. It is just an amazing wilderness that seems to go on and on with high mountains and valleys all around. There are occasional ski areas but essentially the fields were full of cattle and sheep. This is where the Lord of the Rings was filmed.

The following day we spent exploring Christchurch. We visited the cathedral and lit a candle for Sarah’s brother-in-law, Tony and passed the old university buildings which reminded us of an Oxford or Cambridge college. We passed through a porter's lodge into a quad and then continued on to the Botanic Gardens. It is always amazing, that the original founders had such vision to plant so many beautiful trees as well as planning the layout of the gardens and also, of course the city, which makes it so attractive today.

The drive up to Blenheim via Karkura was again outstanding. It was not so rugged but was equally as beautiful, the road followed the coastline for a lot of the time as did the railway line. Blenheim, however, was very disappointing. It is situated on a plain surrounded by hills and mountains and of course mile upon mile of vineyards, many of which we were very familiar with. We had lunch at Alan Scott's vineyard restaurant in a lovely building. It was a little chilly, so we sat inside and had dukkha for the first time. We went on to visit the first world war air museum, which was fascinating, and then drove back via Picton along the Queen Charlotte scenic Route to Nelson. We have driven 2770 km in eight days what a wonderful trip!

The following day was 25 April, Anzac Day. From then until we left Nelson on 4 May we spent our time pottering around the city and completing the numerous tasks around the boat.

The pumps were giving me a real headache, and, in the end, I replaced the bilge pump with a submersible pump. The shower and sink discharge pumps were showing signs of wear, but I eventually refurbished them successfully.

It was amusing to have to describe how to replace the ballcock in the water storage tank in the airing cupboard of our Weybridge flat. Tom had advised that the overflow was causing the outside wall to be permanently wet. Now Tom would be the first to agree that he has no interest whatsoever in DIY, so we were delighted when he rang to say he had managed to fix the problem and replace the valve.

We returned the hire car once we had loaded provisions for our trip northbound and saw that we had completed 3775 km over the hire period of five weeks and three days. We were able to speak to Gemma and Annabel, Gemma getting a little tired as she approaches the end of her pregnancy and Annabel who had completed a sky diving jump from 12,000 feet. We were grateful to hear this after she had done it rather than before!

The weather during this period was autumnal to say the least. Several days of grey skies, strong winds and heavy rain persuaded us that we needed to set off back to Wellington. After all, the rules for foreign yachts meant that we had to leave New Zealand by the end of June, so there was a considerable distance to sail in a relatively short order.

The forecast for the Cook Strait was for the wind to become light and so we departed Nelson Marina leaving behind the delightful, friendly, and helpful marina staff. We completed the 127 miles to Wellington, motoring throughout overnight, in light winds. Once we had bunkered 600lts of fuel we returned to the hammerhead on pontoon B in Chaffers marina. It was six weeks to the day since we left Wellington.

Once again, we found we had to hide from the weather. There was intermittent heavy rain and strong winds with only short periods of sunshine. We pottered around Wellington whilst listening regularly to the forecast, but it was not until Tuesday, 12 May, that the forecast looked good enough to depart. We left Wellington mid-morning and had a bumpy ride down the Cook Strait but once round Cape Palliser it was much more comfortable. We were accompanied by quite a few albatrosses. They are such beautiful birds, and our final send-off was by a pod of dolphins who were busy fishing and leaping into the air.

Needless to say, that once we got around Castlepoint, the seas got rougher and a north-westerly gale set in. This was no fun - it is really sailing at its worst, but as we passed Gisborne the wind abated, so we decided to stop at Tolego Bay to have a rest, a good sleep, and a meal. We stayed here for a day completing little jobs including replacing the port navigation light and sorting out the leaking hatch in the saloon and forward cabin.

Departing to Tolego Bay on a good forecast and slight sees made us optimistic that we might make a good passage to Hicks Bay. However, by early afternoon the wind and sea picked up to give us the most uncomfortable ride around East Cape and on to Hicks Bay. I was having to drain the racor every half hour as water was gaining access to the diesel tank. This process required the engine to be stopped, the water drained from the racor, the filter bowl

replenished with diesel and the engine restarted. This took approximately five minutes during which time we were at the mercy of the wind and sea. Yuck! What a relief when we dropped anchor in Hicks Bay out of the sea and wind. The only bright side of this passage was that we caught a fish.

We spent a couple of days listening to the weather forecasts. There was 60kt of wind in the Cook Strait, so we were very pleased to be here, and although we were comfortable, we were alone in the bay. We concluded that nobody was as crazy as us! I spent an hour or so pumping out the fuel tank and was amazed at the amount of filth that came out and decided to clean the tank once we had arrived in Whangerai.

At last, the forecast indicated a reasonable weather window and we left Hicks Bay mid-morning on 18 May and set off across the Bay of Plenty.

No surprise that the weather turned against us as soon as we rounded Cape Runaway and we motor-sailed for 12 hours before the wind came around and enabled us to sail. The sea was quite rough and so we decided to overnight in Tryphena Harbour on the Great Barrier Island. We ended up staying here for two days hiding from the weather, protected and quite comfortable. Once we left, we had an eight-hour sail to get to a Urquharts Bay, just behind Bream Head where we anchored to await the tide so we could get up to Whangerai. We needed 100 m of chain out due to poor holding and in recovering it, a piece of the windless broke off. Another unexpected expense! We woke up to a beautiful sunny morning and it felt quite warm until you got into the wind. After lunch we gently motored up the river on the tide to reach the Town Basin - by then it was raining quite hard of course! The marina was comparatively empty compared to when we left, as lots of the foreign yachts had already departed for warmer climes. We however, had much to do before we could follow.

We knew that we would have a great deal of busy activity to prepare for our departure from New Zealand. In fact, it turned out that this would take three weeks. The first task was to empty the fuel tank and clean it and to fabricate a new filter because the original one had disintegrated. I made a stainless-steel box and filled it with stainless scorers which seemed to do the trick.

We were delighted that Jim and Diane off Prairie Oyster, last seen in Tonga, knocked on Moonbeam. They were planning to join us here prior to shipping their boat back to Mexico. They proved to be great companions throughout our stay here, with Sarah and Dianne exploring the town and shopping together.

We got Ronnie to look at the Bimini with the plan of engaging him to make a tent. Ronnie comes over as being rather simple, but he is definitely not: he is very chatty and knowledgeable. At the same time Pelle took the sails off in order to inspect them and to make repairs as necessary. Meanwhile I fixed the navigation lights and took the engine injectors to be serviced, and which when returned and fitted gave me great delight when the engine started and ran smoothly.

Having repaired and refurbished the windlass I was able to weld the 40 m of new anchor chain to our existing chain, and we then were able to recover the entire 120 m back into the anchor locker. I used our new purchase of a pressure washer to clean the chain as it was brought aboard, as it had been sitting in the mud at the bottom of the river for a week. I have no doubt that the washer will be well used in due course.

We located a new Iridium Satellite Phone in Auckland and decided we would take a trip in our hire car to obtain charts for Vanuatu and Australia and to purchase the new sat phone.

Jim and Diane came with us. We discovered that they had never experienced dim sum when we had lunch because Jim thought that he should take something from everything that came past us! What fun.

The days were passing quickly and whilst I installed the new sat phone, Ronnie finished the cockpit tent. He was kind enough to give us a book. It was entitled 'Endeavour' which turned out to be a description of Captain Cook's voyage. Pelle returned the sails and helped to bend them on, and I decided to clear out the lazarette.

Now we had been concerned that our medical kit had drugs in it that were time expired. I took it to a pharmacy, but the pharmacist explained that as many of the drugs contained in it were prescription drugs, the easiest way to replace them was to see a doctor. There was a scheme by which a skipper of a boat could get prescription drugs for the boat medical kit, but it was time consuming and complicated. He suggested going to see a doctor who turned out to be a dermatologist but was a keen sailor. I made an appointment accordingly.

Well, I spent an hour with the doctor. He was practical and helpful and went through the medical kit and provided prescriptions for those items that needed replacement. He then quizzed me on many aspects of injury and associated first-aid. For instance, he asked me why I would use an EpiPen. I replied for severe allergic reaction. Good he said – what are you going to do now? As I didn't know, he supplied injectable antihistamine because it was unlikely that I would be able to get the casualty to hospital. He enquired what analgesics we had on board and prescribed morphine because he recognised that Panadol might not be sufficient! He asked me how good I was at suturing, and when I told him I had practised using an orange, he laughed and described the situation where the boat was moving about in a gale and a severe wound had to be sewn. He declared that I needed a stapler and provided one. This was to prove one of the best hours of education spent in New Zealand!

I wanted to get rid of some of the old warps, halyards and sheets which were never going to be used again, alongside the old anchor chain that I had just replaced. So, I put all these on the pontoon with a sign that Jim from Prairie Oyster made which said 'Free - help yourself'. Within an hour they were all gone! Meanwhile, Sarah had stocked up ready for our departure and we departed the Town Basin Marina in the afternoon of Sarah's birthday, 13 June. Jim and Diane were on the dock to help us with lines. It was sad to leave them because they had become really good friends. They are a lovely couple. Jim's parting shot was to offer to crew Moonbeam from Cape Town! We motored down to Marsden Point Marina where we

bunkered 720 L of fuel and recognised that there was still an awful lot to do before we ready to leave and check-out the following day.

However, the wind came up overnight, and it was not very protected in the marina. Consequently, we decided to wait until the weather improved. This was a good decision, because it allowed us to put things away and sort out all the odds and ends that we had not got around to prior to leaving Whangerai. So, on Monday, 15 June we moved to the Customs wharf and were checked out by Bruce, who was the customs officer who had checked us into New Zealand nine months ago. We left the marina at 1115L and said farewell to New Zealand and to start our journey home……

Into the Pacific, once more

We set off in a south-westerly force seven for Port Vila on Vanuatu, running under a reefed main at 6 to 7 kts and completed 171 miles on the first day. We traced an awful smell of diesel to a couple of pinholes which had not been plugged properly when I replaced the fuel tank filter. It made us feel quite ill and we were grateful for our pre-prepared meals. The new sat phone installation worked well and proved that we had been sold an absolute pup originally. It was no wonder that other owners who used iridium were surprised that I did not have a good word to say about it.

The generator kept cutting out for no apparent reason. Eventually I traced the fault to an airlock and happily fixed it because it runs the fridge, freezers, water maker and charges the batteries. It would not have made for a good trip without it! The next couple of days passed uneventfully except for the topping lift parting at the masthead and the neck of the vang adrift which when examined revealed a fracture, which would need repair once we arrived in port.

Day five was a truly awful day, with the wind increasing and blowing a steady gale. We furled the main and had just a pocket handkerchief of yankee because the autopilot drive jammed. My decision to use the spinnaker halyard to give added support in case the passarelle halyard parted was a saga in itself because it got caught round the spreader which entailed a 360 degree turn in big seas in order to recover it. What a mess! In addition, I had to spend the afternoon fixing the connections from the computer to the sat phone so we could send and receive emails and the weather grib files.

Day six was even worse! It started bad enough in a full gale with wave after wave of heavy showers. We were under a slow-moving occluded front so there was no escape. I spent most of the day and all night in the cockpit watching the autopilot and by midday needed a meal, which Sarah was cooking, and a rest. We hove-to on port tack and as I was going up the companionway to furl the staysail, we were side-swiped by a huge sea that laid us nearly flat. I flew across the cabin and landed by the galley worktop on my left upper arm, which I thought I had broken. Happily, I missed the hot food and gas burner that was on, but I was in a miserable state. Sarah went up to deal with the staysail and then came down to try to make me comfortable. She initially gave me a couple of Ibuprofen, but I told her that she had to administer morphine, because I thought I was going to pass out with the pain and shock. Apparently, I had turned grey! Thank goodness for that session with the doctor in

Whangerai. We reviewed our on-board first aid manual and made a splint out of plastic water bottles wrapped with bandages and tried to strap my arm in accordance with the illustration in the manual across my chest. However, my arm would not bend that far and so with hindsight, it might have been a good idea to ask for medical help, but I was sure I had broken it, because the (severe!) pain was halfway up my upper arm.

Having complied with the advice in the manual it helpfully instructed us to go to the nearest hospital! In our present position the nearest hospital was 300miles away, so we had a choice because we were equidistant from Port Villa in Vanuatu and Noumea in New Caledonia. We knew that New Caledonia belonged to France and guessed that the medical support would be better there. We stayed hove-to overnight to rest so that we could start for Noumea in the morning.

Happily, with the engine started and with the wind abated somewhat, the autopilot behaving, we set course for Noumea, albeit that we had water in the fuel. This meant that the racor had to be emptied, regularly every few hours, which was not an easy exercise. The engine needed to be switched off and I had had to squat down in the workshop to drain the water, refill the drum and restart the engine. This was not a pleasant task and once completed I had to lie back on the saloon sofa for a few minutes to recover. We continued in this way until 1900 and then left the boat to drift beam on (a-hull) whilst we had a rest. Sarah was exhausted and could hardly put the washboards in, and we were being knocked by enormous waves. We planned to have a rest overnight, but at midnight because neither of us could sleep due to the boat being thrown about, we started the engine once more and continued towards Noumea.

All the rain and sea spray coming into the cockpit whilst we were running before the wind resulted in the autopilot head and all the instrumentation failing. The autopilot could be controlled from the autopilot head at the chart station, but the instruments requested a code lock. Now we had driven this boat for 21000 miles, and I had never seen this before. As usual with all computers I powered the instruments down and tried the obvious solution of 0000 or 9999 and other combinations, but to no avail. In desperation I rang Ray Marine in Fareham on the sat phone and asked them for their engineer's code so that I could restart my instruments. The response was that there was no engineer's code and the only way I could restart the instrumentation was by taking one of them to the nearest Ray Marine dealer. I informed them that the nearest dealer was over 1000 nautical miles away from my position and this situation was disgraceful. It meant that we would need to complete our passage to Noumea with only the plotter, radar, eyeball positioning and the paper chart - which is exactly what we did. We were only seven hours from the Passe de Havana and soon saw the loom of the lights of New Caledonia. At daybreak, once I had confirmed our position by plot, leading line, and radar we passed through the reef at the Passe de Havana and continued to motor the 40 miles inside the reef towards Noumea. When we were approaching the marina, I called up to ask for help because a crew member was injured. The reply was a question of whether any of the crew had been exposed to bird flu! However, when we arrived in the marina, John who turned out to be a doctor on a boat called 'Destiny', jumped on board, and looked after me whilst the boat was moored up in Port Mossel Marina. It turned

out that John was a dermatologist which he described as the most family friendly medical specialism. This was because he did not have to work nights or weekends!

It was clearly essential to have medical help and the marina staff suggested that I attend the hospital in town. After a two hour wait, I was examined by a doctor and sent for x-ray. It turned out that my arm was not broken as we had thought but dislocated. Consequently, after being pumped with much morphine and breathing laughing gas the doctor manipulated my arm back into its socket. What a relief! This was the best $200 I had spent in many a long day. I was advised that I would have restricted movement for six weeks and that I had to see an orthopaedic surgeon in 10 days' time to check that everything was healing properly. This was because the doctor was concerned that as my shoulder had been dislocated for three days there may be muscle damage. Once we got back to the boat Sarah went to bed and she described it the most glorious unbroken sleep. She certainly deserved a good rest. After all she had looked after me, sailed the boat and brought us safely to port. We contacted the children to let them know we were safe and sound. They were relieved because the last reported position that they had seen was five days ago. John and Shauna from Destiny joined us for a drink and agreed to take the sail that Pelle had given us to deliver to a boat in Vanuatu, as we were obviously not going to get there.

Noumea was just like being back in France, with an excellent supermarket, fish, and vegetable markets, boulangeries etc. The exception was that our phones were blocked – just like in Tonga, so we had to buy a local phone and Sim card. The following two weeks was spent pottering about the town, working on the boat mending, and replacing the autopilot drive with the spare and trying to understand why the battery charger failed.

We organised our tickets to go home via Sydney and Bangkok. Due to the vagaries of staff travel it was necessary to break the journey in Bangkok. Consequently, we decided to treat ourselves to a night in the Shangri-La. We had to organise Moonbeam to be lifted and stored ashore at Nouvelle Plaisance. Even though it was clear when we walked across that there was plenty of space, they said they were full. This meant that we had to engage the services of an agent who after some confusion verified that space was available and that we would be lifted on 15th July, the day before our departure for Sydney. We had booked to stay in the Best Western in town and organised transport to the airport the following morning, so we took our luggage including the instruments, autopilot drive and autopilot head to the hotel and moved Moonbeam to the travel lift. This was the first time that the boat had been lifted in France and to my surprise the price of the lift did not include washing her off, which was left to me, using our pressure washer.

I had only limited time with Moonbeam in the slings of the travel lift because another boat was booked to be lifted. This meant that I only achieved ¾ of the task before the boat was moved and chocked. Unfortunately, there was no easy access to power, so I had to complete the job using our own supply through the inverter. This depleted the batteries which would turn out to be a problem when I returned. However, we flew to Sydney, as planned, and enjoyed a couple of days just walking about and enjoying the local cuisine, before we left for a delightful stay in Bangkok on our way home.

Once we arrived at LHR we were met by Tom, and it started a lovely and interesting interlude back in the UK. We had the delight of greeting our new grandson, Jack Jacob Dixon, and the deep sadness of saying goodbye to Tony, who died seven years to the day after his mother on 8th August. Poor Jo, it is so hard to imagine life without him – he was so special – a larger than life man with an infectious laugh and unfailing hospitality. He was one of my closest friends and it was hard to keep my emotion at bay while delivering his eulogy.

I saw a consultant as soon as we arrived back, who advised that I should start intensive physiotherapy for my shoulder, immediately. I found a clinic in Weybridge which organised sessions with a physiotherapist three times a week. Meanwhile, as a means of occupational therapy, I put a new kitchen into our flat in Weybridge and built a tree house for Eloise at the bottom of their garden. She was delighted with it and particularly the 'hobbit' door. I also made a new roof access for Annabel to enable them to look after their beehive. I renewed the instrumentation for Moonbeam and obtained a refurbished autopilot drive. Moonbeam was never far from my thoughts.

My shoulder was steadily recovering due to my determination to get better, based on the help and advice from my physiotherapist. Nevertheless, I was disappointed when Gemma's father-in-law told me that it took a full year before he was completely recovered from a similar injury. However, in the middle of September, Sarah saw a consultant who advised that her hip and foot problem required her to wear a boot for 6 to 8 weeks. She was not a happy bunny, but at least this should see the end to her discomfort. At the same time, I felt fit enough and thought it was time to return to the boat. I asked Sarah when she would like to go and perhaps was not surprised when she declared that as I had taken Moonbeam to New Caledonia, then I could bloody well take her to Brisbane. Accordingly, I set off for Noumea via Hong Kong and Sydney on 29 September, and where I arrived three days later.

In order to get on to Moonbeam I had to buy a ladder and because all the domestic batteries were completely dead, with no means of recharging them, I bought a battery charger and four new 12v batteries which would eventually power the engine and bow thruster. The battery charger was needed to keep these 12v batteries charged. I proceeded to fit new anodes, clean the hull, fix the electronics and new and instrumentation and jury rigged the new batteries for the passage to Brisbane. On 8th October the day dawned with steady rain, but it cleared up for Moonbeam to take to the water once again, and I returned to the visitor's pontoon in Port Moselle from where I left four days later, having bunkered 400lts of fuel.

It was to take me seven days to complete the 840 miles to Brisbane. This was my first long solo passage. Once clear of the reef and setting course for Brisbane I had to decide how to manage the boat whilst looking after myself. Initially there were several cruise ships and freighters nearby but after the second day I was more or less on my own. It was no problem by day, and I was fortunate to have generally light and following winds all the way to Brisbane. I decided to sleep in the cockpit with the radar set to provide an alarm, and sleep for no more than 40 minutes at a time. The boat was left in the hands of the autopilot and

when I awoke, I inspected the horizon and the radar before returning to sleep. I found I could do this all night without becoming unduly fatigued.

I was nearly 500 miles from Noumea before I caught sight of storm petrels and the first fish under the boat. I made an itemised list of our medical kit, and all the ships stores for arrival in Australia and prepared and sent an email with my revised ETA for Customs and immigration. When I arrived on the quarantine pontoon in the Brisbane River the entry into Australia could not have been more pleasant. Both the customs and immigration officers were delightful. Moonbeam was now in Oz.

I moved to the River Gate Marina which was closer to the city. I was grateful for the help from Nick and Carmel on their boat 'Thistle', who assisted me in fitting a new inner stay because I had discovered some broken strands when I went up the mast to inspect the rigging.

I hired a car and drove 200 km inland to collect a new battery charger from an ex-Victron employee. This was a new 100amp charger to replace the failed unit for which Victron no longer provided spares.

So, with a good forecast I departed River Gate Marina early on 22nd October. I followed the channel and once off Cowan, followed the Inner Freeman channel. This proved not to be a good idea as the chart was in error and I was avoiding breakers and shallows. However once around Cape Moreton I found deep water at last and started going south with a good following breeze. This resulted in the first days run of 221 miles which is a record for Moonbeam, and she at last entered the Tasman Sea. My destination was Sydney, but the engine kept stopping. The fault was finally traced to the racor which appeared to have an airlock in the supply pipe. With time getting short I decided to divert to Port Stephens and was supported by a pod of Whales to starboard.

Once I had tied up in the marina, I had to organise a hire car because Sarah was due to arrive at Sydney Airport the next day. This being a Saturday in Australia, it meant that the local hire car agencies were closed. The nearest place I could find a car was at Newcastle airport which was 50 km away. I checked the bus times and duly waited at the bus stop at the appointed hour, but unfortunately there was no bus. It turned out that I had failed to notice that there is a one-hour time difference between Queensland and New South Wales. This meant that I was an hour late for the bus. There was no other way of getting to the airport except by taxi, which made this car hire rather expensive! However, at least I had a car so that I could drive to the airport in Sydney to collect Sarah, even though the morning traffic caused me to be late.

With Sarah safely on board I fitted the new battery charger and dismantled the old one to find that it was completely corroded. We filled our gas bottles, and I serviced the racor which proved to be the problem for the persistent engine problems I had experienced on my trip from Brisbane. We drove around the bay and found an oyster farm and bought a dozen for supper. I returned the hire car and we set off for Sydney the following day. We had decided to stay in the Pittwater where we lived here when I had two postings when I was flying.

We had a pleasant day's sail on a good forecast with the sun shining and when we arrived in the Pittwater it was like a trip coming home. I had sailed this area countless times on our postings, and we could recognise the places where we lived. We got a berth in the Royal Prince Alfred yacht club which had been so hospitable when we were living here.

In the morning we managed to catch a ride on a private bus that took us down to Manly Ferry where we took the ferry to Circular Quay and then a taxi to pick up our car which we had booked from Europcar. It was a horrid bright green colour but got us mobile.

In the evening we met Jo and Keith Rees. I had trained with Keith and Sarah had worked for BA with Jo, on the ground shortly after we were married. We had a meal together in a pub called Philip Foote where we cooked our own food on the barbecue. It was a place that we used to go to when night stopping Sydney on a trip.

The next morning, I collected them from the Manly Ferry, and we had a lovely day gently sailing up the Pittwater to The Basin, where we picked up a buoy and had lunch. It was perfect weather because Jo is not a good sailor. There was just a very light sailing breeze and beautiful blue skies. They left us in the early evening when I drove them back to the ferry. It was lovely to spend time with them.

The next couple of days were spent organising the boat to make room for Tom and Annabel who arrived on time on 2nd November. Annabel from Hong Kong and Tom via the Middle East. They landed within an hour of each other, tired and moaning about travelling economy! They have been spoilt over the years travelling with me in comfort. We drove them back to Moonbeam over Sydney Harbour Bridge so they could glimpse the Opera House and down through the Spit. Tom was to be with us for 11 days and Annabel for 18.

Melbourne Cup Day was spent taking Tom and Annabel down memory lane. We went to find the house we lived in Illuka road in Palm Beach, but they had knocked the house down and redeveloped the site, although the old traditional bungalow next door was still standing. Annabel was two years old when we lived here, and she went for a dip both off Palm Beach and Whale Beach. We drove back through Bayview and passed Loquat Valley School where Gemma went for a term, and up to Kookaburra Close where the house we lived in was still there, although extended. We then went up to the Kurungai Chase for a barbecue. There was an extreme fire warning so many of the trails were closed, but fortunately since we were last here, gas barbeques had been installed to replace the wood fired ones. Tom nearly stepped on an iguana, which gave him a bit of a shock as we climbed up the steps to West Head. They really do look like miniature dragons. In the evening we entertained Peter and Christine who were moored alongside us. Peter was an ex-Qantas cabin service director and he and Christine ran a sailing school. We enjoyed their company, and they were very helpful to us for the time we stayed there. They introduced us to the Aussie way of joining another boat for drinks – you bring your own!

We spent the time that the children were with us being real tourists. We went into Sydney and did a tour of the Royal Opera House. We went up to the Hunter Valley and spent a wonderful day in a wildlife park watching koalas having lunch. We had a trip to the Cottage

Point Inn because the yacht club needed our birth for a night. We motored up the Pittwater and passed West Head and Lion Island up into the Hawkesbury River. We moored at the Cottage Point pontoon allowing for the seaplanes to be tied up behind us. We had a wonderful lunch, as ever, and delighted in the tame kookaburras being hand fed. We then spent a day in Callen Creek and dropped anchor for the first time in a long time, in Smiths Creek and then gently drifted back to the yacht club.

We were very sad to see Tom go when we delivered him to the airport, after we had lunch at the fish market, down-town. It had been well reviewed, but I don't think we chose the best venue, which was a shame as it was his last meal with us. However, if all goes well, we will see him at Christmas. We spent the next day at Newport Beach watching the lifeguards training. It was fascinating to see how they would give mouth to mouth resuscitation whilst the casualty was supported on a surfboard.

Annabel was determined to complete a walk in the Blue Mountains. So, we drove up and checked out the National Trail. It was advertised as a 4 to 5-hour walk, and there was not a lot of daylight left, but Annabel and I did it in one and a half hours, allowing Sarah to read her book and collect us at the end of the trail. The remaining time of Annabel's visit was doing girly things with her mother. Our transport to the airport for Annabel's flight to San Francisco was somewhat what tense, because we got snarled up in traffic. Happily, her flight was delayed so she left us as planned, but sad for us because it had been so much fun to have had two of our children visit us.

The next two weeks was spent cleaning stainless, varnishing the saloon table, the cockpit table and Sarah's side table. I went up and down the mast like a yo-yo because the television antenna had become disconnected from its cable. In addition, we had a problem with the upper swivel on the Yankee foil that was cutting the halyard. The port mast winch had needed servicing, but when I stripped it down it had been affected by corrosion between the aluminium of the mast and the bronze base, which was badly cracked, so a spare was ordered for delivery on our return to the UK.

We decided to take a trip to Canberra and after an early start drove through Sydney and the Southern Highlands and stopped at the Surveyor General in Berrima for a drink because it is supposedly one of the oldest in Australia. We continued to Canberra with its wide avenues and lots of trees planted alongside and on the site of the new parliament building. That could not be said of the motel that we stayed in which was ghastly but at least clean. The next day we went to the parliament building which is really impressive. It completely embodies the spirit of optimism of a young Australia. We were permitted to sit in the visitors' gallery of both the House of Representatives and the Senate. It was fascinating. It looked as though there was some plotting going on because the Liberal coalition leader, Malcolm Turnbull, was hanging on to his position by his fingertips. Then we went on to the War Memorial Museum at the other end of the Avenue. It was majestic and had been designed by an American architect with wide avenues and vistas. All in all, it was quite splendid. Afterwards we went to the Australian Botanical Gardens where we had a slow walk around

the garden with so many wonderful plants that Sarah had not seen before and in fairness I wouldn't have noticed. This turned out to be a really good trip.

When we got back to Moonbeam, we took the ‘green bug as we called our Hyundai Getz back to Europcar in which we had driven 3000 km. We then crossed William Street to pick up another car from Budget this time. It was a red version, but slightly bigger so hopefully the air-conditioning would be more efficient. The weather seemed to oscillate between being overcast and wet and very hot, easily in the high 30°C.

Our next treat was when we motored down to Sydney in Moonbeam - past the Opera House and under Sydney Harbour Bridge and then through the Spit Bridge and picked up a mooring in Sugar Loaf Bay. It was very difficult to believe we were right in the middle of Sydney because the bush came right down to the water's edge. We caught a fish on the way, but it managed to escape and at the same time we had the first breakage of our china service - one of the mugs. It was quite amazing really when you think it was three years since we first acquired it.

Sugar loaf Bay proved to be a good, sheltered anchorage because the weather forecast was to expect a southerly gale to come through. However, we woke up the next day to peace and quiet apart from the noise of the birds in the bush around us. We went out through the Spit Bridge albeit a bit late, but in quite a nice breeze and sailed out of Sydney Harbour Heads and then had a lovely sail back to the Pittwater, spending the night in the Basin before taking Moonbeam back to the yacht club where she would remain while we returned home for Christmas. We entertained Peter and Chris from ‘Splash’ for supper and they persuaded us to buy a Cobb barbecue as it provided a safe means of using one on the boat because the fire is surrounded by a moat.

We had organised tickets to go home on 15 December and had still lots to do before we left, so we used that as an excuse to get out of going to a ‘cruisers’ lunch with Peter and Chris but we had a drink with them in the evening. They invited themselves to have it on our boat with a couple from ‘Evening Star’ Julie and Simon. They were a charming couple with Simon sending Julie up the mast when necessary – I obviously got our arrangement for ascending the mast wrong, especially when we found out later that they were 70 and 74! We thought to ourselves, that if we were like them at their age we would be delighted. Simon was kind enough to offer to keep an eye on Moonbeam whilst we were away.

Well, we set off for the airport and got rid of the car and were lucky enough to travel back in comfort having to re-check in in Bangkok, which necessitated a mad dash through the airport only to be allocated the seats that we had just left! So, we were home for a family Christmas catching up with the children and grandchildren and our wider families. It was a truly lovely time. I set off back to Sydney the day after Boxing Day and arrived in time to take Moonbeam down to Sydney Harbour for New Year’s Eve.

When I arrived through Sydney Harbour Heads and set course down towards the Harbour Bridge, I was amazed to see so many boats. I anchored alongside Splash and rafted up to them in the early afternoon and spent the next few hours watching more and more boats

assemble. It looked as though at one stage you could walk across the harbour from boat to boat because there was so many of them. In a very typical ‘Australian Rules’ manner, the boats were patrolled by New South Wales Coast Guard who were giving everyone who was not showing an anchor light a hard time. This was notwithstanding the fact that no one on the water could fail to see the general lights of the thousands of boats anchored there. However, what was to follow was a sight that I shall remember for the rest of my life. At 9 o'clock in the evening there was a firework display which was put on for young children, so they could go to bed whilst their mums and dads stayed up for the main event. The firework display at midnight was staggeringly beautiful. The way in which Sydney Harbour Bridge was used as the platform for the main part of celebration was quite amazing.

After we had welcomed the start of 2010, I retired to bed and upon waking up the following morning was astounded to see that most of the boats had disappeared, and I was more or less on my own! I spent the day servicing the generator and on 2nd January I drifted back to the Pittwater and moored up at the yacht club. Sarah meanwhile was skiing with the children in La Clusaz and was planning to return to Sydney a few days later, only to find when she turned up at the airport that the flight was overbooked. The first attempt on 18 January resulted in Sarah being turned away as there was no space available, nor was there likely to be space until the following Friday, when she was advised to try again. Now, as she had a first-class ticket the fact that she was travelling out with the folding bicycle that I had given her for Christmas was no problem because it was within the baggage allowance.

However, when she arrived back at the airport, she was told that it was unlikely that she would be able to get on the Bangkok flight, but she would be able to get to Singapore What she wasn't told was that it was unlikely that she would be able to continue her journey beyond Singapore! Now Singapore is not the cheapest place in the world to have to stay in a hotel. Nevertheless, she was able to get a room in the airport Crown Plaza, but when she tried to get on the next day's flight, she was told that it was unlikely there would be any space available for at least another week. Consequently, I decided to buy a ticket on Garuda going via Bali to Sydney. Luckily, Sarah turned up early for the flight only to be told that she would need to pay over 600 Singapore dollars for excess baggage because of the folding bike. Needless to say, this was more than the bike was worth. However, happily there was enough time for her to send it as unaccompanied baggage for half the price. In the end, she eventually arrived 10 days later than planned. Such are the vagaries of staff travel!

I met her at Sydney airport, and we drove back home to the yacht club where Moonbeam was lying out in the anchorage on a buoy, Sarah could be rocked to sleep and overcome her jetlag. She was too tired to stay up for the firework display on the Pittwater which started at midnight to celebrate Australia Day. But when we went into town later in the morning, all the flags were flying, and supermarkets covered with bunting. We decided to have a lazy day with a barbecue on our new Cobb with some oysters to start with. We were to learn that the disadvantage of the Cobb is the length of time and energy needed to clean it after use!

The next day we had a gentle sail down to the Basin for a barbecue organised by Peter and Chris for "old salts” having done a quick hop ashore to buy food. The picnic area at the

Basin was delightful. It was no wonder that Annabel and Tom had come back wide-eyed after their excursion ashore here. Wallabies and kookaburras surrounded us where about 20 people turned for the occasion. We stayed the night here and Sarah reported waking up to the worst hangover she'd had in a long time - it must have been the sparkling Shiraz that did the damage.

The last few days of January were spent pottering about on the mooring taking trips into Avalon to change DVDs and buy diesel in the jerry cans as there was no fuel pontoon at the club. We booked to see La Traviata at the Sydney Opera House to celebrate our anniversary and left early to drive down to Sydney where all along the waterfront it was absolutely bustling, particularly around the Opera House. The performance was magical with the costumes, scenery and music being very special.

So, on our anniversary on the 2nd of February we rang Qantas who said just come along to the warehouse and pick up Sarah's new bike. However, a whole morning was spent at the airport because we had to queue for forms to take to customs and then visit quarantine and finally have the bike delivered to us in a forklift truck. Now this bike was now worth half as much as the dinghy by now, and the irony is that it in its entire life it was only ridden once!

However, on the way back we called into Sydney Fish market and bought oysters, prawns, crab, and lobster for our anniversary meal which we had in the cockpit with some champagne. There was a gentle cooling breeze from the south which was just lovely and made this special occasion perfect.

It was time to move on before we grew more weed. It is true that the longer we stayed in one place the harder it was to leave. We bought more fuel and food, and I took the car back to Sydney and came home to the boat via the Manly Ferry and the bus and the following day we set sail for Sydney Harbour. We overnighted at the Basin and with a good forecast in the morning sailed down through the Heads and picked up a mooring off Taronga zoo in Port Jackson just before the rain started. This was the start of a couple of wet and miserable days with torrential downpours that caused flooding in the city. They needed the rain, of course because it was this time last year when there were terrible bush fires in Victoria.

We left Sydney Harbour (Port Jackson) for a quick trip down to Port Hacking and picked up a mooring in quite shallow waters close to the shore in Jiboon Bay. There was a great deal of sea grass on the bottom, which was protected, with heavy fines if you were caught anchoring in it or damaging it in any way, because it was a refuge for young fish. It was evidently a good place to fish for squid with quite a few dinghies drifting in and around the sea grass.

The following day started as a beautiful morning when we left and motored down the coast. There is a large national park extending from Port Hacking almost to Wollongong with just a few small towns along the way. The Pacific Highway bridge could be clearly seen, which we had driven across in November. Stretching behind the amazing beach which extends for miles along the coastline we could see the hills that the Aussies call the Southern Alps. As we entered the Crookhaven River we were reminded of the entrance to Spaanse water in Curacao as it was very narrow and shallow but at least this one was well marked and had

leading lines! Once inside the entrance we motored safely up the river and found a pleasant anchorage just off Greenwell Point. We had a wonderful welcome from lots of pelicans which were hanging around the fishermen as they were gutting their fish. Anything for an easy meal.

We decided to stay the day here and have a slightly longer hop the next. So, we dinghied to shore and walked up into the village which was just a few shops and obviously a holiday spot. We bought some fresh vegetables and a newspaper and some beer from a very friendly village hotel/ pub/ bottle shop, to which we returned to in the evening for a drink. The pub was grim, with no women and just men propped up against a disgusting bar not talking to each other - Bill Bryson describes them brilliantly. Our early morning departure plan was foiled by fog but once it did eventually lift, we were able to motor down the river in bright sunshine and then motor sailed about 75nms south to anchor off Broulee Island which is just south of Batemans Bay. Joy of joy we caught a tuna that replaced the one that got away as I was trying to get it aboard, so sashimi is planned for tomorrow!

The next day started in a local Aussie expression “steamy "which in English is hot and humid so we decided to dinghy up the little river to a boat ramp and small pontoon and walked into Broulee village where there was a general store and local post office in a row of shops and newsagents and a small café. It was very hot walking back the mile or so to the boat ramp and so it was a relief to get back to Moonbeam for a quick shower.

In the afternoon the wind turned into the South the anchorage became quite unpleasant, so we moved initially to the other side of the island which was at least out of the wind but a bit roly-poly. When we listened to the forecast the following day there was a deepening southerly depression to the south, which would clearly make our anchorage worse so looking for a nearby shelter I calculated that we could just clear the entrance to the Moruya River, which was just a few miles away. We crept in on the top of the spring tide, very slowly and following the leading marks as closely as we could before we could motor up the river, which itself was shallow until we found a pool of water in about 4.7 m to anchor. It was beautifully sheltered, which was just as well because it started to pour with rain. We thought that given the weather we would be here for at least a couple of days but how wrong we were!

We were about a mile downriver from the town of Moruya, which had a good Woolworths, so we were able to stock up, although most of the other shops were shut as they obviously closed early on a Saturday afternoon, which was typical away from the cities. The next four days were spent in torrential rain which undoubtedly made the farmers happy given the preceding drought. However, the ebb tide was really strong with the water carrying all sorts of debris downstream, and which had the effect of shifting the sand bar in the entrance. Consequently, when we tried to depart on the 17th of February, we touched bottom on the bar and abandoned the attempt and returned to our pool. We tried again the following day on the top of the tide when the swell in the bay had decreased somewhat but we could not find a way out!

Two locals in a fishing boat were kind enough to explore the entrance and confirmed there was not enough water for us to pass over the bar so we would have to wait for the next spring

tide. So essentially, we were landlocked for the next eight days which we spent pottering to the town and doing odd jobs on the boat, fixing the water maker, and making a cover for the jerry cans. Once the rain had finally stopped, we spent a whole morning in the dinghy surveying the entrance to the river with a lead line and finding and marking an escape route. This bores no relation at all to the leading marks we used to get into the river, and we had to make up our own marks from the surrounding topography. Fingers crossed we would be able to leave without having the mouth of the river dredged!

So, 12 days after entering the river we woke early and set off for the entrance. As the sun started to come up, we could make out the clump of trees which was our mark to turn across the river and line up with our new leading lines. We managed to touch the bottom only once before we were through the first part of the transit and could creep alongside the training seawall until we were out of the river. What joy! We really were worried that we might need to have hired a dredger.

We had recognised that our time locked up in the river made our plan to reach Melbourne impractical, so we decided we must go north again and headed off for Jervis Bay. Once inside we set course direct for Hare Bay but were chased off by a navy patrol boat informing us that we were entering a live bombing range and we must track the edge of the bay. The only consolation to this piece of poor planning was that we caught a fine bonito which was delicious. Over the course of the next few days, we went back to the Pittwater via Greenwell Point and Port Hacking and stayed there for another 3 weeks. The Royal Prince Alfred Yacht Club were absolutely outstanding in their friendly hospitality. Even though we spent most of our time tied up on their pontoons they insisted on only charging us as though we had been on a buoy throughout the entire period that we were with them. I wonder how many yacht clubs at home would do the same.

It was to be that after very nearly 5 months we would finally leave the Pittwater for the last time, on 23rd March. We felt quite sad as we had left behind many new friends and had enjoyed the city and the general area around the Pittwater so much. It had brought back so many happy memories of our two postings out here when I was flying. I wonder if we shall ever return.

Our overall general plan was to head north to be in Brisbane before the beginning of May as Jane and Willem Westermann were due to join us once more for a few weeks. Our first stop was Lake Macquarie where once through the bridge, we stayed for a week anchored off Belmont initially, and then on a visitor's buoy at Wangi Wangi.

This period was spent, in delightful weather, servicing the engine and generator and working on the deck. The caulking had become adrift in places and so I decided to rip it all out and re-caulk it. This entailed undertaking a laborious exercise using a custom-made chisel to extract the old caulking, dress the teak put a stabiliser on it, mask the gaps and renew the caulk before sanding it down. You can imagine how pleased we were when this task was finally completed, and the deck looked quite pristine once more. It had always fascinated me that as a very hard-wearing surface when dry, teak loses its fibres quite readily when it is wet. It is why it is recommended never to use a pressure washer to clean.

When we left Lake Macquarie, we discovered the phenomena of a tide overrun. The effect of the large expanse of the lake connected to the open sea by a narrow channel meant that when the tide ebbed, the outflow from the lake continued for up to a couple of hours after low-water and at speeds up to 6 knots. When we came off the courtesy buoy by Swansea Bridge, where we were waiting for the bridge to open so that we could leave the lake, Moonbeam was virtually uncontrollable even at full throttle. However, we made it and spent the rest of the following day tracking up to Nelson Bay in Port Stephens to recover our composure!

Once we had picked up the mooring outside Nelson Bay Marina we popped into town and did a little shopping when we returned to the dinghy, we found a couple that we had met in the Pittwater and got to know well. Kerry and Linda were circumnavigating Australia on their boat 'Sojourn'. Now Kerry had been struck by the boom when racing on the Sydney Hobart race years before and sadly had developed Multiple Sclerosis. He kept his mobility scooter in the lazarette of their Benetau, but it meant that he had to work around the cockpit by using his arms and upper body, whilst Linda did most of the hard graft crewing. They were a really lovely couple and we had shared a number of pleasant evenings with them, and to our delight this was to be another one. We knew that it was unlikely that we would ever see them again as they were heading north at a much quicker pace.

During the night the boat moved round the buoy in the wind and in the morning was touching bottom, so we moved out to Salamander Bay to anchor in much deeper water. We decided that it would be best to make an overnight passage to Laurenton, so that we could arrive in the morning on the top of the tide, as in keeping with so many rivers on this coast the entrance was protected by a bar and was only accessible close to high water for a boat with Moonbeam's draft.

We motor sailed up to Salamander Bay by the entrance to Port Stephens and picked up a buoy there so that we could have a rest prior to our departure later that evening. A fisherman came out to talk to us on his kayak and warned us to be very careful going into Laurieton River, as it was known to be tricky. Well, it turned out that his warning was well made. After a pleasant and uneventful sail in a beam wind, we arrived off the entrance to the river at 0930 in the morning, in beautiful sunshine. The leading marks were easy to identify, the tide was right, but as we got closer to the entrance, we noticed that the waves were breaking across the entrance and near to it. However, by this time we were committed and found ourselves surfing in at one stage being nearly laid flat on a breaking wave, before getting through the entrance to the applause of several onlookers standing at the heads. One of their number came to talk to us after we had moored up at the RSL jetty in town to say that our arrival looked quite scary with our mast rocking side to side like a pendulum. I responded that he should have seen it from where I was standing! My logbook entry says the bar was entertaining, somewhat of an understatement looking back.

Returned Servicemen Leagues, (RSL) are found all over Australia, in towns and villages alike. They welcome visitors and are a haven for gamblers who enjoy the pokies. They usually have restaurants attached to their bars and are generally well supported by the local

community. At 1800 every evening everyone stands up for a minute's silence at the end of which a verse from Laurence Binyon's poem 'For the Fallen, is read out:

> They shall grow not old as we that are left grow old:
> Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
> At the going down of the sun and in the morning.
> We will remember them.

It is a very special insight into Australian patriotism and their genuine respect for their armed forces.

The Australian Volunteer Marine Rescue organisation provides rescue services and Coast Guard observation along the entire coast. It is manned exclusively by volunteers, and Laurieton was one of a very few that provided a 24-hour watch. When I went to visit their headquarters, it was clearly a refuge for the male retirees who staffed it. They had their own kitchen and bar within its confines.

Laurieton was a lovely place, and it was great fun staying on the public pontoon as many people came to talk to us. We even have a couple from Gisborne, New Zealand offering to lend us their car so we could explore the area. It is a pretty river with lots of yachts and dozens of pelicans or 'flying pigs' as they are described because they all sit around on the pontoon waiting for the fishermen to return and get the easy pickings as they clean their catch.

We were up early on the Monday after the clocks changed so we could walk up Brother Mountain behind, us which had been named by Captain Cook. There were 880 steps according to the noticeboard, but I only counted 770. Anyway, it was a steep climb, and we were pleased to come back down again for a cold beer. However, the view from the top was stunning - looking straight down the river to the entrance and the bar and we could make out the pattern of the breaking waves across it.

When the tide was out, I could stand on the riverbed with diving equipment and was able to change the propeller anode that had become loose and to clean some of the hull. We caught a bus into Port Macquarie, but it must be said that the journey was better than the town. Whilst we were waiting at a bus stop, we saw a koala bear in a eucalyptus by the bus stop. It was the first time we'd ever seen a koala in the wild and was a delightful sight.

After checking the weather in an Internet café, we decided to depart on the high tide on Thursday, 8 April. We led quite a procession down the river, but the closest tail was a Swiss couple, who had gone aground when coming into the river. The VMR had dispatched a rib to lead them through the bar at the entrance and then left them to return direct to their boat ramp. Unfortunately, they followed rather than navigating the marks and they were really upset and a little underconfident, because it was their first mishap in 10 years of cruising. Anyway, the departure was much less of an event than the arrival and we were able to have a gentle sail up to Trial Bay in Coffs Harbour.

We were singularly unimpressed with Coffs Harbour as the swell inside was substantial and there was nowhere to hide that was not roly-poly. Consequently, we quickly decided to move on to Yamba/Iluka in the Clarence River. High tide was at 1800 so we would have very little light left having crossed the bar. Having frightened myself crossing the bar in Laurieton, this time I contacted Iluka VMR and enquired about the entry conditions which were duly reported to be benign, so happily no surprises here. We crept into Iluka Harbour and managed to anchor with very little light left, although it turned out to be a good position as we didn't have to move in the morning. We spent a week here shuttling between Yamba on the south bank of the river and Iluka on the north. I acquired a couple of collapsible crab pots more in hope than expectation of catching anything.

We were of course now in the Coral Sea and luckily found a copy of Alan Lucas's Coral Coast. This enabled us to see that we would not be able to cut through the channel from the Gold Coast to Moreton Bay in order to get into Brisbane, as the main channel is silted up and the other channel had power lines over it. This meant that we would have to route another 60 miles to get around to Brisbane using the shipping channel.

We departed the Clarence River straightforwardly and set off for Southport on the Gold Coast, spending an awful night anchored in Byron Bay. We woke up feeling as though we had been through a tumble dryer! However, the entrance through the spit into the bay was straightforward, although the man on watch in the VMR was slightly surly, which was the first time we had encountered anything other than very friendly conversations on the radio.

What a contrast from Yamba! Speedboats were tearing up and down just outside the anchorage and we discovered that the speed limit was 40 kts! Even the crossing to Southport for shopping was a nightmare in the dinghy, but we were able to stock up enough for the next couple of days for our trip to Brisbane.

We set off from Southport just before sunset on 17th of April and once we had cleared the bar set sail into an awful sea with a short steep swell, but nevertheless made steady progress to the north of Moreton Island to pick up the north-west shipping channel into Brisbane. This was much easier, given the problems I had coming southbound using the shorter routes. However, this put us bow into a fresh breeze and ebb current, so we were very pleased indeed to enter the Brisbane River and moor up at the Riverside Marina, where we stayed for a few days before repositioning to the Royal Queensland Yacht Squadron at Manly. We had now completed over 25,000 miles since we left home.

We were to spend just over three weeks in this delightful city. Firstly, we had to reorganise the boat has it been quite a while since we had guests on board, and it was necessary to acquire charts for the cruise northwards. It was also an opportunity to replace some of the domestic batteries which were not holding their charge as well as they should.

We had noticed a problem with the radar on our passage to Brisbane and happily found a Furuno dealer nearby who unhappily told us that it could not be repaired. Being a foreign yacht meant that a new radar could be imported free of customs charges, and so we planned

to order a new one from Miami at a considerable discount to buying one in Australia. This would be done in Darwin in due course.

As usual we hired a car and were able to do a little sightseeing whilst visiting the Scarborough marina who were unable to give us a berth, and subsequently the Royal Queensland Yacht Squadron, in Manly, who were.

Now it is true to say that our original plan was to join the Australian Indonesian Rally leaving from Darwin, because it was understood that entry into and out of Indonesia for a single yacht could be problematic. Apparently, the rally which departed annually, was well supported, and well run. We would then leave Indonesia and cross the Indian Ocean to make our way back from South Africa. However, the imminent arrival of Annabel's baby put paid to this plan as Sarah was flying home in time for her confinement, and so we would miss the start.

Whilst having a casual conversation, with a couple who I had met when I first arrived here from Noumea, we discovered that the Blue Water Rally were leaving Darwin in October with a route through the Indian Ocean, the Suez Canal and into the Mediterranean arriving there next April. Given that the rally had a track record, we were excited when they accepted us, as a late entrant, albeit with a charge of £5500. In fairness, we did not do much research before applying to join as it would really suit us given that we would be unable to join the Indonesian Rally, and they would manage the issues regarding our visit to Indonesia, or so we thought. What a dreadful mistake this would turn out to be.

Our next-door neighbour in the marina was a boat called ‘Tharion’ which the owners, Leanne and Brett, had built themselves. It may have been very practical and spacious but to our eyes it looked more like a flat than a boat, however, they were very pleased with it. We were invited to supper and asked if we had any empty rum bottles because they had a distillery on board and made their own! Very good it was too. Brett was a boat builder and Leanne was a high-powered executive. They made great fun of our stock of fishing lures which were examined due to our poor catch record. So, it was with great pleasure that when they presented the journal that Brett’s father had started to record visiting circumnavigators, we were able to attach our pink lure to our track diagram, much to their amusement.

We collected Jane and Willem from Brisbane Airport on 4 May. They were looking very well after having three days in Hong Kong en-route, and happily the weather had picked up for their arrival. It was lovely to see them again.

We took them into the city centre next day to explore, whilst I went to pick up my air tank that needed re-certification. Sadly, I was told that it had to be condemned as it had panted. I had to replace it and did so with a steel tank as the condemned one had been aluminium alloy. Another unexpected expense!

Before Jane and Willem had arrived, they had kindly suggested that they take us up to Lamington National Park to stay at Binna Burra, as their treat. What a treat it was! We went on guided walks through the rainforest with a thoroughly good guide pointing out the

different trees, bird calls, and all sorts of wildlife. Our early morning bird walk was fascinating and introduced us to the bower bird for the first time. It is extraordinary that the male builds his structure with sticks and decorates it using only blue objects, to attract a female. It was quite wonderful to see.

When we left on the Sunday, we drove around to another camp in the National Park, which was much more commercialised, and went on a 10 km walk which was both exciting and adventurous, before we drove home to Moonbeam. All in all, it had been a very special experience.

With all the necessary jobs completed, including replacing the tilting mechanism for the outboard and fitting gas struts on the lazarette, it was time to leave. We said farewell to 'Tharion' and motored out from the Marina to cross Moreton Bay en-route to Mooloolaba. We arrived at dusk but found our allocated slot on the pontoon without too much difficulty and noticed an oyster, just like ours, on one of the hammerheads.

The following morning was just beautiful, and we walked into the town on the boardwalk, and whilst Willem and I went to have a beer, the girls wandered around the shops. We could see and hear the surf pounding onto the beach which made us rethink our plan to anchor in the bay off Noosa as it would likely be most uncomfortable.

After lunch, whilst Jane and Willem went off to do some bird watching we met David and Valerie who owned the oyster 55 that we saw when we arrived, and who we would meet again in Phuket sometime later.

We wanted to visit Noosa because Gemma had been here on her year off and an Australian ex colleague of mine used to commute from here to go to work from Heathrow! So, we caught a bus which was an uncomfortable hour and a half journey and discovered Noosa to be a holiday town. There were lots of expensive shops and apparently the beach was suffering from erosion. After a coffee on the front, we walked around the headland to look down on lots of surfers below. We were told by the information kiosk, that a koala had been spotted along the path and we were lucky enough to see it. That made our koala count in the wild up to three as we had seen one in Bina Burra.

We left Mooloolaba just after 9 o'clock in another absolutely beautiful morning with not a cloud in the sky, and as soon as we put sails up the wind died so the day was going to be just motoring once more.

We entered the Sandy Straight inside Fraser Island and Wide Bay just as it was getting dark, but fortunately there were no breaking waves, and the blue leading lights and well-marked channel made it easy to find a somewhat tight anchorage where we stopped for the night. However, when we awoke the following morning, we found that we were incredibly close to a sandbar.

After breakfast we crept slowly up the great Sandy Strait between Fraser Island and the mainland. It is a surprisingly wide and relatively well marked channel, in no less than 3 m but what joy because we were accompanied by dolphins and turtles. The turtles were the first

ones we had seen in Australia. We anchored in Gary's Anchorage and put out the crab pots, but when we pulled them up found that they had been destroyed and the bait taken by small tiger fish. These are apparently not unlike piranha.

We continued through the great Sandy Strait to Hervey Bay. We were a little bit tight in some areas but generally there was never less than 3m under us. Willem was helming all the way and did a good job to keep us within the marks. We then had a great sail to our anchorage behind Big Woody Island. When it started to rain, we put up our tent, including the back part of it, which was the first time since we had left New Zealand, so we were very cosy.

We then had a wonderful sail up to Bundaberg in much stronger winds than predicted but on a perfect beam reach. Moonbeam sprinted along most of the way at over 8kts. We were a little disappointed, having heard so much about Bundaberg, when we slowly went up the river to tie up on the pontoon which was covered in seagull poo, and which was both wet and damp. However, this was probably coloured by the fact that it was miserable, and we were wrapped up in our Musto's. This did not detract from the fact that we did catch a lovely bonito which we had for supper.

Next morning, we caught the courtesy bus into the centre of Bundaberg which was a long drive through immaculately kept sugar cane fields and the most incredible red soil. We wandered around the city, which was just like any other, but in a slight time -warp. There were more bookshops in one street than in the whole of the last few towns. We completed a big shop because we now had a serious intention to get up to the Bay of Islands, and the last opportunity for topping up will be when we arrive in Gladstone. I managed to find a wetsuit which will help to keep me warm when I dive on the boat, but most importantly we acquired a special lure for bonito and tuna.

We were now on a mission. We were determined to reach Gladstone via Pancake Creek on our way to the Whitsundays. We departed early in the morning to be clear of the shoals at the entrance and had a gentle sail and an overnight anchorage in Pancake Creek prior to arriving in Gladstone marina in the afternoon of the following day.

The harbour was clearly serving an industrial area but nevertheless the marina was tucked away behind the docks and was surprisingly very pleasant. An excursion into the town revealed lots of empty shops but we were able to top up our stores from a local supermarket and took a taxi back to the marina.

Once we had bunkered fuel the following morning, we departed for great Keppel Island, planning for a day off. It was quite late when we got there but happily, we were able to anchor off Leekes Beach in moonlight, after navigating safely through the entrance with the assistance of radar.

A trip ashore after a leisurely breakfast took us up the hill to look down on Moonbeam in the bay. We were surrounded by beautiful butterflies and walked through the garden of an eco-

resort where we spotted a possum in a bucket in the shower. The little thing with its huge eyes and little pink nose was looking at us.

We had a long day sailing up to Pearl Bay on the Capricorn Coast. It was a beautiful unspoiled area, very densely wooded with small islands in the bay and trees coming down to the water's edge. We were now back in the tropics having crossed the Tropic of Capricorn, but in fact the weather was rather chilly. We continued to Hexham Island in the Northumberland group, again sailing past the most-lovely countryside. This huge area was a military range, covering fantastic mountains and terrain.

We spent the night in the bay alongside Cathedral rocks with a sea eagle nesting on top of one of the pinnacles, and then we set off for Middle Percy Island and Whites Bay. After some overnight rain the wind went around to the south, and we set off for Port Mackay via Digby Island. We passed dozens of big coal carriers waiting to load in the port, just south of Mackay. We berthed in the marina and took a bus into town. The centre turned out to be a rabbit warren with an amazing number of jewellery shops. We were able to stock up at Woolworths and Dan Murphy's with a good supply of beer and vegetables.

We spent the morning giving Moonbeam a spring clean, taking the Bimini and spray hood off to clean the stainless, and using 'Magica' to remove the rust stains. We decided to make Brampton Island the first Whitsunday Island to visit, but first I needed to empty the lazarette to get at the autopilot steering rods and replace one of them with our spare, as the autopilot had been playing up.

We had a short trip to Brampton Island and anchored off the resort, but the wind got up overnight and we started to pitch quite heavily. I needed to put out more chain but overall, it was a very uncomfortable night, so we did a quick hop to Shaw Island and anchored in Kennedy Bay, so that the crew could go ashore and walk up to the summit where there were stunning views all around the compass.

It was now the beginning of June and we gently sailed out of the bay past Pentecost Island named by Captain Cook all those years ago and anchored in White Bay for lunch, and snorkelling and then motored round to Windy Bay to anchor for the night. Here we had an amazing view of Whitehaven Beach, which has incredibly white sand, almost salt like.

Sarah and I made a plan! We decided that we would get up to Townsville in time for Sarah's birthday on the 13th so that Jane and Willem could leave us because they were due to fly out of Cairns on the 15th.

After a rather uncomfortable night we decided to go to Cid Harbour via Hamilton Island and have a quick look at the marina. We timed our passage so there was slack water through the Solway passage and then had a lovely sail down to Hamilton Island through the Fitzalan passage We passed the high-rises which had been built with natural materials and which blended it into the surroundings and got a fleeting glance at the marina before we sailed past the south end of Whitsunday Island and anchored in Sawmill Bay. We went ashore early the next morning to climb the highest peak on the island. It was a pretty steep climb, but well worth the effort as there were amazing views once we had reached the peak - Hamilton Island

and Pentecost Island to the south and Hook Island and Hayman Island to the north in clear beautiful weather. What a treat! Willem took a photo to send to Mr Mcminn, the surgeon in Birmingham, who had resurfaced both of my hips and one of his!

After lunch we moved round to Stonehaven Bay on Hook Island and then to Butterfly Bay on the north of the island, the following morning, and which proved to be delightful. However, it was time to say au revoir to the Whitsundays, and we found a slot on a pontoon in Bowen marina that evening, having stopped for lunch at Breakfast Bay in the Gloucester passage to wait for the tide to turn. Bowen marina was tiny, but we met a successful fisherman who sold live coral fish to China. He was departing the next day and then flying to Ireland for a wedding.

I got up early and went into town to find a hairdresser. It turned out that her husband owned the boat that was next to us in the marina, and just after lunch he turned up and took us on a tour of Bowen. He took us to the top of the water tower where we could see the surrounding fields and told us of the recent poisoning of millions of tomato seedlings. It was thought at the time that this was a form of industrial sabotage, and indeed the problem re-occurred a month or so later. It was thought that the irrigation system had been poisoned deliberately. Tomatoes were going to be expensive this year! Much later, it was thought that the water supply had been contaminated by a spill from a mine.

He and his wife came to have a drink with us on Moonbeam that evening and informed us that we were going to pass over the mackeral patch where it was be impossible not to catch a fish. However, he obviously had not made allowance for my fishing skills, as we failed to catch one having left the marina but managed to have yet another lure bitten off.

We spent three days, day sailing and tracking up to Townsville flying the cruising chute for the first time since it was wrapped in the Atlantic, and arrived in the breakwater marina, Townsville on 10 June, where Jane and Willem left us two days later.

We spent four days here in Townsville and celebrated Sarah's birthday with a visit to the Sunday market. We walked over the swing bridge to Palmer Street where there were quite a few restaurants and returned to the aquarium where we had visited with Jane and Willem to buy a platypus for Moonbeam to add to her menagerie.

We day-sailed all way up to Port Douglas, first of all picking up a mooring in Pioneer Bay on the Orpheus Island and then spent an uncomfortable night off Dunk Island which had been recommended as a pretty place to visit but the strong south-easterly made the anchorage unpleasant, so we didn’t go ashore. We sailed northwards on the following day, but the weather changed for the worse and we could barely see the coastline and were battling into a large current and swell. We sought refuge in Mourilyan Harbour along with a couple of fishing boats and their dories. The harbour was a major port for the export of sugar, with huge silos connected to a long conveyer belt to load the ships alongside. We were advised that we might need to move if a big ship came in, but in fact we had a peaceful night out of the weather.

Once the sun came up the following day, it was to a lovely morning, and we had a wonderful sail up to Cape Grafton before turning into Cairns. The wind had picked up and it was blowing strongly in Mission Bay, which was very exposed, so we decided to head down into Cairns along with the dozen or so tripper boats that had been out to the Barrier Reef for the day. We anchored just off the channel opposite the marina, and after a quiet night we left Cairns, again in beautiful weather along with like-minded yachties. We haven't sailed amongst this number of yachts for quite a while! The wind was light, so we poled out the Yankee for the first time in ages and this kept us moving along at 5kts so that we arrived at the entrance to the marina in Port Douglas shortly after lunch, and tied up on a pontoon, with nobody to help. This was a common feature in Australia that we had become accustomed to.

Sarah was able to get her haircut and highlighted and we treated ourselves to dinner at one of the restaurants with tables outside in the sunshine. We had oysters to start, and I had a steak and Moreton Bay bugs, whilst Sarah had a whole deep-fried fish. It was lovely! I picked up a car from Avis and we decided to be tourists for the day, so we drove up to Mossman Gorge first, and walked through the tropical rainforest where there are amazing trees. We walked over a swing bridge that was quite literally very swingy and drove up to Cape Tribulation, having a picnic on the way, and crossed the Daintree River on a similar chain ferry to the one in Dartmouth. This was the first time that we saw signs warning of the dangers of crocodiles. We walked along the beach and saw that this was the end of the metaled road. There were lots of four-wheel-drive campervans heading up to Cookstown and beyond.

We then had a busy day packing up for our trip back home. It was to be a quick trip for me, but Sarah was going to stay for the arrival of Annabel's baby. We drove to Cairns and then picked up a flight to Sydney and then via Bangkok to London, where Tom was there to meet us. Sarah drove down to Cornwall with Annabel to join Gemma and Simon and the little ones so that they could go to Suzie Pomfrets' wedding. Suzie and Gemma had been great friends at school. I drove down with Tom the following day to see them all. We went to the bistro owned by Rick Stein in Padstow and had a delicious meal in a quite lovely atmosphere surrounded by our family. What bliss!

I returned to Heathrow to fly back in order to complete a refit and position Moonbeam to Darwin in time to join the blue water Rally. On my arrival in Sydney, I thought I had a good idea and would drive to Port Douglas rather than catch a plane to Cairns. As I recall my thinking was that I had viewed the coast from the sea, and it would be good to view the coast from the land. This was to prove not one of my best ideas as the road did not really follow the coast. I spent hours and hours driving between plantations of sugarcane with nothing else to see. Not only that, but it was also over 3000 miles, and I finally arrived back in Port Douglas on 4th July.

Moonbeam spent 84 days in Port Douglas, in total. Once I had arrived back, I started doing a refit that is always overdue. I renewed all the forward sanitary pipes and serviced the heads. I sanded the main deck and cleaned it before covering it with Teak Wonder. I replaced the steering on the dinghy, updated the computer with a new DVD drive and memory. I serviced the fridge a/c pump and had the water maker high-pressure electric motor rewound and

serviced. All this was done along with a hundred and one little items, before it was time to go. However, Annabel's son, Wilfrid Matthew Otto was born on 23 July and very sadly with distressing complications after a nearly 24-hour labour.

Initially the outlook was very poor and so I returned home via Tokyo as soon as I could. The next few days were spent praying that Wilfrid's brain damage would not be as devastating as Professor Edwards, who was the consultant paediatrician, counselled us that it might be.

Happily, as I write this Journal 10 years later, I am delighted Wilfie has grown up with hardly any disability and is an intelligent and delightful young man. Truly a miracle, but in many ways down to the dedication and determination of his Mum and Dad.

I returned to Moonbeam on 16th August and departed Port Douglas on 10th September, with a full tank of diesel. I had met one of the Blue Water Rally yachts in the marina and in conversation found that the skipper, Pete Callis, came from Dartmouth and lived about 200 m away from our house! It is a small world….

The next 1250 miles were to be on my own. I had brought out a new autopilot head because of the problems that the autopilot had been exhibiting, and once installed and the steering adjusted, the sea test appeared to show that it had fixed the problem. My optimism was short lived as the autopilot persistently drove the boat in an unpredictable direction, with the warning of an autopilot drive problem. Eventually, I managed to troubleshoot it to the left autopilot drive, which I promptly removed. This left the control to just one drive, but at least it worked!

My plan was to sail up to Cape York inside the Great Barrier Reef. I decided that as I was solo I would day- sail and anchor each evening. The first 270 miles was completed uneventfully in three days, and when I anchored, I was called up by ‘Bali Blue’ who it turned out to be another Blue Water Rally yacht, and who was alongside.

The delight of being inside the Great Barrier Reef was that generally the wind blew steadily on the beam between force four and six, and because the Pacific swell broke on the reef the waters inside were usually benign.

I averaged 60 to 80 miles a day in generally very good weather and in the company of Bali Blue. However, five days out neither of us had a good day. Bali Blue was knocked down in a thunderstorm, and Moonbeam ripped her Yankee after I had managed to jam the furler, which left me having to drop the sail in 25kts of wind, on a lee shore. Once I had got everything back to normal, or at least under control, I then promptly ran aground trying to get into the entrance of the Escape River. Oh dear, oh dear! Still, all's well that ends well, and nothing was damaged beyond my self-esteem.

It was now just a short trip to the entrance to the Albany passage and mid-morning Moonbeam said a fond farewell to the Pacific Ocean as she entered the Arafura Sea.

I sailed up past Cape York and left a Union Jack off Possession Island. It was here after all that Captain Cook claimed Australia for England, all those years ago, and essentially gave birth to the nation as we now know it.

The next 740 nautical miles took five days during which, I was buzzed by the Australian Coast Guard aircraft (a light twin) no less than three times and had a good conversation on each occasion. They patrol the sea between the north coast of Australia and Papa New Guinea on a regular basis, to control illegal immigration. I wish we did the same around the coasts of the UK.

I never felt very much that I was on my own because I regularly passed ships, yachts, and tugs, often with tows behind and not forgetting the odd cruise ship. It was easy to strike up a conversation on the radio, and as a rule everybody was typically friendly. The passage was essentially uneventful until I was approaching my destination off Fannie Bay in Darwin. I noticed that the windless was demanding 230amps! It was doing this all by itself and, no surprise, consequently burnt out the motor - happily before it caught fire. It turned out that there was no way of disconnecting the power to the windlass other than by severing the cable to it. I was not best pleased as it would be yet another expense and refit to be completed. On later inspection, the up contactor had developed a short circuit and closed the relay. I suppose I should have been grateful that it was the up relay because the down relay would have resulted in the loss of the anchor and 120mtrs of chain!

Happily, two days out of Darwin, I learned that Sarah was on her way and that Moonbeam's mistress would be back on board by 26 September, when we could pick up the anchor in Fannie Bay and move into Tipperary Waters Marina where she would stay until leaving on the Blue Water Rally. However, before that, Moonbeam had to be inspected by Australian Fisheries to confirm she was not carrying unwanted marine creatures that might damage the local fishing eco-systems. This was carried out by a team of divers, who happily gave us a clean bill of health.

The tidal range was such that it was extremely difficult to get to the boat when the tide was out because the dinghy would have to be dragged for miles. Consequently, when Sarah arrived, and I was able to pick her up from the airport, we spent the night in an hotel so that we could wait for high tide the following day in order to get out to Moonbeam.

This entailed getting up before dawn and pulling the dinghy down from the yacht club passing a sign saying 'beware of crocodiles!' However, we made it safely to the water's edge and were able to take Moonbeam around to the marina, passing the high-rises that had been built since the devastating cyclone of Christmas 1974, which had completely flattened the area.

It was very hot indeed in the marina with a boat like an oven, even though we ran the air-conditioning and had the shades up all around the cockpit. We now had 2 1/2 weeks before our departure on the Blue Water Rally. There was an awful lot to do. I took the fuel injector off the engine, for the third time this trip, so that it could be refurbished as it was playing up once again. I took the Yankee to a sail- maker for repair. The new radar was on its way from

Miami, and I located a new motor for the windlass, as it had burnt out and was beyond repair. However, the nearest one was in Perth, which was duly dispatched and arrived a few days later. We obtained sailing guides for the Indian Ocean, Indonesia and Thailand and visas from the Indonesian Consulate by parting with $150.

Meanwhile the Blue Water Rally boats started arriving in the marina, and we introduced ourselves to one and all who generally seemed to be very pleasant, and welcoming. However, there was no doubt that we were incomers, which was no surprise as they had been together since departing Gibraltar. In addition, it was clear that there was a hierarchy of boats with Blue Magic, a Discovery 53, and Miss Tippy, a new Oyster 56 on top.

Our next-door boat in the marina was called 'Tranmontana', and whose owners, Lex and Joe invited us for a drink. Lex was a retired barrister and Joe was full of fascinating and useful information. They were both on their second marriage. She had spent time in the far north of the Northern Territories and married an Australian with whom she had a child. It was their life together that formed the basis of the story of Crocodile Dundee. She had written a book about this life in the outback, and we were delighted when she was kind enough to give us a signed copy.

We managed to pass the inspection, which was a prerequisite of joining the rally, having to explain if not justify, how we ran the boat. Richard Bolt, who was the rally representative, spent a couple of hours with us. He let it be known that he was taking a gamble regarding the entry into Indonesia for the yachts on the rally. Of course, it turned out that it was not his risk but ours, but more of this later.

We attended our first Blue Water Rally briefing for our trip to Kupang, which was our first insight into the organisation, or lack of it, of the rally staff. Having worked non-stop to fit the radar, fix the windlass and install new relays, we were ready to visit customs for our outward clearance. We had been in Australia for very nearly a year, and we were very pleased to get $300 GST back. We had enjoyed our time here in Darwin and lunched on several occasions at the Darwin Yacht Club overlooking Fannie Bay, which had welcomed us more than us 35 years ago when we started flying.

On Wednesday, 13 October we were booked out of the lock at 0800, and so at last we were homeward bound, and shortly afterwards lost sight of Australia for the last time. We set course for Kupang in West Timor and had an uneventful three days sail, whilst sorting out the furling drum for the Yankee and re-threading the vang so that we could use the main. We got used to the HF radio net and the general chatter on the VHF, which was quite an eye-opener to sailing in a rally. However, otherwise life was looking up because we caught a fine tuna just 10 minutes after starting to fish - perhaps my luck was changing.

We were buzzed by a maritime control aircraft on the second day out, and on the third day we saw what looked to us to be a suspicious boat, turning circles a few miles away. We had been asked to look out for anything suspicious or unusual and so I sent an email to Customs and shortly afterwards a Coast Guard aircraft appeared over the horizon to have a look and advised that it was an Indonesian fishing vessel. They were, however, very grateful that we

had alerted them. We made steady progress to Kupang but had to motor most of the way due to very light and variable winds. This was the downside of leaving so late in the year.

Our arrival in Kupang turned out to be a fiasco regarding obtaining customs clearance for our stay in Indonesia. Basically, Richard Bolt was trying to get away with not paying the required bond for each of the yachts on the rally and, no surprise eventually clearance was refused. This meant and we were to spend all our time in Indonesia, until we reached Bali, in contravention of Immigration and Customs. Without clearance, we were at risk should we be boarded by officials, in Indonesian waters. Without being able to produce the necessary clearance, it would potentially put us in jail and Moonbeam subject to forfeiture. This unnecessary risk was to spoil our enjoyment of cruising in one of the most delightful areas.

Now I was very angry about this. After all, I had been responsible for adherence to all the rules and regulations of the many countries that we had visited for the last four years without mishap. The first time that this responsibility had been delegated to a third party, it had been cocked-up.

Nevertheless, we were able to get fuel, and started to get to know the crews from the other yachts and were able to treat the engine and generator to an oil change. We bought a dongle from a local phone shop to be able to get on the Internet and had a gas bottle refilled. However, when we got back to Moonbeam, we heard an announcement on the radio from Richard that all boats were required to leave at first light the next day. Failure to depart by 0600, would result in the boat being impounded. A meeting was called for 1730 to discuss our options, and given that there weren't any, we agreed to try to stay together with two other yachts, 'Moonshadow' and 'Talismano' to find similar anchorages, and essentially minimise our exposure to built-up areas, where we might meet officialdom.

Well, the next day we have never seen so many yachts depart in such a hurry. It was actually a lovely morning with a reasonable breeze which enabled us to pole out the Yankee. We had a good sail for the first 150 miles and then motor sailed for the last 100, until finding an anchorage in Rinca.

It was clear that there was considerable discontent with the way Richard Bolt had handled the issues in Kupang. It appeared that this had been compounded by earlier unhappiness at the way the rally had been run and there was a demand for a meeting with the management of the Blue Water Rally, in Singapore. There was clearly a loss of confidence in how they would lead the rally around the Gulf of Aden. Eventually an email appeared announcing that they had negotiated a payment of US$800 for each boat. We were now caught between a rock and a hard place and will have to pay it.

We had a pleasant evening entertaining Anna and Peter from 'Talismano' and Peter, David and Jim from 'Moonshadow' on Moonbeam. Anna delighted the chef by declaring my home-made pizza to be as good as an Italian version!

We were up early the following morning so I could go up the mast to swap halyards on the Yankee. We had been experiencing a persistent problem of the top of the foil chafing

through the leather protection where the halyard was bent onto the head of the sail, and then we departed in trail of ‘Talismano’. We had to track along the north coast of Sumbawa which required us to go up through the channel between Rinca and the Komodo Islands. There was very little wind so we started the engine so that we would be able to combat the five-knot current in the channel, which was running against us. However, we suffered an engine overheat which initially I thought was likely to be because the raw water impeller was breaking up, even though I had previously commented that there appeared to be a noise coming from the gearbox, so I topped up the gearbox oil as a precaution.

Once the engine had cooled, we were able to run it at 1800 rpm for the rest the day, until we dropped anchor in Bina Bay, alongside ‘Talismano’, who were kind enough to give me some of their spare ATF oil, as I was getting low. We left promptly at 0700 the next morning after I had changed the impeller and been up the mast to bend the new halyard onto the Yankee. All in all, it was a busy morning.

Once again, the wind was light and variable so we motored until we found a place to anchor below Mount Tambora, off a small fishing village, after we had been chased off by park rangers when we attempted to anchor on the top of some drivers. Needless to say, they had absolutely no warning flag or dinghy to protect them. Once we were settled, a thorough examination of the engine revealed play in the aft bearing of the gearbox, which was leaking ATF oil. This would obviously need to be fixed sooner rather than later.

We had a good sail the following morning, but as usual the wind died quite early on, so we motored across the bay and along the coast until we found a spot to anchor behind two islands on the north-east corner of Lombok and below Mount Rinjani, which is the second highest mountain in Indonesia. At about 2100 after supper, Sarah went forward to get the fan to put in our cabin and noticed that the halyards were slapping loudly. When I put my head up in the cockpit, I found that we were in a full gale, and we were dragging our anchor onto a lee shore. I started the engine and took the weight off the anchor chain and continued to steer the boat around in circles until the worst of the wind and rain had passed through. Whilst being thoroughly wet and miserable, I could see ‘Talismano’ was in similar difficulties, and it turned out that they only just kept afloat in very shallow waters.

We picked up a mooring at Gili Air on the north-west corner of Lombok having motored through local fishing boats trailing their nets and which would prove to be totally invisible by night because they did not have any lights. It was only possible to determine where their nets were by observing the direction of the boats. We went ashore for a quick lunch and then again at 1700 for happy hour, as it was Guy’s birthday off ‘Larooba’. He and his French wife Simone had two lovely children, Hugo who was 3 and Juliet, 4. We presented him with a Moonbeam T-shirt as a birthday present.

We had a great motor-sail across to Bali at times doing over 9kts. It was a wonderful sight as we crossed because it looked as though there was a regatta with a great many coloured sails in the channel. We nearly picked the wrong harbour, when we were deceived by a charter sailing boat, sailing out of a small bay, but we saw ‘Talismano’ heading further south, and on examination of the chart, our mistake became obvious. An entrance to a large bay opened up

which was alive with dozens of pleasure boats whizzing about and so we slowly made our way up the channel counting off the port and starboard buoys to the marina. We were disappointed to see that 'Talismano' had cut the corner and ran aground where they had to stay for the next eight hours!

Now this was a very special arrival for us because Sarah and I met when I was visiting the passenger cabin of a B747 at 35,000 feet over this island 37 years ago. We (the flight crew) had acquired a new cabin crew when leaving Hong Kong for Darwin and Melbourne, and because flight and cabin crew were picked up from the hotel at different times and delivered to the airport separately, we had not met any of our new crew, so I went to say hello to a very special lady who I subsequently married. Well now we were able to walk ashore – what a joy!

Bali

Well, it might have been nice to be able to walk ashore, but in truth the marina was pretty rundown, and unbelievably given the arrival of so many blue water yachts ran out of diesel after topping up the first arrival, which was 'Blue Magic'. In addition, there wasn't a great deal of space, so we had to raft up, and as we were on the inside had a continuous procession across the foredeck. We dealt with all the necessary paperwork with Quarantine, the Harbourmaster, Immigration and Customs all of whom came aboard. That said, it only took about one and a half hours which was mostly spent stamping forms, not to mention providing the necessary number of copies of each. Goodness knows what they do with them but happily we were now legally in Indonesia - 570 miles after we had first entered!

I immediately started to remove and strip the gearbox and was ably assisted by David off 'Moonshadow'. It wasn't easy to remove it from the engine and drive shaft, not least because of its weight and I was very grateful for his help. The following day, Friday, I completed the dismantling of the last piece of the gearbox and as David and I were finishing up, Paul from 'Jackamy' arrived alongside and advised that he could get the necessary spares. His business at home was a hydraulic engineering supply company and his son was arriving from England on a visit on Tuesday – how that is serendipity! We had to measure the bearing that was specific to the gearbox so that it could be machined specially. The micrometre I had in my toolkit was not big enough, so we had to use my Vernier Calliper. The problem was that the difference between 11/2 inches and 38mm is tiny, so we made an educated guess.

We took a taxi to the airport to collect our hire car and returned with fear and trepidation as we drove on Bali roads for the first time. We did find our way back to the marina satisfactorily, but I had never experienced driving on roads where literally thousands of motorbikes came at you from all directions and random angles.

We ventured out to Denpasar, to see if we could find the bearing shop which we did and surprisingly which was open and even more surprisingly had the oil seals that I needed for the gearbox. We were pleased with ourselves in finding our way as there are almost no road signs. This was after having an altercation with a policeman on a motorbike who accused me of violating lane discipline. I refused to pay his fine as I had specifically stopped at the

police box on the corner of junction to ask the way and I admit that I shouted at him! It turned out to be a scam most often evident at the end of the month when they were getting short of funds. The scam was best illustrated when Jaime off 'Bionic' was fined for not wearing a crash helmet whilst driving his car!

We passed a political rally near to the Governor's residence which was quite exciting and then took the road to Ubud. It was amazing as there was mile after mile of craft shops. One area specialising in silver work, another woodcarving, another stone sculpting, and another batik weaving which no doubt we would need to return to in due course. We had lunch at the Café Lotus, which was heavenly, overlooking stunning lotus ponds. We then drove up to the rice terraces which are a wonderful sight but spoiled for us by being hassled by the local hawkers.

Back on Moonbeam, the following day we had two local guys who came and cleaned all the stainless and the glass fibre as well as the lifelines for US$25. I was tempted to take them home but employed them to clean the hull, which they did for another US$30!

There was no time to waste as the refrigerator needed servicing which revealed that it required a new bearing and I needed to get up the mast to retrieve the halyard and saw off the top of the foil because it had parted and had a sharp edge, which had been the cause of our chafing problem.

Happily, Jaap, off 'Peter Pan' had found a local Dutchman who ran a Marine services operation and who undertook to find replacements here in Bali. We drove out to the east of Bali to Tengana, one of the oldest villages here, which enabled us to stumble across the Rama hotel in Candy Dasa, where we had a delightful lunch. The hotel was in an absolutely idyllic setting, and we decided to book to stay for a couple of nights later in the week. We toured around the village which had several long houses, rice barns, shrines and pavilions and a large village meeting hall and of course some shops.

The long drive back to Bali marina had us battling unmade roads and motorbikes darting around and across us with no lane discipline whatever and lorries and cars all over the place, so we had the next day pottering on the boat to recover.

Our sojourn in the Rama hotel was delightful as there were very few other guests and the hotel staff could not do enough to make us comfortable. It helped to recharge our batteries because back on Moonbeam, many of the yachts had already departed and I still had the challenge of rebuilding the gearbox. In addition, not forgetting to replace the bearing in the refrigerator pump and bending on the Yankee with the repaired halyards.

A nerve-racking morning as I started to rebuild the gearbox, ecstatic when one bearing slipped on having left it out in the sun whilst the shaft was in the freezer, but desperately disappointing when the second one split as it cooled. Sadly, there was a disastrous end to the day when it appeared that one of the gears was jammed, and upon dismantling it once more the springs went flying all around the cockpit and fired the bullet-like end pieces all over the place, with one being lost permanently. I now needed two new bearings which would be sent

from Jakarta and a new bullet which happily our local Dutchman was able to source. This eventually enabled me to finally reassemble the gearbox. Happily, once it was installed back on the engine, it was run for an hour in neutral and then joy of joys put into forward and reverse and it worked! It was such a great relief to now know that we would be able to depart on the high tide next day.

We had had a problem in that there was no diesel available in the marina and it was illegal for petrol stations to sell diesel in jerry cans because of the difference in taxation between road and marine diesel. However, this being Bali, petrol stations were keen to sell us diesel providing it was done out of sight. This meant that several trips after dark was necessary to enable us to get enough diesel to top up the tank. We were lucky to get away with it, as were several others, but the last boat to leave was impounded until €850 in cash was passed to the local chief of police. Of course, no receipt was offered.

So, it was with mixed emotions that we left Bali marina on 11th November, because on the one hand it had been lovely to visit, but on the other the obvious corruption and general tardiness, made us feel pleased to depart. We now had a thousand miles to put behind us until we reached Batam and Nongsa Point Marina where we would leave Indonesia for the last time.

We whisked up the east coast of Bali at times doing more than 11kts before establishing ourselves in the Java Sea. There were several aspects to concern us for the whole trip. Firstly, there were there was lots of shipping, particularly fishing boats, and tugs with tows. Now when I was flying over this area, I often looked down to see literally thousands of lights which I had assumed were fishing boats. Now that I was amongst them at sea level, it was obvious that many did not bother to exhibit lights at all and as for the tugs they were frequently showing lights that had no bearing whatever to the International Collision Regulations. This meant that on several occasions we were close to being in collision with tugs, tows, or both, which we were unable to see at night, let alone figuring out what they were and what they were doing. This made watch-keeping at night, somewhat fraught.

Secondly, the Java Sea is filthy. There were literally millions of plastic bags floating near the surface. We were to learn later, that much of this problem was a relatively new phenomenon because traditionally goods were packed in leaves or bamboo containers which when dumped on the hillside were washed down by the rain and degraded naturally in the ocean. In recent times everything was being packed in plastic bags. However, the means of disposal had not changed and so the rain washed them into the ocean where they do not degrade. As a result of this unsustainable contamination, we understood that fishing was becoming progressively more difficult for the locals with smaller and smaller catches. This meant that there was absolutely no point in putting a line out. This was to remain the case until we were well north of the Malacca Straits.

We only had one incident of which we had been warned, of a fishing boat trying to get rid of his demons. This required the fishing boat to motor directly towards a target boat as quickly as possible and only to turn away at the last moment before ramming it. Happily, on the

occasion that Moonbeam was a target, we were able to outrun him and therefore remained demon free.

On this part of our trip one day was very much like another. We had very little wind and consequently had to motor much of the way. The gearbox initially stood up well but towards the end of the trip started leaking ATF oil, so it needed to be watched very carefully. It was clear that on reaching Singapore it would be necessary to have it rebuilt professionally. To add to our problems the engine consistently ran hot and once I had inspected the cooling system from end to end, I concluded that the propeller must have accumulated barnacles or other contaminants. This meant that we had to keep our speed down to ensure that we did not overheat.

We were using fuel at a tremendous rate and so we decided to alter course towards Kumai on the south-west corner of West Kalimantan to get some more. We only stayed there long enough to get 600 litres because we wanted to arrive in Batam, in time to check out of Indonesia with the help of the rally organisers. On 18th November we crossed the equator, to leave the southern hemisphere after spending two years eight months and 16 days there. We gave a glass of bubbles to Neptune, a glass to Moonbeam and we had the rest of the bottle. We were 29,500 miles from home. What fun, what an achievement!

Our arrival in Nongsa Point Marina was uneventful apart from missing two fishing boats with no lights and weaving around big ships that were unloading and tied up on the fuel berth to be met by Tony and his wife from the Blue Water Rally, Tony was an ex-RAF officer and had been involved with the organisation of several of the previous rallies. He advised us how to check out so that we could leave the following day for Singapore. This meant getting up early to visit Immigration, Customs and Quarantine. However, not having paid attention to the fact that there was an hour’s time change, I was there well before they were! Mind you I had always had difficulty with time zones, so Sarah was not surprised.

Crossing the Singapore Straits was made interesting by the fact that we were surrounded by thunderstorms and on occasion the visibility was poor and the radar full of shipping. This challenge was relieved by watching Sarah dancing on the foredeck, because she was so relieved to be out of Indonesia. In fairness we had been really stressed until we had been properly cleared into Indonesia in Bali. As a complete contrast, our check-in to Singapore took five minutes with no money changing hands. How civilised! We were directed immediately to our pontoon in Keppel Bay Marina. This was a newly constructed marina, and the staff were outstanding in their hospitality and provision of services, which included tight security.

Our arrival in Singapore marked the start of 2 1/2 weeks of rushing around. We started with the inevitable shopping which included pearls for Sarah's birthday, and a new computer for the boat. As this was Sunday, we took ourselves off to have the delicious champagne brunch in the Equinox in the Swissotel, Stamford on the 67th floor. This to my mind was the best place for Sunday brunch anywhere in the world only closely followed by the Oriental in Bangkok. To my amazement and great pleasure, one of my ex-colleagues walked into the restaurant with his partner, later to be his wife. I had done a lot of Bill Barrett's command

training and recognised him to be one of the worlds really nice guys, so it was a delight to see him again. We had checked into the Stamford to stay there overnight as a special treat and the following morning went across to the Long Bar in the Raffles Hotel for a beer and some lunch before returning to the boat. We had originally stayed in the Raffles on the way back from a posting at a time when there was no air conditioning. Now it would be hard to recognise the original hotel.

Bill and Kate visited us on Moonbeam, once a runner from security had checked with us that it was OK to let them in. They presented us with a cake and a bottle of champagne. We ate the cake, but I undertook to keep the champagne until we completed our circumnavigation, which indeed we did.

With so much shipping in Singapore it was easy to find a dealership and engineering works for the manufacturers of the gearbox, who undertook to rebuild it for me, and so I left it with them the following day. We had a wonderful evening with Val and David off 'Angel' and Dick and Sarah off 'Moonshiner' and John and Gillian off 'Spirit of Nina'. Val had come to fame because whilst she was on watch in the Indonesian islands, she was busy knitting and put Angel on the rocks, happily without too much damage. They had lived here in Singapore when David was working and his ex-PA hosted a trip to the Long Bar for Singapore Sling, followed by dinner in an excellent Chinese restaurant. They had picked us up from the marina and drove us down Orchard Road, which had the most magnificent Christmas lighting we had ever seen. It was like a ceiling of constantly changing colours.

Over the next couple of days there was a general exodus of the Blue Water Rally boats with only 'Island Kia' and 'Peter Pan' left to keep us company. Jaap from 'Peter Pan' joined us for a meal on Moonbeam and we reviewed the management or lack of it of the Blue Water Rally. The latest fiasco was that Indian visas which were necessary for boats wishing to visit anywhere in India were no longer available in Singapore as they once used to be, nor had they been for the previous two years. This meant that the nearest consulate where these could be obtained would be in Colombo in Sri Lanka. He was, along with other participants, really disparaging about the whole organisation.

Happily, the pumps I had ordered from New Zealand arrived in Singapore and cleared customs and when fitted we were able to run the air-conditioning once more which was bliss. Sarah's computer was repaired in Sim Lim Square which was a high-rise shopping complex dedicated to electronics, and I was finally able to upload Max Sea (the navigation platform) to the new computer and connect it generally with the sat phone and AIS.

We dropped the main early in the morning just after sun-up whilst it was still quite cool in order to mend a small tear that we had spotted, when last flying the main. The tear was along a seam where the stitching had com adrift and was easily managed by our sewing machine. This exercise had the bonus of revealing a problem with the foil at the bottom of the mast. We had been puzzling the mystery of some screws which had turned up on the deck some time ago, which is always a worry. They turned out to be from the bottom of the foil, where it attached to the furler and was thus easily fixed, which would not have been the case if the main had jammed half-way out.

A trip to the engineering shop, was disappointing in that they needed spares for the clutch which would take a minimum of three weeks to be sent from Germany. We could not stay that long, so I told them just to rebuild the gearbox with new bearings and seals and I would deal with the clutch later on. Once that was done, I refitted the gearbox onto the engine and happily it worked without any problem.

All sorts of odds and ends were bought from various chandleries including a new dyneema halyard for the Yankee and a new outboard motor starter which was in stock!

We had spent lots of time renewing my acquaintance with Singapore from my flying days and finding many new places to visit, very often in torrential rain. Our last day in Singapore was spent topping up supplies of food and buying Christmas stocking presents from Chinatown. We had advised the marina of our intention to leave, and they came around to give us a photo that they had taken of us and fixed it inside a card, to wish us bon-voyage. What a nice touch!

So, at 1000 on Sunday, 5th December we departed Keppel Bay Marina for our trip to Phuket. It was a relief in some ways, but we had had a really enjoyable time in Singapore particularly at the Raffles and the Equinox and took with us some special memories. We were required to anchor in the West Customs Anchorage, where we put our passports and documents into a net being held by one of the crew of a customs launch which rafted alongside. Happily, they were returned a few minutes later without getting wet. It highlighted just how well organised and efficient the officialdom in Singapore was, and how it contrasted with Indonesia.

Once clear we motored out through the anchorage and alongside the busy shipping lanes. It was an incredible experience, with mile after mile of super-tankers, car transporters and freight carriers which would be en-route to all parts of the world. Au revoir Singapore!

Our first night was a real awakening to how treacherous this passage was going to be. Just outside the main shipping lanes there were dozens and dozens of fishing boats and nets, many of which were unlit. A few miles further on it was possible to find a net with a flashing light in the middle, but with no boat which made is almost invisible against the background of waves and the lights of the shipping. It was really confusing, and we decided to stop in the afternoon off Port Dickson.

It was nothing like we remembered of the time we had been here 30 odd years ago. There were many tall buildings lining the coast and several oil rigs not far offshore. The anchorage was a bit roly-poly, but it was a welcome break, and we had a good sleep to make up for the night before. We continued tracking the shipping lanes into quite a strong current and of course the wind, but finally the Straits opened up and the shipping dispersed.

We were still tending to experience the engine overheating, and I figured out there were four possibilities of the likely cause. It was either the thermostat, the heat exchanger, a fouled propeller, or Moonbeam's hull being heavily contaminated with weed. This was clearly going to have to be sorted out as soon as possible.

We anchored for a break in Teluk Belango Bay on Pangkor Island, where I changed the thermostat and popped over the side to look at the propeller which appeared to be clean but sadly the hull was really grubby with lots of weed and barnacles on her.

After a restful sleep we woke up to pouring rain which continued for the rest of the morning we actually put on our oily jackets, whilst weaving in and out of dozens of fishing boats. This continued throughout the following night, and at one point I had to do a 180° crash turn to avoid hitting one, which I couldn't see because he wasn't showing any lights! However, the reward in the morning was to see the islands south of Langkawi which was a really beautiful sight with quite stunning shapes of the rocks and narrow passageways into the bay of Langkawi. We motored up to the Royal Langkawi Yacht Club Marina and checked in with them and went to the ferry terminal to clear. The harbourmaster, customs and immigration were grouped together in this very busy terminal with lots of people travelling to and from the mainland in high-speed ferries.

Two of the rally boats were already here so we invited everyone for supper, but first went shopping with Eva. Eva and her husband were circumnavigating but decided to stop here in Langkawi. Her husband, who she stayed with once a week, set up a charter business. Eva had bought an old, actually very old motorboat, which she had renovated and converted into a day charter boat, which she operated with one other crewmember. She kindly drove us from place to place so that we could stock up on duty free wine and beer, flour for breadmaking, fresh vegetables meat from the cold storage shop. We would never have found any of these without her help and we had a very pleasant couple of hours at a bar where she described their life here in Langkawi. Apparently, her boat was popular with Muslim men who arrived with their wives in their Abayas, but as soon as the boat was out of sight of land, the women would go down below to change into the skimpiest of bikinis. The male crew member was clearly considered to be invisible!

After four days we left the Royal Langkawi Yacht Club, but not before we had employed a diver to clean the hull. He used a small compressor with a long tube to enable him to breath whilst under the water. As we set off there were stunning views of Langkawi, and we could see the cable car glinting in the sun that goes up to one of the highest peaks on the island.

We stopped just as it was getting dark north-east of Ko Rok island, in the bay south of Rok Island where we found ‘Peter Pan’ at anchor. The water was in incredibly clear, and we could see the coral heads below which was something that had not been possible since the Pacific Islands. For the first time I would be happy to dive here under Moonbeam as I would be able to see approaching marauding sharks or crocodiles! The delight on the trip from Langkawi is that Moonbeam was back up to her hull speed with the engine running normally. This proved that our overheating problem was because the engine had to work too hard because of the weed on her hull.

We were up before light and left the bay quietly and slowly but for a change all the fishing boats were showing lights which made it somewhat less stressful. We had a brisk motor sail up to Phuket, passing some stunning rocks pointing out of the water and then past Phi Phi Don island which I am sure we will return to with Tom. We tracked up the shallow channel

to Yacht Haven Marina and was met by Tony, last seen in Batam who took our lines and briefed us on our arrival.

Phuket

We got up early to collect our car from Avis at the airport and then went down to Ao Chalong to clear customs, immigration and the harbourmaster. It was very straight forward although the number of different forms seemed to be endless. Once again, we wondered what on earth, they do with them. We said goodbye to David and Peter off 'Moonshadow' because they were taking the boat back to Langkawi to leave it there for a year before continuing their voyage. We also said goodbye to Jaap off 'Peter Pan' because he announced that he was leaving the rally. Nice man that he is, when we told him we would miss him, he reversed the compliment.

We bumped into David and Valerie off 'Kanaloha', who we last saw in Mooloolaba. It turned out that they lived here, and they invited us for drinks in their beautiful house and to join them and some friends at a beach restaurant on Sunday. We commissioned a new cockpit table to be built and fitted by the joiners who had made a similar table for 'Larooba'. It was quite a complicated design, and we were happy to have it delivered unvarnished, because the owner of the firm took all of his staff for a holiday over Christmas, and otherwise it would not be ready until after we needed to leave.

Tom was due to fly out from London, but Heathrow had been closed due to heavy snow. He eventually arrived four days late, having booked a single fare ticket with Scandinavian out of Birmingham to pick up a connection in Copenhagen. It turned out that Heathrow was no more able to deal with a snowfall than when I was working. They had only one runway operational, and many stands unavailable due to snow clearance, after two days! This meant that he missed his connection at Birmingham for Copenhagen, which in turn missed the connection there. Happily, SAS were on the ball and had rebooked him on a flight out of Zurich.

Meanwhile after a welcome party, Tony from the blue water Rally held a briefing for the next leg to Sri Lanka and opened the discussion about the passage beyond. Using the example of previous rallies, we were to cross the Indian Ocean to Salalah, in groups of four boats. Essentially, we were to keep in sight of one another and in the event of being attacked by pirates, we were to close up and make quote 'a hard target'. Now how four fibreglass boats make a hard target was a puzzle that was compounded by his description of the historical problem of piracy. It would appear that mother ships would depart in the monsoon with a number of high-speed ribs on board and having identified a target the pirates would leave the mothership and attack. Heretofore, the mother ships had limited range from the Somalian coast. However, in recent times, the pirates had attacked and acquired some long-distance Chinese fishing boats which they were now using as mother ships. This meant that the radius of action of the pirates extended more or less right across the Indian Ocean. With this in mind, Sarah and I started wondering if the plan to route up to the Gulf of Aden was something that we really wanted to do given the real risk of piracy. This concern would lead us to do our own research of the situation much later.

I had been finding it uncomfortable to walk because my left calf had become quite swollen. In the first instance I thought it was due to an infection from a graze, however as it did not get better with antibiotics, David and Valerie suggested that I went to the Bangkok Hospital which David described as like visiting a five-star hotel.

He and Valerie had described to us an accident that occurred to David whilst he was lighting their barbecue. He had poured some alcohol onto the charcoal and put the open bottle down whilst he ignited it. Tragically, in doing so the bottle of alcohol ignited and the consequent explosion set him alight. He was fortunate in that Valerie was there and rolled him in a rug to extinguish the flames, but he was very severely burned. He spent the next six months in the Bangkok Hospital where he was fortunate to have such good care that unless you looked very carefully you would not be able to see the scars of the multiple skin grafts that he had had.

So, it was with some trepidation that I did visit this five-star hotel and can only say that the care that I had was brilliant. I was met in the lobby first by nurses who took my details and then I was immediately seen by the doctor on call. He initially thought that it was probably deep vein thrombosis, and I was promptly sent to the ultra-scan department where it was determined that happily the diagnosis was wrong and that I had a baker's cyst. This is where the sack around a joint leaks fluid, but which usually clears up of its own accord. This was all done whilst Sarah and Tom were having lunch down in Ao Chalong. Amazingly, the charge for this care came to the US$200!

We took a trip up to the Big Buddha which was still in the process of being built. We signed a tile with our names which will be stuck on the border of the building. This meant that we will be ever a part of Phuket. A new boat 'Saildance' had joined the rally here which was a lovely Oyster 62 owned by Virginia who was American and Peter who was English, who were a lovely couple. They had a crew who had gone home for Christmas and so they were stuck in the marina because they did not like sailing without a crew. They invited us for a drink, and we had a long discussion about the shortcomings of the rally. They described how they were impounded in Indonesia and spent six days in jail lying on a concrete floor! This was because they had been boarded and did not have the necessary clearances. It was likely that they would have still been there without the intervention of the American Embassy to arrange for their release. The Embassy had been alerted by their son. This story confirmed our concerns about our status ex- Kumai.

Sarah managed to find a Buddha to take home after some discussion about its size! We stopped up at the Villa Market, supermarket in Ao Chalong and went back to await the arrival of the teak cockpit table, which unfortunately was too large and was taken away and returned on Christmas eve. It was beautifully made, and fitted perfectly, although the cupholder was too small. They took it away along with one of our cups and undertook to leave the modified version in the marina office for our return. This was because on Christmas morning we left the marina to anchor off Ko Hong which is just south of the James Bond Island. It was a beautiful anchorage surrounded by amazing limestone pinnacles. Once we had settled some local fisherman came alongside selling prawns. We bought a kilo for 200 Baht, two beers and a coke and now had our starter for our Christmas lunch. This was a rib of beef roasted on

the barbecue and washed down with a bottle of champagne. Tom had arrived like Father Christmas with all sorts of presents and spares for the boat, so it was a lovely Christmas together. We pottered from island to island and finally returned to Phi Phi Don before setting off back to Phuket. We suffered an engine overheat again which was a bit of a worry as I thought we had sorted the problem, so the following day I took the heat exchanger apart to find that it was full of barnacles! How they got in there is anyone's guess especially given the temperature of the water, but once I had cleaned them out, the engine returned to running at its normal temperature.

We welcomed 2011 by lighting a lantern and sending it skywards along with thousands of others and watched the fireworks lighting up the night sky at midnight from our boat. Sadly, it was now time for Tom to go home and it was it was with a heavy heart that we delivered him to the airport to see him leave on 2nd January. At least his flight home was less of an epic than his flight out, as he went direct! We were now one of the last boats left in Phuket and having bunkered 500litres of fuel we finally departed two days later with our destination Galle, in Sri Lanka. This would be something that we were later to deeply regret.

The Bay of Bengal

We set out into the Andaman Sea and to cross the Bay of Bengal in good spirits and made good progress for the first day or so. We spotted a dolphin for the first time in a while which we thought would be a good omen, and indeed the following day a whole pod came to play for an hour or so. Initially we were surrounded by ships exiting the Malacca Straits so a keen look out was needed.

Four days out we encountered heavy rain with thunder and lighting, which was to be more or less continuous for the next several days. We commented that the ships were like fireflies coming from all directions and we were nearly run down on several occasions no doubt because there was inadequate watch on the bridge.

We heard a cri d coeur from ‘Bionic’ who were ahead of us but believed they had something entangled in their propeller, so we altered course to close on them to provide any assistance that we could, as it was clearly not safe for Jaime to dive on it. This sort of help was the accepted norm of boats on the rally.

The winds were generally south or south-east force 3 to 4 but interspersed with vicious squalls gusting often to more than 40kts, so we had to be very alive to the sails that were set, at all times. Finally, as we were closing the last position that ‘Bionic’ had given us, Sarah asked over the radio where are you? Jaime answered I'm on my boat which was hardly surprising as he was half-way across the Bay of Bengal! By the time we had him in sight, he was able to report that whatever had been entangled with the propeller had dropped off and he was now fully seaworthy.

Now it would be true to say that the weather forecasting for this part of the ocean was not the best. In fact, we were about to be caught in an un-forecast tropical revolving storm. This hit us a thousand miles out of Phuket with 500 miles still to go to Galle. It started with

continuous torrential rain with the radar being entirely black. The wind picked up from the south-west and steadily increased to forced nine with gusts over 60 kts with huge seas. In fact, the anemometer was carried away in a gust whilst it was reading over 60kts.

As usual, Sarah had gone to bed at midnight to try to get some rest, and during the early part of my watch I noticed that the automatic bilge pump was cycling on and off. I lifted one of the inspection panels in the cabin sole and to my horror saw that we were taking on substantial amounts of water. I immediately thought that a through-hull fitting had failed and shouted for Sarah to get up.

Now of course, I knew the position of every one of the 18 through-hull fittings like the back of my hand and went forward with the intention of inspecting each one of them from bow to stern. However, whilst lifting the cabin sole in the forward cabin, I was surprised to have a bucketful of water sprayed onto my neck from above. It turned out the anchor locker was completely full of water and as Moonbeam was submarining in the heavy seas, water was being pumped through the top of the forward bulkhead where it had not been sealed. This was the first and only time I cursed the build quality of Oyster Marine. I jury rigged a temporary seal, whilst starting the engine and running the engine bilge pump until we had eliminated most of the water. What a mess in the forward cabin! Everything was completely soaked in seawater. However, it was with great relief that we were not sinking, and it was unnecessary to seal the forward watertight door.

This started a spell of the worst weather we experienced on Moonbeam. As there had been no forecast of this storm, nor could we get any sense out of the rally organisers in Galle who we asked to obtain up to date forecasts for us. They merely contacted the Sri Lankan Navy in the first instance, who basically were unable to help, so we did not realise that we were in a tropical revolving storm and that it was tracking north-east. Had we known this and given that it would have been readily identified from satellite observation, it would have prompted us to turn south towards the Equator. However, we didn't, and the nearest port was Trincomalee to the north-west and initially it seemed like a good idea to head for it. Just to illustrate how severe this storm was, the Falmouth coastguard received a call asking for medical advice when the skipper of 'Baccus' a 14m sailing vessel, injured his arm. Less than an hour later the yacht started to sink, and the crew contacted Falmouth coastguard again to say that in force 11 winds with high seas and heavy swell they had lost control of the yacht which was taking on water and sinking. Happily, the crew were rescued by the merchant vessel Maersk Surabaya which was en route to Malaysia, but the yacht was lost.

There were four boats caught in this storm, Moonbeam, 'Nautibuoytoo', 'Bionic' and 'Natibou'. We set up a web on the HF so that we could communicate with each other and the rally organisers in Galle. Hans, off 'Natibou' who was from Sweden, acted as co-ordinator, and this provided some comfort to one another whilst we in caught in the storm. When we finally arrived in Galle, Hans still had sores on his forearms from leaning on his chart table whist on the HF.

It was clear that a substantial amount of water had somehow got into in the fuel tank which resulted in an engine failure, when I did not notice the warning from the Racor. Also, it

meant that we were unable to run the gen-set without jury rigging some form of fuel supply separate to the main diesel tank. When the wind went into the west, we lay ahull for two days so that I could complete the jury-rig for a fuel supply for the generator, and hence start charging the batteries. I started to investigate what had happened to the fuel supply to the engine.

Eventually the storm blew itself out and the wind settled into the south-east once more and we were able to sail. In the meantime, I had taken the fuel injection pump off the engine and found that the internal shaft had fractured, when I dismantled it. This would be the first and only time that I could not fix a problem whilst at sea.

Now Moonbeam is a sailing vessel and at some point, the wind would enable us to continue to our destination. However, consequent on being in the rally there was a requirement to make landfall in order to join an excursion that had been arranged in Sri Lanka commencing 20 January. Consequently, we advised every one of our inability to meet this arrival time, as we had suffered an engine failure that was beyond repair and that we were becalmed.

It turned out that ‘Moonshine’ who had left Phuket after us, was running out of fuel and could not make landfall. Happily, although we had run out of wind, we still had plenty of fuel, so we organised a rendezvous. This was so that ‘Moonshiner’ could take us undertow whilst we provided them with fuel, so that we could both get to our destination.

Once we met up, we transferred a total of 120 litres of fuel, in two tranches, which was not an easy task at sea, but that enabled Dick and Sarah to tow us into Galle Harbour where we were met by a number of the Bluewater yachts and a host of Sri Lankan Navy staff.

Sri Lanka

We were tied up outside ‘Moonshiner’ to the pontoon which was one of those temporary structures made up of squares of plastic loosely connected to one another so that walking on it requires a substantial degree of acrobatic balance in order not to be ejected into the water. It was quite a long walk around the marina to the entrance, through a filthy area which was the unloading dock for concrete deliveries. The marina was controlled by the Sri Lankan Navy, and there was still a concern about the uprising of the Tamils and consequently the Navy closed the port each night by dragging a chain across the entrance.

This meant that we were inside a military controlled area and necessitated us getting a pass so that we could move freely in and out of the guardhouse gate. With this in mind we checked in with the Navy who managed to mix up my Sarah and Dick's Sara's passport. This meant that for the whole time we were there, their papers did not match their passports, something that was never noticed.

Whenever we left the port area, just on the outside of the guardhouse we would be met by Marlin. He was a rotund happy individual who was the local Mr Fixit. Whatever was required, he would efficiently arrange it, whether it be laundry, transport, or general advice. He was universally considered a great asset, and presumably made his living by obtaining commission from all his activities.

The nearest hotel to the guardhouse was the Closenberg, which was a short walk above the marina and had once been a P&O rest house for their passengers. It was a delightful old building that served excellent traditional Sri Lankan food, and we visited on numerous occasions, to experience their silver service.

Meanwhile, Richard Bolt's latest bright idea was to engage Chatura, who ran the Tango Shipping Agency. It was a requirement of the port authority to engage an Agent. It turned out that Tango Shipping had under-cut the Agent that the Blue Water Rally had used successfully heretofore. Chatura obviously could see the potential of screwing as much money out of the Blue Water Yachts in the shortest space of time that they were in port. For instance, no contact was allowed directly with engineers, divers, or anybody else that might be needed unless through his office. Now unfortunately, during our transfer of fuel, 'Moonshiner' (Sara) had let go a line which had wrapped itself around our propeller. The Agent wanted US$100 to engage a local diver to disentangle it. However, I spotted some divers not far away from the pontoon and got them to clear the propeller for the price of a couple of beers and a yachting knife. When Chatura got to hear about this, he was apoplectic.

He was completely obstructive. When the local engineer who was a lovely guy and clearly knowledgeable and intelligent turned up on Moonbeam, he advised that he would be able to source spares for the injection pump locally. Unfortunately, even though this pump (Delphi) was used universally on the majority of Sri Lankan goods vehicles he was unable to do so but didn't advise us that this was the case for nearly two weeks, because he was prevented from coming to see us. Once I was aware that this was the case, I alerted the girls in Oyster after-sales that I needed a replacement pump and asked them to locate one and send it. As usual they did a magnificent job and dispatched it in the first days of February and in due course, I was able to track it arriving in customs in Colombo.

During this period, we got to know Paco, off 'Nautibuoytoo' which is a 65foot catamaran. together with his crew that consisted of John, his daughter's father-in-law, Nina his partner and Sebastian his 11-year-old son. They had all experienced and survived the tropical revolving storm. It transpired that they had been running out of fuel and had closed down one engine on the catamaran and obtained fuel from a passing tanker. This had caused considerable damage to the guardrails of one of the hulls, and whilst the engine had been shut down sea water had flooded it. This meant that the engine had to be taken out, and the cylinder liners and pistons needed to be replaced. Paco ordered these from Yanmar in Japan for delivery to Colombo.

It was John who let it be known that Nina and Sebastian weathered the storm quite well up until Paco had suggested that they put their life jackets on. He embarrassed me by saying how it important to them all it was to hear from Moonbeam on the HF. It turned out that this was to be the start of a lasting friendship, as we would sail together for much of the next year.

Those that had gone on the blue water Rally excursion, which we had missed because of our late arrival, were universally disparaging about it. However, Sarah and I really wanted to explore this part of Sri Lanka and we set up our own tour, with Marlin's help, to follow much of the same itinerary. We organised our own driver to take us up to The Hill Club in Nuwara

Eliya, which was a long drive and as we started up the hillside, we were engulfed in torrential rain such that the driver thought that we might not be able to make it. However happily we did, and we stayed two nights at the Hill Club which was like taking a walk back in time. When we got there, it was quite cold, and we were very pleased that in drawing room a large fire had been lit so that we could enjoy an aperitif before dinner. We were joined by five lovely and bubbly young ladies in cocktail dresses, who were on a bicycle ride from Kandi to Galle in order to raise money for a charity.

We continued our tour through the tea plantations with a stop to learn how the tea was produced, and to observe the magnificent European vegetables that were grown by the workforce on small patches of land that did not have tea trees. Our trip took us back through Kandi where we toured the Temple of the Tooth and stopped for lunch before driving along the coast road all the way back to Galle.

We were amused that one of our colleague crews was bitten by one of the hundreds of stray dogs that surrounded the port. It turned out that Richard Bolt had been bitten and had gone to the local hospital where he had had an injection for rabies. When our friend turned up at the hospital, he was asked whether or not he would be able to recognise the dog to which he confirmed that he could. He was told that if the dog was still alive in three weeks' time, then it did not have rabies. However, shortly afterwards the Navy took it upon themselves to clear the entire area of dogs, never to be seen again! Happily, our friend did not develop any symptoms.

We broke up our stay with a couple of nights at the Lighthouse hotel, which did a magnificent buffet on Thursday evenings, and subsequently in the Galle Fort hotel which was a lovely Dutch building run by a Swiss couple that provided a perfect lunch right in the middle of town. We took a trip with Dick and Sarah off 'Moonshiner' north along the coast which had been devastated by the tsunami in 2004. The destruction was still quite evident in places where there had been such a huge loss of life. We headed to a venue so that Sara could fulfil her life-long wish to ride an elephant. When the girls rode off into the forest Dick and I went and had a beer together, where I learned that he had been the personal pilot to John King and Colin Marshall in their early days in charge of British Airways, when they decided to take a trip together around the Caribbean. Our trip returned via a medicinal herb garden where we purchased a couple of 'guaranteed' remedies. One of which was a combination of oils that I rubbed into my leg that was still giving me some grief from the Baker's cyst. I did this more in hope than expectation, but it worked, and I am now a believer!

We went to Colombo with Paco to collect our respective deliveries from the airport and took Marlin with us to help. This proved to be not easy, not least because customs were having a day off, even though I had previously contacted them to ensure that we could process our goods that day. This resulted in the need to stay a night in the Hilton hotel in Colombo, because the journey up and down from Galle was horrendous. The following day Paco parted with a large sum of money otherwise known as a bribe, with the help of Marlin. Marlin also helped me to minimise my expenditure in customs provided that my fuel pump was

accompanied by a customs officer until it was delivered to the customs office within the port. This was duly accomplished but my refusal to pay an extortionate sum for his return journey caused somewhat of a ruckus.

The Blue Water Rally briefing took place in a nearby restaurant, where we were introduced to the idea that the groupings that had been agreed in Phuket were to be changed. When I challenged this, ultimately Mark from 'Blue Magic' admitted to persuading the organisers to rearrange them. After some discourse this rearrangement was overruled, and we broke up into our groups to decide who would be in charge of each and how we would operate. Once again, this nonsense of coming together to make a 'hard target 'was put forward as a defence against piracy. Our group asked me to be the lead, to which I agreed provided that 'Quest' would undertake to comply with our agreed modus operandi. This was necessary because already there had been issues of them 'doing their own thing'. However, this had nothing to do with the tragedy that was to befall them. The plan was to route to Salalah by following the west coast of India before turning west to join the routing of shipping bound for the Red Sea.

Now the discomfort that Sarah and I had developed in Phuket became nearer to alarm. This was because the incidents of piracy had become substantially greater than in previous years and were occurring much further out into the Indian Ocean, with several attacks off the Seychelles. The more we thought about it and discussed it, the more concerned we were with the risk. It may have been fortuitous that the delay in obtaining the necessary spares for both Paco and I enabled us to develop a thought process that was not influenced by groupthink. Moonbeam was further delayed because I needed additional spares from the UK, having discovered that the inner shroud had a strand that had parted. Equally Paco was delayed whilst the guardrails were replaced and welded, and the engine rebuilt.

This meant that we were observers at a meeting of the skippers of the rally yachts to discuss a missive that had been sent from one of the yachting magazines recommending us not to attempt the passage to the Red Sea because of the current situation of piracy. However, sadly they departed anyway.

Now Paco, John, Sarah and I had a meeting over lunch where I asked Paco what he was planning to do. I advised him that I had spent a quarter of a century training Captains that they must make the best decision on the facts available at the time. We had by now done our own research and discovered that Pirates were attacking boats and ships at the rate of one per day. I had decided that I was not prepared to risk our lives on this passage and was withdrawing from the rally. Paco said that he was going to do whatever I did! At that time, I thought that it would be best to return to Thailand and leave the boat there for a year before resuming our original planned route to South Africa, via the Cocos Island and missing out on the trip to the Red Sea completely. However, when we looked at the chart, we realised that we were one third of the way across the Indian Ocean already, so maybe it was more sensible to continue on, and this was what we did.

Our decision to leave the rally was vindicated in the most tragic way. Whilst we were still in Galle, we learned that 'Quest' had been taken by pirates and the crew were hostages. Jean and Scott Adam, who owned 'Quest' had accepted Phyllis McKay and Bob Riggle as crew

members out of Galle. Phyllis and Bob had circumnavigated on a previous Blue Water Rally in their own yacht but were essentially hitchhiking on any boat that would have them on this rally. When the pirates had attacked and taken them, Operation Shield who were coordinating Naval protection of shipping in the area, instructed the USS Enterprise, an aircraft carrier and three other ships to close with the pirates and to free the hostages. Although the American forces were capable of neutralising the threat, sadly all of the hostages were killed.

The Blue Water Rally initially tried to distance themselves from this incident by suggesting in the media that 'Quest' had left the rally. However, this was not the case as an email before they were taken clearly indicated that they were en route towards a waypoint agreed and organised by the rally. Shortly afterwards the Blue Water Rally went into liquidation and ceased operations.

The trauma experienced by the other Blue Water yachts resulted in a decision to remain in Salalah until such time as a vessel could be arranged to ship the yachts through the Red Sea and into the Mediterranean. This meant that they had to wait for more than three months, before one could be arranged.

Maldives

At last having spent over a month in Galle we departed on 24th February for the 430-mile trip to Male in the Maldives.

The wind was light, so we motored for the first day and a half until I noticed the Racor light but unfortunately too late to prevent the failure of the engine, due to water in the fuel. Before this happened, we had spotted a whale to port and had had dolphins to play with us whilst we avoided what seemed like to be hundreds of fishing boats. We made the most of what little wind we had whilst I stripped and cleaned the fuel injector pump, using vast quantities of WD-40 and happily declared the engine fixed. Sarah wrote into the log 'clever, clever captain Colin' which must be the first (and last) time she made such an entry! However, there was still clearly a problem and so we varied the engine speed regularly to try to ensure that we did not have the problem of not being able to change the power setting, that we had experienced in the Pacific.

Four days after leaving Galle, we were directed to anchor in 22m off Male to await clearance and because of the current, I had to put 80 metres of chain out. Once we had been cleared, we had to pick it all up again using the starboard main winch, as it had not been possible to repair the damage to the windlass whilst we were in Sri Lanka. This exercise took us an hour and a half before we could move to Hulule lagoon adjacent to the airport, to await the arrival of Annabel and Wilfie.

Parco arrived in 'Nautibuoytoo' a few days later having escaped from Gaul by parting with nearly US$7000 and not a good word to say about Tango shipping. Unfortunately, his arrival in Male at the anchorage to clear into the Maldives resulted in his anchor becoming snagged, and so he decided to drop all of his chain with the intention of engaging a diver to recover it.

This could only be achieved in slack water, as the current was fierce, and indeed it never was recovered.

To our surprise when we met up with him in Hulule lagoon, he had two extra crew form Sri Lanka. One was very familiar because Batu was a Tuk-Tuk driver and had ferried us around Galle for the best part of a month. The other was Kasun who was Marlin's eldest son. The plan was to introduce them to yachting and to help them broaden their horizons so that they might make more of their lives than would otherwise be the case.

Once again, we were forced to engage an Agent. This was so we would be able to visit other destinations in the Maldives group and obtain an exit clearance when we left. The agent was in a sleazy office in Mali and took US$100 off us to do practically nothing.

Mali had very little to offer us. We found the atmosphere intimidating because of the evident imposition of strict Islamic law. There were no smiles from the women because you could not see their faces. There were no smiles from the men, probably because they couldn't see the women. However, we were able to obtain some spares here and we enjoyed the local cuisine even though no alcohol was served.

Once Annabel and Wilfie had arrived and we had picked them up from the airport we did a short hop to Guraidhoo and anchored off the resort in beautifully clear waters, where we stayed for a few days. Annabel and Wilf quickly settled in, and we used a paddling pool in the cockpit for Wilf's bath. Annabel and I went snorkelling to marvel at the vibrant colours of the corals and the multitude and variety of sea life under water. After returning to Hulule lagoon to stock up on supplies we popped across to Velassaru, where we stayed until it was time for Annabel and Wilf to go home.

Sarah decided that she would go home with them, and they all departed on 16th March to leave me on my own for a while. I stayed put in the lagoon for the next ten days and observed all the yachts that had arrived on the TT Rally (Thailand to Turkey), planning to route up to the Red Sea. In their case, they had been contacted by the Joint Piracy Coordination Centre in an attempt to dissuade them from attempting the trip as they would be seriously risking their lives. As a result, most of the yachts decided to abandon the trip and were waiting for a vessel to ship them to the Mediterranean. They had to wait 3 months. Meanwhile, Paco and I arranged to visit the Chagos Islands. This entailed parting with £100 and getting permission from the British Indian Ocean Territory office in London, to allow us to stay for a period of three weeks in just two of the islands.

However, I was now on a mission because I had undertaken to visit Gan, where Tony, Sarah's brother -in-law, had been stationed for nine months on an unaccompanied posting shortly after he and Joanna were married. So, I set off at the end of March and decided that I would route east of, and outside the atolls because it was 320 miles. It was going to take me three days, and I thought that sailing between the atolls would likely be challenging unless I anchored each night.

At 1000 on 30th March Moonbeam returned to the Southern Hemisphere once more, and later that day I anchored and rafted alongside ‘Nautibuoytoo’ in Gan. There followed a busy period finding all of the buildings that Tony would have been familiar with so that I could take photos to send to Jo. The area had been turned into a resort with the old officer’s mess being the main restaurant, and the only place serving alcohol. Many of the other buildings still showed evidence that they belonged to the Royal Air Force. This included the camp Cinema and the BFPO post office among many others.

Tony had been in charge of the signal station that was on the next island in the chain, Fonadhoo. Since that time a causeway had been constructed and I was able to walk and identify where he was stationed and although his quarters had been demolished the antenna was still in use.

A week in Gan, was long enough to be able to create a disc with all of the photographs I had taken to send to Jo from the Post Office, which was the first letter from this BFPO for many a long year. On 7th April, I moved to the fuel wharf to top up the tank and departed just before sunset to route towards the Solomon Islands, in the Chagos Archipelago. I was chasing Paco but with no chance of catching him. The wind held steady for the first 48-hours and then dropped away to become light and variable, so I lay a hull to give myself three- or four-hours uninterrupted sleep, during the night, as I was in no hurry to arrive. However, when I did make landfall in the afternoon of the 10th, I was well rested, but the visibility was too poor for entry through the reef, so I passed the night just drifting around north-west of the entrance and waited until the morning.

Paco came out in his dinghy and delivered Batu to provide help in spotting coral heads which are known as bommies which were littered all over the place on the route down to anchor off Ile Boddam, where I spent the next two weeks before moving to Ile Fouguet.

This period proved to be a spectacular lesson with regard to the success of fishery protection in a marine conservation area. The clearance that had been obtained from the British Indian Ocean Territories provided for visiting yachts to fish for no more than they could eat. This was because the entire Chagos Archipelago was a marine conservation area, and no commercial fishing was allowed. Sadly, the entire 56 km² of this marine park was patrolled by just one fishery protection vessel chartered from Jardine’s and based in Hong Kong where it was undergoing maintenance.

Now it is not an exaggeration that when we went fishing outside the reef, you could trail a safety pin and a tuna would leap on it, followed very quickly by a shark if it wasn't landed soon enough. The ocean was absolutely teeming with fish. What a contrast to how we found the Pacific Ocean!

Some rough and ready tables had been set up on the shoreline on a small spit, for the purpose of cleaning the catch. As soon as anyone approached the table, dozens of small (about a metre long) black tip sharks would appear alongside the spit in anticipation of an easy meal. This was in spite of there being only half a dozen or so yachts in the bay. This small piece of land by the tables was home to hundreds if not thousands of hermit crabs which scuffled

away as soon as they saw anyone. Above there were a great number of coconuts on the palms that shielded the area. Although being told not to, when we left Batu and Kasun on the shore whilst we went fishing, Batu was persuaded to climb one of the palms to harvest some coconuts. However, sadly when we returned to the shore, it was to find that he had fallen out of the tree and hurt his leg. Fortunately, there was a doctor on one of the boats in the bay, who examined his leg and thought that it probably was not broken. However, upon reaching Mauritius and visiting the hospital, the x-ray clearly showed that it was. It must have been a very uncomfortable transit from Chagos to Mauritius!

One morning I was looking towards the entrance through the reef and saw a yacht sailing through the entrance, in spite of the obvious danger of doing so. However, it turned out that 'Zebedee' did not have an engine. Alan was a vet who spent a couple of months in the UK every year, to fund his circumnavigation and his crew was a woman that he had picked up in New Zealand. They were great fun, but I don't think it unfair to describe Alan as something of a maverick. He had commissioned the building of his boat in Newfoundland but insisted that there would be no through-hull fittings and that the only means of propulsion would be by sail. And here they were in the Chagos Islands-brilliant! We would see them from time to time over the coming months until we parted company in Saint Helena.

Towards the end of our stay, we had a visit from British Indian Ocean Territories fishery protection. This turned out to be a rib crewed by officers and ratings of the British Royal Navy. They visited each yacht in turn to inspect the clearance papers and stamp passports. The senior officer, a Lieutenant was female, and in conversation turned out that she was the most popular person on Diego Garcia which is where the crew was based. This was undoubtedly because 1. she was the only female on the island and 2. the naval base was a British Naval mess that served alcohol. The attraction for the American personnel stationed there was obvious!

It was now time to leave this magical place to set off for Mauritius 1250 miles away. Having cleared the reef off Ile Fouguet, I set course in order to make sure that I made landfall in time for Sarah's arrival.

The trip started uneventfully, but within two days the wind died completely and whilst running the engine I discovered that the throttle was stuck at 2000 rpm, just as had occurred in the Pacific. Yet again, it was a problem with the fuel injection pump, which was not responding to the throttle control. I decided that it was best to just leave it and accept that the engine would run at this speed in either forward or reverse provided of course I stopped it in between. Thereafter the wind picked up and I was able to set sail and with only two or three ships passing within 20 miles of my position much of the rest of the journey was uneventful. I was able to sleep for 20 or 40 minutes at a time in the cockpit, and happily the autopilot behaved as it should. Throughout the trip the radar and AIS warning systems worked well. And with only 300 miles to run I was only 47 miles behind 'Nautibuoytoo'.

Approaching Mauritius in the early morning of 5th May, I recognised that parking Moonbeam with my engine problem was going to be somewhat of a challenge. I knew that I was required to moor up on the Customs wharf, so I called up Paco to see if he and John

could help, which of course they did. Once cleared and again with their help I moved to the Caudan marina just below the Labourdonnais Waterfront Hotel that I used to stay in when I was flying, and where Moonbeam would stay for the following couple of months.

I picked up my hire car and drove Paco and John down to the Le Paradis hotel in Le Morne, which is in the south-west corner of the island, and was where I learned to dive many years ago. The hotel has a number of restaurants and is spread out over quite a large area with its own golf course and can only be described as absolutely delightful. We had lunch here so that I could book a room for Sarah's arrival on the ninth, so we could celebrate my birthday here for a few days.

Mauritius

Having been on standby initially, Sarah had a seat in club, but was alarmed when she heard the announcement for immigration forms into Mauritius because there was a need to prove that she had a return ticket, which of course she didn't. It took one and a half hours for immigration to confirm that Moonbeam was in fact in the marina and that she was a member of the crew, whilst I was waiting to welcome her.

However, this was all quickly forgotten when she found out that I had booked us in for three nights at Le Paradis. We had a lovely stay here before returning to the boat via a Bricolage to buy a plug to connect with shore power, and to find Batu with a plaster cast all the way up his leg. This meant that clearly it was sensible for Batu to return home to Galle, but in talking to some cabin crew in the hotel, John found out that it would not be possible for him to travel with the plaster that he had, unless special arrangements had been made beforehand. Consequently, he borrowed my Dremel and cut off the top of the plaster and made a slit down either side so that Batu could depart on Emirates via Dubai to Sri Lanka.

We started exploring the island in the way that had not been possible when visiting on a trip whilst I was flying, and discovered good supermarkets, and many useful outlets including a diesel service centre, where I took the fuel pump for repair. When we returned to the boat, we found that John's wife, Julia had flown in that morning, and they had decamped to the Suffren Hotel across the water. He had joined Paco in Perth five months previously, and they had not seen each other since. They all came to dinner on Moonbeam, and it was clear that Julia was not prepared to allow John, who had shaved off his beard, to continue even though he wanted to. Her declaration was along the lines that if he wanted his conjugal rights, he had better come home.

The arrival in Mauritius raised a problem for Paco, in that immigration clearly did not like Sri Lankans. It was necessary for Paco to guarantee that they would depart Mauritius in due course, and to regularly take them and their passports to the immigration office in Port Louis. This meant, among other things, that because he was returning to Australia for a visit, it was necessary to appoint a captain for ‘Nautibuoytoo’ who would take on this responsibility. It was not allowed for me to be in command of more than one boat, so Sarah was promoted to captain of a 65-foot catamaran as her first command!

The hill behind us was called Signal Hill, which was part of Long Mountain. It had radio masts and a magnificent view from the top. It was an 11 km round trip up a road which was quite steep in places, and which we started to climb on a regular basis. We left early in the morning in order to get back before it got too hot and then recovered with some breakfast. It was obviously a favourite venue for exercise for the locals, and in parts of the climb we would meet local Chinese walking up it backwards!

Towards the end of May we had a final lunch with John, Julia, and Paco at the Suffren Hotel, before they left for Perth. John would not return, and Paco would be away until 20th June. It was sad to say goodbye to John because he was a lovely gentleman and had become a good friend.

We had become aware that a Danish yacht (ING) had been taken by pirates, and as usual a ransom had been demanded. There had been a request in the yachting community for contributions to raise funds for their release. With that in mind, and still angry at the incompetence of the organisers of the Blue Water Rally, I wrote to ask that our payment for the transit of the Suez Canal be donated to this fund. However, I got no reply and I doubt that they did so. When the ransom was finally paid and the family escaped, both the mother and daughter were pregnant.

We kept a close eye on Kason and employed him to clean the stainless at US$10 an hour, a rate that had been agreed with Paco. We generally looked after him and regularly fed him but each week we insisted that he cooked for us. On the first occasion as with any young man, he rang his mum to ask what to do, and provided us with a delightful Sri Lankan meal.

This was a great place for a yachtsman to be because I found somewhere to re-galvanise the anchor and chain, any number of tools that I needed or might need and a radio specialist who was able to test my HF when I took it all out of the boat so that he could put it on his test equipment. I did this because it was clear whilst we were in the Blue Water Rally that our HF signal was weak. Having thoroughly tested it and found no faults, he sold me a length of 6 mm wire to reconnect the antenna tuner to the backstay, and lo and behold once more I could emit a hundred watts. I found a Bricolage where I could buy stainless steel pumps with which I could replace the refrigeration and air-conditioning pumps that I had bought in New Zealand, and which had since failed.

We got to know Jill and Tony off ‘RealTime 2’ which was a 55-foot catamaran. He had been a master mariner. They had been en route to the red Sea when Quest had been taken and promptly reversed course and turned up in Mauritius. They were from Anglesey in North Wales but lived in Northern Cyprus and told us that they had been wiped out financially by a Ponzi scheme, which Tony admitted he had got involved in by greed and the promise of 20% interest rates!

Tony accompanied us up Signal Hill and I learned that he was looking forward to receiving his full state pension. Knowing that he had spent long periods abroad, and having had experience of dealing with Sarah's pension, I asked him whether or not he had paid national insurance throughout the time that he had been working. It turned out that he hadn't. As he

was approaching retirement age, I explained that he had a small window to top up his national insurance contributions in order that he would be able to receive the maximum state pension. I explained what we had had to do for Sarah, given the initial indication that her pension would be £20 per week and all that we had to do to correct the position, so that she would receive the full pension to which she was entitled. I tried to make clear to him that if he didn't sort out the position, then once that window was closed, he would be unable to change whatever HMRC were going to pay him. I do hope he took this advice but somehow think that he probably didn't.

Across the water by complimentary ferry, the Suffren hotel held a happy hour each Friday where the young and beautiful of Mauritius all turned up for music and entertainment, and where the Moonbeam crew went to enjoy the spectacle on several occasions.

We were asked to move up a little into the marina to make space for a discovery 65. Stuart and Patricia from ‘Rhianna’ joined us for a drive up to Grand Baie and on to the Sea Lovers Restaurant where we got to know this very pleasant couple. They were childhood sweethearts that had been extremely successful establishing ‘Gael Force’ marine equipment suppliers in Inverness. This had developed form his apprenticeship as a welder, when he saw the opportunity of making indestructible lobster pots. In addition, he had bought much of the Inverness waterfront and was developing it. Stuart was a very lucky man because he needed to wear a brace or girdle because he had gone motorcycle scrambling in Langkawi and whilst doing a wheelie, had come off and broken his back. He was carried out of the Forest where this happened and transported to Penang, where to his good fortune a surgeon was able to repair his spine and here, he was in Mauritius shortly afterwards!

The market in Port Louis was a large building selling all manner of fish, vegetables, and meat along with most other things. Venison had just come into season and was clearly plentiful at this time of year and we were able to buy loin fillet steaks extremely cheaply.

We stayed in the marina until Paco returned from Australia on 20th June, and Sarah was relieved of her command and released from and the responsibility for Kasun. During this time, we walked up Signal Hill regularly and became enchanted with this lovely island. The combination of French English and Indian backgrounds ensured that the local Mauritians were delightful. It helped that everyone spoke English, but the cuisine was such a mixture of French, Creole and Indian, that anywhere we stopped to eat we were very well fed.

We entertained Peter and his crew from a ‘Amber’ which was a UNESCO boat that spends its time dropping buoys every 350 miles, where they would sink to 2000 metres over a period of 5 to 15 days, collecting data so that when they resurfaced it was transmitted via satellite to researchers examining the effects of global warming on the currents, sea temperatures and many other parameters. One of the fascinating things is that although they were dropped 350 miles apart, when he returned to pick them up, a few months later they had tended to congregate into a relatively small area of the ocean.

Tom arrived for a two-week break just before Sarah's birthday so we decided that we would have a night stop in Le Paradis. The hotel had obviously kept track of our previous visit and

completely unexpectedly produced a birthday cake on a square platter that we still have in Moonbeam. It was a lovely gesture. We met Bill and Gene off their catamaran 'Out of the Bag' once we had gone up to Grand Baie to anchor. We were made temporary members of the yacht club, and later they would present their visitors book for us to complete with a map of our circumnavigation so far. I spent a considerable time under the boat in fact nine dives in all, to clean the marine weed and barnacles that had grown on her hull. We had the dive tank refilled at the local dive centre called Seaman Diving! It was also an opportunity to renew the anodes and separately to polish the hull above the water line. At last, she looked presentable once more.

There were many tasks undertaken during this lovely spell, including renewing the bow thruster batteries and obtaining and fitting new relays for it, varnishing the cockpit and saloon table, repairing the spray hood along with the myriad of other things.

The Botanical Gardens at Pamplemousses were quite staggering, with the giant water lilies with leaves like giant plates and producing a lovely white flower which turns pink the following day and then dies. A visit here would not be complete without viewing the giant tortoises.

We completed some administration tasks with a little perseverance. I needed a visa for Madagascar, and Moonbeam needed a new registration certificate from the UK. This finally arrived at the British Airways office in Port Louis, and the visa was obtained from the Madagascan Embassy over a period of two days. However, a delivery for Sarah's computer arrived in customs, and was as difficult to extricate as it was in Sri Lanka. I was threatened with the need to engage in agent who would charge ₹6000 for something costing peanuts.

I wasn't prepared to accept this and turned up at the Agents and insisted that I paid them the customs duty and ₹1000 for their assistance. I don't think this had ever happened to them before! On the plus side, a Coast Guard cutter appeared alongside us to advise that a package had been received at the Le Caudan marina!

Whilst Tom had been with us, we looked at a number of model ships so that we could buy one for his birthday. Model ship building was an important business in Mauritius and many of the models were just beautifully made. Tom chose a model of the Endeavour which we acquired after he left, and I would need to take home from South Africa. On 26th July we left Grand Baie a little apprehensively as the entrance was very shallow and returned to Port Louis. We moored in front of 'Katrinya'. This was owned by Bruce and Gina, who were travelling with their daughter Rachael. They were from New Zealand where Bruce had been a close protection policeman. We were invited for a meal along with Julia and Jim from 'Papillion' as well as Paco and Kasun. It was a really fun evening with Sarah and I doing the starter, Bruce and Gina, a venison casserole, and Julia a pumpkin pie.

Our plan was in accordance with everyone else to make the next destination Ile Reunion. It appeared that the main port of entry was Le Port in the northwest corner of the island, but before we left Sarah bumped into Bill and Gene off 'Out of the Bag' who had decided to make St Pierre their land fall because it had a small marina on the west coast, albeit with a

challenging and shallow entrance. When we looked at it this it seemed to be a good place to aim for, where there were facilities to check-in. This would be a much nicer place than going to the main industrial port.

I serviced the generator, the water maker, and the engine in the last few days in Port Louis before we were ready to move to the Customs wharf by 1000 on 31st July to clear out of Mauritius. This took less than an hour and we said our goodbyes to Paco, Gina and Bruce who were on the key and set off for Ile Reunion, 160 miles away.

We arrived at St Pierre by 0830 to be welcomed by Gene and Bill who had got in the day before, and Gilbert who was the port captain. He was a little worried about whether or not there was enough water in the entrance but the least depth we saw was 2.9 meters, and that was at low water. However, this said, we arrived when there was very little wind and almost no swell. We docked to find that it was a lovely port and we felt that we could be back in France. The marina was full of small French leisure fishing boats that you see all around the French coastline, but we were in the middle of the Indian Ocean! We moved out over to our allocated pontoon which was in the deepest part of the marina and awaited the arrival of immigration that, being a Department of France didn't bother to turn up. So, we went up into the town to explore, and once again it reminded us of Cannes with narrow ending streets with even the same shops!

Bill and Gene came to supper, and we arranged to hire a car and drive up to see Cilaos through the most amazing countryside. It was very mountainous with steep straight sided gorges which were incredibly beautiful and totally unexpected. There were lots of narrow hairpin bends and sometimes single lane track roads and single-track tunnels to reach this mountain village of 6000 people.

The next day was really a day to remember. We made an early start to visit the volcano Piton de la Fournaise and had an absolutely fascinating but exhausting walk up to the crater over volcanic rocks, some looking like melted wax which reminded us a little of Lanzarote. We had to climb up 500 steps, at the end but it was not as tortuous as we were expecting. The round trip took five hours there and back even though we were not slow. We clearly should have started earlier because when we arrived the car park was full, but when we got back it was almost empty. Sarah had taken her walking poles with her, for which Gene was thankful for one and Bill the other!

We had been warned of a swell, known locally as la houle which was to coincide with an exceptional high tide at 1600. When we got back, we found the access to the marina blocked and there was debris all along the road outside and inside the marina. It was extraordinarily quiet principally because all occupants of the boats that were tied to the pontoons had been evacuated to a local school. This was because the marina personnel were worried the pontoons would come apart in the surge. I went down to secure Moonbeam with more lines and Sarah tried to find a hotel for the night, but they were all full. We decided the safest thing to do was to sleep in the car for four hours over the next high tide and in the end were able to return to Moonbeam to find happily, all was well.

The gale continued to blow for two days, and the huge surf across the entrance to the marina was dramatic. Certainly, no one would contemplate entering the harbour in these seas. Nevertheless, out of the wind, the air temperature was quite warm.

The first Saturday we were there we walked up with Bill and Gene to the Saturday market which was great fun. It was very busy because there were lots of stalls selling vegetables, flowers, cheese, meat, pies, and crafts. Also, on sale were live chickens, ducks, and rabbits. We could have been in any thriving market in France and would do this repeatedly every Saturday that we stayed in Ile Reunion.

A trip up the mast revealed a separated strand on the staysail stay, so I tracked down a chandlery who was able to supply a replacement. I took the staysail foil down and rethreaded the new wire and connected it with spares that fortunately I had on board.

We watched 'Vamp' arrive from Mauritius. They had a really entertaining time in the entrance because the wind and swell were quite strong, and in trying to turn in the marina lost control but happily did not damage themselves or the catamaran that they touched.

We hired a car again and took the road across the island to St Benoit and then up to Salazie and Hellbourh up an amazing gorge with spectacular waterfalls. We returned by driving around the north of the island, through St Gilles and St Denis and stopped at the tiny marina there where there was certainly no room for Moonbeam. Returning along the coast road we saw a pod of whales just offshore.

We entertained Bill and Gene and Carmen and Kim off 'Vamp' that evening and had dinner on 'Out of the Bag' a couple of days later with them all. We all brought and shared dishes once again. Carmen and Kim brought their daughter Rachel with them, who was a vegetarian, so each of us made a suitable dish for her too.

We were amused by Kim and Carmen's description of their climb up the volcano. They came back with their walking shoes having fallen apart. Carmen's were held together with a hairband and handkerchiefs and Kim had given up before his completely disintegrated! I was vindicated in buying some walking boots prior to us going up, because I was concerned that I might have had a similar problem given that I hadn't used them for many months.

In about the middle of the month both 'Out of the Bag' and then 'Vamp' left for Madagascar, and Paco arrived from Mauritius. We decided to head up to Cilaos having talked to a local Frenchman on the pontoon, who advised that we definitely should not miss Mafate, which was a remote volcanic caldera. When we arrived, we saw that the sign for the walk up to the Col de Taibit was a five-hour 8 km trek there and back with an 800metre rise and was described as medium/difficult. It was more difficult than medium, but the view from the top was well worth it.

Towards the end of the month, we started thinking about how to get Sarah home so that she could be with Annabel towards the end of her pregnancy. The obvious way was to take a flight to Mauritius to pick up a BA flight home to London on 5th September, assuming as always that space was available. We booked a flight on Air Mauritius, a return for me and a

single for Sarah on the day before, and night stopped in the hotel adjacent to the airport where I used to spend the day when flying a shuttle from the Seychelles.

It was a sad farewell as I returned to Reunion because I was not looking forward to being on my own again until returning home, hopefully from South Africa, after the birth of Annabel's baby.

The end of the month saw another ‘la houle’, accompanied by a severe gale for several days during which the port was closed. A month spent here in Ile Reunion left us with a lasting impression of the beauty of this remote island with its rugged mountainous countryside and delightful French inhabitants. It is definitely on our list of places to revisit.

The next few days were spent preparing for my departure for Richards Bay in South Africa.

It would be true to say that most yachts were reported to track north of Madagascar and then south-westwards along the west coast, before setting course for Richards Bay or Durban. The challenge was the Agulhas current which runs southwards along the East Coast of Africa. It is a narrow and strong. There were a number of strategies to minimise the risks of meeting mountainous waves that were built up by a southerly gale meeting this current. One well tried plan was to sail south of Madagascar for about 600 miles before turning due west to shorten the exposure to this current prior to reaching the continental shelf where any big seas started to diminish.

Now, I was well aware of the potential that by reading too much into the sailing directions and advice on Noonsite, it might undermine my confidence in tackling this part of the journey. Nevertheless, we had had an email from Stuart on ‘Rhianna Marie’ who had decided to route direct to Durban. He and his son described the most terrifying story of struggling to get through the current when a southerly gale set in. The bottom line was that he was very grateful to still be alive.

With all that in mind, Paco, together with Jim and Julia off ‘Papillon’ who were going to sail with us, decided to route to the south of Madagascar towards Toliara Harbour, and if necessary, wait there for a weather window before proceeding direct to Richards Bay.

With a good forecast for the next three days, we all departed on 14th September, me a few hours later than the other two because there wasn't a great deal of water in the entrance, and waved goodbye to Ile Reunion, for the last time.

An uneventful two days saw Moonbeam crossing the Tropic of Capricorn and then entering into a period that I described in the log as ‘Piccadilly Circus’ with ships like fireflies around me. This of course was around about midnight so there wasn't much sleep to be had that night. Steady progress was made until a south-westerly gale picked up and I hove-to with a serious rip in the mainsail and decided that I needed to divert to Fort Dauphin in Taolagnaro for repairs, and advised ‘Nautibuoytoo’ and ‘Papillon’ accordingly, whereupon they altered course.

My arrival in Madagascar left something to be desired. I contacted port control when I closed the land a bit before sunset, only to be told that I was headed to the old port. They had built a new one which was not on the chart plotter, or my paper chart. The new port had been built and was run by Rio Tinto, for their mining operations. Paco gave me a couple of waypoints and then the port captain talked me in so that the arrival was in the right place and safe enough.

Of course, by this time the wind had picked up from the North and it was too rough to get the boat ready for docking, so I had to do everything at the last minute, which is something I don't like to do. However, this being a big commercial port there were line handlers on the wharf, and as I was coming alongside nicely, I got the aft line to them but needed to go back to the cockpit put some power on to go forward, when the engine failed! I thought that it would be helpful to alert the line handlers to the fact that I had this problem and shouted "engine failure" whereupon they promptly cast me adrift, and the dinghy was punctured by a stanchion on the wharf.

So now Moonbeam was waltzing across the harbour towards the breakwater with no power and no means of steering her. Luckily, as usual, I had my Leatherman on, so I ran forward and cut the anchor tie and managed to get the anchor down in time to stop hitting the rocks. A quick inspection of the starter motor showed it to be completely stuck, which meant that it was not going to be a quick exercise to get the engine going. Meanwhile the Port pilot who was clearly very English came on air to say that he would try to get their Zodiac in the water but failing that he would organise a tug crew. They had two massive tugs tied up, and the thought of being charged by the Port authority for their use filled me with foreboding. By this time Paco had arrived in his dinghy and we agreed that if we could get a line across to the wharf where five line-handlers were waiting, they could probably pull me across. We were never short of rope on Moonbeam, so we tied some together and Paco took one end to the wharf where the line handlers pulled me across and finally Moonbeam was tied up. This was to be the closest that I ever got to putting Moonbeam on the rocks and this was in a harbour!

Being the first yachts to visit the new Rio Tinto port of E'lohara, brought its own challenges. We had an uphill battle with the port captain over the charges that he planned to levy. This was because the only visitors before us were commercial shipping. Eventually, we managed to persuade him that a reasonable charge would benefit the port, because we would be able to advertise the welcome that was offered to visiting yachts on Noonsite to indicate that this would be a good destination for yachts en route from Ile Reunion to Richards Bay. This in turn would be good for the inhabitants of Fort Dauphin.

That battle being won did not help us with respect to the local port captain who demanded to see evidence of crew competence. Neither Jim nor Paco had anything, but luckily my International Certificate of Competence issued by the RYA, which was copied 3 times, was reluctantly accepted as evidence for all three of us. In addition, he was extremely reluctant to issue us with a port clearance for departure without payment of a substantial sum in US dollars. We finally extricated ourselves through a little bit of bribery, threats, and a lot of

corruption. It would prove to be the only exit clearance we would receive from Madagascar, and which would be needed for entry into South Africa.

Fort Dauphin in Taolagnaro was extraordinarily poor. The locals lived mainly on rice and fish, the forests were denuded for charcoal and the fishing was undertaken in the most primitive of canoes. However, unlike Sri Lanka or India there was no begging and so it was a real delight to be able to donate clothing colouring books colouring pencils and lipsticks that Sarah had put together for just such an occasion. The smallest gift was met with the biggest smiles.

During the time we were at anchor here, I rebuilt the starter motor, which is a complicated piece of kit on a Perkins Sabre 92, no less than five times. This was because every time I put it back together it failed. Eventually I traced the problem to a crack in one of the electrodes once found was able to solder it so that I was able to start the engine once again.

I completed repairs on the yankee and staysail with extensive use of the sewing machine, but the damage on the main, would clearly need to be repaired in a sail loft. I fabricated a temporary repair as best I could with sail repair tape hoping that it might hold until reaching South Africa. The tear in the dinghy was nearly 30 cm long and was beyond repair with the spares any of us had on board and would also have to wait.

After 10 days we were ready to depart Fort Dauphin for the 300-mile trip to Toliara. To help matters a weather net was set up on HF SSB. The net was run by a group of yachties who examined the forecasts and satellite images to provide individual advice to yachtsmen inbound to South Africa. It was known as the Perri Perri net. Once you checked in with them with your position and destination, they would provide the best assessment of the weather to be expected in the immediate area around your position. We all joined the net here to add to the grib forecasts and anything else we could obtain.

The trip was straight forward, with generally light winds and little swell. From time-to-time Moonbeam was surrounded by whales – a really stunning sight provided they didn't get too close!

The arrival in Toliara revealed a completely different climate to Fort Dauphin just 300 miles to the East. It was considerably wetter here contrasting against the arid landscape in the East. It was necessary to go ashore for clearance, not least because the only boat that customs and immigration had was a rib that was on the hard minus its engine. However, the entry procedure was relatively straight forward and surprisingly free of charge. The town was a short walk away and bustled with roadside stalls where it was possible to buy almost anything. There was a small supermarket that was reasonably well stocked, and the town also supported a wine shop, which enabled Jim and Julia to spend a couple of hours discussing which wine they would buy for an evening meal on Moonbeam. This was notwithstanding that most of the bottles on the shelves had been standing there for the best part of several years!

It was here that Paco had his dinghy stolen. He had not lifted it and during the night it disappeared. Now we had every suspicion that its whereabouts was well known by the locals living here and who we engaged to drive us around searching for it. This was, needless to say unsuccessful, and so it was necessary to report the theft to the police, so Paco could claim for its loss on his insurance. This was duly done at the port police station and at the completion of filling in all the paperwork, the policeman demanded US$20 for his trouble. Paco was not unreasonably unwilling to part with this on the basis that the policeman was doing his job. He followed us around town for the next few days, which made Paco even more obstinate. However, this was to prove to become somewhat of a problem when we wanted to depart. This was because he alerted the Customs and Immigration officers to the fact there was an outstanding unpaid bill. This meant that they were unable to issue us with a departure clearance. This put us between a rock and a hard place, and so we decided that given the weather was about to change, (and that we had a clearance from Fort Dauphin), it was not unreasonable for us to move down the coast temporarily for protection, which is what we told the port authority. We did this on the evening of 8th October and anchored in the Baie St Augustin about 10 miles east. We knew that there was no chance of being chased by customs or immigration because their boat was still engine-less on the hard, and with that in mind, we departed for Richards Bay early next morning to cross the Mozambique Channel.

After all the concern about the dangers of crossing the Mozambique Channel the five days that it took to sail 720 miles proved to be uneventful. We had left in a good weather window and as a result the wind and seas were quite benign. So, after the usual minor challenges, Africa appeared on the radar along with its characteristic smell. I didn't get much sleep as there were dozens of ships outside Richards Bay at anchor awaiting a berth to load or unload their cargos, but in the last few miles a pod of whales appeared port and starboard - what a wonderful welcome to South Africa! I moored alongside 'Nautibuoytoo' inside the small yacht basin in order to clear customs and immigration but this being South Africa neither turned up to the boat. As a result, we took a taxi to find them downtown and cleared in successfully. This done, a couple of days later, we sailed 'Nautibuoytoo' around to the Zululand Yacht Club and I returned on foot with Kasun to bring Moonbeam around and where she would rest for the best part of two months.

It is impossible to overstate the hospitality of the Zululand Yacht Club and it is members. We were all welcomed and were known during our stay as the 'Internationals'. There were a few live-aboard locals and a number who were working on their boats on the hard. I was originally thinking that I could pull Moonbeam out for a clean and replenishing the antifouling, but one look at the tractor and trailer used to pull boats out and the props available to prop them up, soon changed my mind. It would have to wait until Cape Town.

As soon as we arrived, and after a fun evening on Moonbeam, we were taken in hand by a family who were building a catamaran in order to sail around the world. They were living inside and underneath the hulls that were at the stage of being fitted out. The family, husband, and wife and their three teenage children, a boy and two girls, were all involved. We were shown the downtown area and introduced to the available supermarkets and the

areas where anything could be fabricated for a boat. The girls were employed on Moonbeam to give her a thoroughly good spring clean, and they did a really good job.

I hired a car with a view to stay mobile, but also to be able to leave it in Durban because I planned to return home to be around when Annabel's baby was born.

Because of the influx of international yachts, representatives of both North Sails and Quantum Sails, turned up in order to arrange repairs and refurbishment, and in my case to build a new mainsail. North Sails offered me what I thought to be a very compressive price, but when I challenged Quantum, they undercut it and so got the business. Both sail lofts were based in Durban and so I arranged for Quantum to build the mainsail for delivery in Durban, but to refurbish the yankee and staysail for collection when I returned from London.

Monday was known as Braai Night at the Club, where the barbecues were lit, and everybody brought their own food and wine and cooked their steaks or whatever before sitting down at the shared tables for a very convivial evening. The Club had a small restaurant that was good for a snack lunch but a busy bar overlooking the water which was well frequented in the evening, and they made all their facilities available to us.

I used the time here to do many small jobs on Moonbeam and managed to find an engineering shop to fabricate eight stainless steel end caps for the water maker tubes to replace the plastic caps which appeared to be cracking. They used a computer-controlled lathe which resulted in the caps being perfectly sized, and they were able to provide the new O-rings necessary to refurbish the tubes. This would be an introduction of what could be done in South Africa.

I found a dentist who repaired a broken tooth in the nearby village and was so impressed with him that I arranged for a complete dental check-up a few days later. One of the shortcomings of circumnavigating is the difficulty of keeping up with the normal 6 monthly visits to a dentist, because firstly it is necessary to find one.

I arranged to fly back from Durban via Johannesburg and arrived back in London on 4th November, where I would stay for three weeks. During this time, I was tasked to put in a new bathroom into Tom's flat in Weybridge. As usual, it took much longer than I forecast and was 100% over budget! However, most importantly, I was there to welcome Beatrix Grace Joyce into the world when she arrived on the 12th.

My return to Durban via Johannesburg enabled me to pick up my head sails and prepare for my departure from Richards Bay, 3 days later. My target was to reach Cape Town in time for a trip home for Christmas, before returning there to await Sarah's arrival. The forecast was for light winds when I departed for Durban on 29th November. It seemed that the entire Yacht Club was on the pontoon to wave goodbye when I left at high tide at 1500. It really had been special to be here. It was a straightforward trip to Durban about 100 miles south, but when I arrived there was no room in the marina, so having checked in, I moved around to the Bluff Yacht Club, to await the delivery of the mainsail, which happily fitted perfectly.

A couple of days later I was able to move back to the marina off the Royal Durban Yacht Club, where I could stay, whilst watching the weather until I was ready to depart. The challenge was the same as the east coast of South Island, New Zealand: there are not many 'boltholes' to hide in if the weather changed adversely, which it often did and at short notice.

On 3rd December it looked as though the weather was going to be suitable to depart. The requirement to check in and out of each port was in part due to the South African approach to safety in that if you failed to check in to your destination within a reasonable time, a search and rescue operation would be launched. So, I was one of half-a-dozen or so yachtsmen checking out with our common plan to depart the following day.

Listening to the weather forecast early the following morning I decided to go, and departed the marina at sun rise, the first of a line of yachts that started about an hour later. However, not much time elapsed before another forecast indicated that a north-westerly gale was due in the next 24 hours, which would turn south-west the following day, and so everybody else turned back. However, I was committed and started to search for the Agulhas current which took me the best part of a hundred miles offshore and a day to find so that I could use it to assist my southerly passage. As per the forecast, the wind picked up from the north-east to a full gale and I decided to close the shore, towards East London in case the weather got worse. Happily, the wind started moderating as I approached the coast, and I thought it reasonable to decide to continue towards Port Elizabeth. It was not until the following day that the wind went into the south-west, and although making the sea seriously lumpy, it did not increase above force five, so I continued onwards towards Cape Town.

However, just off Cape St Francis, I was informed by the Peri Peri net that a severe south-westerly gale was forecast and so it seemed sensible to hide behind Cape St Francis and I anchored in Seal Bay. Meanwhile, I had been exchanging emails with all possible refuges between Cape St Francis and Cape Town, to be informed that there was nowhere that would be safe for Moonbeam given her size. This meant that I would have to route direct to Cape Town unless entering the bay at Knysna, which had a narrow and very shallow entrance, which would be dangerous in any swell. With that in mind I moved into Port St Francis marina and found probably the last space available.

Although this was still only the first week in December, the weather windows closed off almost on a daily basis. It was evident that I needed to abandon my plan to reach Cape Town because it was not worth the risk on this coast if I could not be sure of reaching there in one hop, if I was to make sure I could return home for Christmas.

I decided to drive to Cape Town having planned to leave Moonbeam until the New Year and followed the Garden Route until reaching the BA crew hotel where I stayed for a couple of days before coming home with them. After spending a lovely Christmas with the grandchildren, I returned on New Year's Day.

Port St Francis was home to a fleet of fishing boats that went out for a period of three weeks at a time to fish for squid. At this time of year vast shoals of squid came up towards the surface from the ocean depths and were caught by teams of local fishermen using hand lines.

The squid were immediately frozen on board and essentially the fishing boats did not return to port until their holds were full. This meant that there was an extraordinarily comprehensive chandlery within the Port, and Moonbeam still exhibits a number of items acquired there. It also meant that in and around the Port the restaurants served exquisite seafood! There was a well frequented pub on the seafront in the marina and on its central pillar, yachtsmen who were circumnavigating left their boat and crew names written on it. Many years later Sarah and I returned to see that Moonbeam and her crew were still there.

By the 6th of January, the weather forecast looked reasonable enough for a few days and I decided to leave Port St Francis for my three-day trip to Cape Town, which was essentially uneventful. This was with the exception that the autopilot kept dropping out which meant that I had very little sleep. It appeared that every time I wanted to steer on a course of 295° or thereabouts, it would drop out repeatedly. I assumed that given this had not happened before, this must be a problem associated with the compass coupler or alternatively a connection problem. Other than that, there was nothing really to note other than noticing the sea temperature dropped 5°C when I rounded Cape Agulhas and entered the Atlantic for the first time in five years. The highlights of the trip were being surrounded by seals and dolphins. So, at 1400 on 9th January I moored in the Victoria and Albert waterfront marina in Cape Town to await Sarah's arrival three days later. In order to get into the marina a pedestrian bridge had to be lifted, and amongst those waiting for me to enter was Paco, Nina and Sebastian!

Cape Town

Sarah arrived from London, a few days later and then we spent two glorious months in Cape Town. From a practical point of view much of the time was consumed with a general refit for Moonbeam. The forestay was removed and refurbished with a new stainless wire and the topmost foil which had been cutting the halyards was replaced with the spare that had been under the forward bunk cushions since we left England. The upper swivel was refurbished with new delrin ball bearings and a sleeve machined from acetyl plastic. Replacement windlass parts (main gear and worm) were ordered and paid for early in January from the Lofrans dealership but did not arrive until the 8th March. Once to hand, I needed a machine press to insert the gear wheel into the base of the unit and I found an engineering shop and got to know the foreman who allowed me to use whatever machine tools I needed in his well-equipped workshop. I just cannot believe that this would happen anywhere else in the world, especially as he would not take any payment on the grounds that I was doing the work myself. By the time I left Cape Town, we were on first name terms!

One by one the washing machine, microwave and radio failed as they had come to the end of their lives and were duly replaced. The old washing machine was donated to a local young man, Angus, who worked on the boat for several weeks at the rate of US$10 a day. He did a fantastic job of polishing the hull, and generally cleaning the topsides. He was a lovely young man, and it was a great pleasure to learn that he had managed to get the washing machine fixed and was in use to make money for his mum.

The autopilot drives were removed for service, and one was replaced with the spare as the motor had seized, but on refitting the drives the autopilot computer short-circuited. The local Raymarine engineer was completely useless, so the I sent the unit back to the UK and after it was returned and refitted it needed commissioning which could not be done until we found a smooth patch of sea. Sarah had brought out a new flux gate compass, but it did not work any better than the original one it was replacing, which made me think that it was not faulty after all. In order to pick up any signal it had to be repositioned above the stateroom bed. Much later, I learnt that there was a magnetic anomaly in the Cape Town area, probably because of the proximity of Table Mountain which was the cause of all my autopilot problems. It turned out that refitting and repositioning of a new fluxgate compass was entirely unnecessary exercise not to mention expense. However, I now had a spare!

Towards the end of February Moonbeam was pulled out at the Royal Cape Yacht Club where even as she was being lifted from the water the work team were already cleaning her off prior to antifouling her and repainting her lines. I serviced the Max prop and fitted new anodes before she was returned to the water and positioned back to the Victoria and Albert marina. Meanwhile the life raft was serviced, and new fire extinguishers acquired and fitted. A new immersion element which was a standard size for this part of the world required a bronze boss to be turned by my friendly engineering shop in order to fit. This only left swinging the compass and commissioning the autopilot outstanding, before we could set out for home.

Now it is true to say that having been away from the boat for four months, Sarah was not planning to complete another long passage. The tropical revolving storm in the Indian Ocean had taken its toll and rather spooked her. Consequently, this period in Cape Town started off to be an extended holiday in the sunshine, prior to her returning home and leaving me to complete the voyage.

So, we started off by going to have lunch at Vergelegan, which was one of our favourite destinations in the vineyards of the Stellenbosch. This was a beginning of a wonderful social time. We met up with Sarah's sister-in-law, Caroline and her partner Jeremy, who amazingly would become our next-door neighbours when we moved to Lymington years later. Our lifelong friends were staying nearby for two months hiding from the winter, so we were able to spend lots of time with them and they with us. Our nephew Tim and his wife Celine and their three daughters were living here in Cape Town, and it was lovely to get to know the little girls who were fascinated with the boat. Caroline and Jeremy had been visiting Cape Town at this time of year regularly and were a fount of knowledge of places to go, restaurants to eat at and otherwise general useful information.

We were made very welcome at the Royal Cape Yacht Club where we had lunch on many occasions. Similarly, we could not miss the opportunity of making the most of this time to explore the city and its surroundings. We visited Robin Island and returned to many of the places that we had been to when I was flying, with Sarah accompanying me on many a trip.

We had been adopted by a cat called Lucky who was owned by Eric off his catamaran, ‘Yela’. Lucky would leap on to Moonbeam come down the companionway and settle herself on one of the sofas in the saloon. Eric had owned a factory in Vietnam, where the local clay

was used in the manufacturing process to make very fine but strong porcelain. When Eric decided to leave, I think that Lucky would have quite happily have stayed with us as she really did not want to go.

Although this was summer, there were several severe weather systems with high winds and heavy rain, and separately the occasional isolated thunderstorm. Just for a change the foghorn would sound throughout the night and would only stop once the fog slowly burnt off after sunrise. Throughout our time in the marina, there were always seals sleeping on the pontoon and sometimes it was necessary to turn a hose on them in order to move them so we could go ashore. Being situated on the waterfront was ideal because the extensive mall was only a few steps away and at the same time, because we were residents in the marina, we were able to park our car free of charge nearby.

Since my arrival in the Victoria and Albert Marina, we had not seen Paco as Nautibuoytoo was in Saldana, a few miles north having some work done to improve its longitudinal stability. He had come down to Cape Town once Nina and Sebastian had gone home to Perth, so we decide to visit him once 'Nautibuoytoo' was back in the water. Saldana Port was like a prison in that there were no less than three security posts to get past, each with a breathalyser kit, but it was good to see him and have lunch together to find out what his plans were. Meanwhile, Jim and Julia off 'Papillon' were in Simon's town near the Navy Shipyard which they reported to be really dirty. They came to have lunch with us at the Yacht Club, where Jim insisted, we should have 4 glasses of the same wine even though a bottle of it was cheaper. It reminded me of Madagascar!

Alan and Pauline off 'Zebedee' came into the marina for one night and stayed for supper before departing for Walvis Bay, as was Paco who came to say goodbye. By the middle of February, Sarah was in somewhat of a quandary, because she was torn between her plan of flying home to the grandchildren and her wish to complete the circumnavigation. However, by the end of the month she had made up her mind to sail back to Europe.

So, at the beginning of March we started to seriously plan our departure from Cape Town. Most of the foreign yachts, many of whom we had entertained on board and vice versa were headed for Walvis Bay in Namibia. However, by the time we were ready to depart we were about the last foreign yacht to leave, and so we decided to route direct for St Helena.

Having checked out of South Africa we found ourselves blocked into the marina because there was a regatta being held on that day, and we had to negotiate a slot to get out. Once free we tried to swing the compass but without success, as the sea was too lumpy, so we set off for Saldana Bay where we knew we would find smooth water and hopefully be away from the magnetic anomaly in Cape Town.

This being South Africa we thought it unlikely that there would be a problem even though we had departed, for a short visit to Saldana Bay even if the authorities noticed us, which they didn't. A 24-hour stop enabled us to swing the compass and commission the autopilot so that we were fully ship-shape and serviceable to set off for our passage to Saint Helena.

Saint Helena

We departed Saldanha Bay on 12 March in fog which didn't lift until mid-afternoon by which time we could no longer see South Africa. In fact, we would not see the coast of Africa again. For the next 10 days the wind stayed generally in the south and for the most part blew consistently between force 4 to 6 and this would remain the case until Moonbeam arrived in the tropics having clocked up over a thousand miles from Cape Town. The watch system that we had used for all of our long passages together worked well. Sarah took the midnight to 0400 watch after my stint until midnight. We were pleased that the outside temperature was steadily getting warmer which reflected the sea temperature which by now was 26°.

In the first few days we were surrounded by seabirds but as we got further away from the land, we had the ocean to ourselves with only a very occasional ship appearing on the AIS. During the entire trip we only caught two fish, a lovely bluefin tuna and a dorado, with only one other strike. This was in spite of trawling a line continuously. It was either my fishing technique or maybe using pink lures!

By the time we had reached 20° south with Moonbeam back in the Western Hemisphere the wind steadily abated, and we decided it was time to fly the cruising chute for the first time since we were last in the Atlantic. After several hours, we were able to set it and pole it out so that we could sail goose-winged for two days before I managed to wrap whilst endeavouring to jibe the boat on my own before Sarah got up at 0700. Happily, it only took the rest of the morning to unwrap it and re-fly it, where it stayed until St Helena appeared over the horizon.

We motored just for the last 50 miles in order to arrive by lunchtime on the Friday because we knew that Immigration and Customs would be closed over the weekend. As we approached Jamestown, we could see 13 other foreign boats including ‘Nautibuoytoo’, ‘Listerwell Lady’ and ‘Zebedee’ as well as some others last seen in Mauritius. As I was coming around to close ‘Nautibuoytoo’ to say hello to Paco, I got caught in the current unexpectedly and Moonbeam kissed her which would be the last time that they met. Happily, no damage was done other than to my self-esteem.

Customs and Immigration duly came aboard to clear us in, and we had to pay port fees and visitors tax which amounted to about £60. This enabled us to go ashore at Jamestown which is absolutely delightful. It was just like walking up a village High Street at home in England. There were Georgian houses on either side of street and arches and little alleys that were very pretty indeed. We had a few beers in the Consulate Hotel which was designed like an old coaching-inn but returned to Moonbeam early because we were not used to drinking! Our reward was in watching the sunset to see the green flash, which was probably only the second time we had seen this in the entire time that we had been away and watching countless sunsets!

The following evening, we had a farewell supper with Rebecca and Graham off ‘Listerwell Lady’ and Paco because he was departing the following morning and it would definitely be the last time, we would see him as he was heading for the Caribbean via Ascension Island

and Brazil. Paco and I had sailed together for many, many months and had consumed copious quantities of wine and beer and had enjoyed endless conversations so it was indeed a case of “Parting is Such Sweet Sorrow……..”. I wonder if we will ever meet again.

We hired a car and toured the island which proved to be quite beautiful: the stark tall cliffs all around led to verdant country lanes and fields with cattle grazing and quite stunning views. One side of the island to the south was dry and desert-like and very sparse and then into the centre it was lush and fertile and very green. We visited Blair House which was Napoleon's first residence for the initial six weeks he was here and until Longwood House was completed where he spent his final six years before his death in 1821. The English gave him the rank of General and as a result he was incredibly well treated. He had an entourage of 20 along with his personal valet. It would appear that he lived in a considerable degree of luxury and locally they believed that he died of stomach cancer rather than arsenic poisoning, because both his parents and sister were similarly affected. We visited Plantation House which is the Governor’s residence to see the giant tortoises in the grounds and went down steep hairpin bends to find Sandy Bay with its disused lime kiln.

We found a local seamstress who undertook to repair the Bimini with some sunbrella strips that I cut up for her. I was able to successfully download the electronic charts for the next part of our passage and we did some last-minute shopping for supplies for our journey so that we were ready to leave on the last day of March. We had had a wonderful stay here in this very pretty island with lots of history and a delightful population. It was remarkable that at this time the island was only connected by a ship that did a round trip from Cape Town to Ascension and back every two weeks, although an airport was being constructed albeit with a runway direction that was not aligned with the prevailing winds!

Homeward Bound

We left St Helena early in the morning and as the island was slowly disappearing into the distance, we picked up a south-easterly wind and set course to cross the equator at 30W. Our thinking was that we wished to be far enough off Africa because piracy was not unknown on its west coast, and I wished to ensure that we would cross the ITCZ (doldrums) at right angles to minimise our time in the notoriously unpredictable winds, known in days of yore as the ‘Horse Latitudes’.

We had set up an HF SSB radio net before leaving St Helena so that we could talk to the other boats leaving for various destinations over the course of the following days. It worked reasonably well for the first 1500 miles or so. We also knew that all being well, we should manage to cover a thousand miles per week and to that end we had stores on board and sufficient bottled water should the water maker fail, as it had done on our initial Atlantic crossing. We also decided that we would run a dry boat with the exception of celebrating crossing the equator. And our arrival in Europe.

So, on the first day I established that we had three problems. Firstly, the fridge pump was unserviceable, secondly, we seemed to have a problem with the GPS antenna because we were getting persistent messages of ‘No Fix’, and the automatic bilge pump was faulty. The

fridge pump was easy to fix but the GPS continued to give us a problem for two weeks. Interrogation of the built-in test equipment repeatedly showed that the unit could not find suitable satellites to provide a reasonable fix. This may have been because the GPS had been installed in 2006 and may not have been searching for all the satellites that had since become available. That said, there were three other GPS sets on-board and once again I took regular star shots to ensure that I kept my hand in just in case they all went down.

However, probably the most serious problem occurred on day two when in the evening we noticed that a large tear had appeared on the yankee above the UV strip on its foot. As soon as the wind allowed, we unbent the sail and brought it into the saloon through the forward hatch and spent the next two days repairing it. We were to really regret not buying a length of sail cloth before leaving South Africa, because we quickly ran out of the sail repair tape that we had in our spares locker and had to start using our store of sunbrella to patch it up.

Towards the end of the first week, we got a large fish within a few metres of the boat before it escaped and then lost the other lure almost immediately afterwards so it proved that there were fish out here, even if we can't catch them! We completed just over a thousand miles in the first week with the wind essentially behind us and with the now patched yankee poled out.

On Easter day, just after seven in the morning we caught a skipjack tuna, so we had sashimi for lunch followed by the roast lamb that we had got out of the freezer to celebrate Easter. The celebration didn't last long because the following day I looked up to see that we had yet another tear in the yankee. The upper part of the sail was basically in shreds. Of course, this was after six years of wear and tear, but it should have been spotted as a problem by Quantum Sails whom I had engaged to refurbish it. However, we cheered up when in the evening of 9th April, we crossed the equator northbound, when we celebrated with a bottle of champagne and to our delight a pod of dolphins appeared alongside us, and which was the first time we had seen any since South Africa. We took this to be a very good omen.

On the following morning we were surrounded by rain clouds and the wind became light and variable. The radar turned completely black and there was a torrential downpour before we became completely becalmed. We had clearly entered the intertropical convergence zone (ITCZ or Doldrums). I decided that we could safely run the engine and use up to 200 litres of diesel which might enable us to push northwards sufficiently far to exit the ITCZ. Meanwhile, we pulled the yankee back into the cockpit to dry out before taking it below into the saloon so we could repair it. It turned out to be an enormous task because it was very badly ripped, and the sewing machine was not really man enough for the job and constantly jammed.

A couple of days later Sarah was on watch when the wind died completely and so we decided to tie the wheel and just drift, until the wind came back just after 0400. My attempt to unfurl the main whilst I was half asleep resulted in it being jammed in the furler so that it would neither furl nor unfurl, all in the dark, of course! In the end we had to release the halyard and pull the sail down to unjam it, before it could be set once more. I spent the rest of the day trying to fix the sewing machine. Being the cheapest entry version Elna, it had plastic gears,

which had become worn and repeatedly slipped around the spindles. In the end I recognised that it was beyond repair and decided to give it to join so many of my tools to 'Davy Jones locker' along with the instruction manual. This meant that we would have to hand sew the remaining tears in the sail.

By now we had got to the edge of the ITCZ and started to pick up the North East Trade Winds. The irony was that in discussion over the radio net with those boats that were headed directly to Brazil and the Caribbean, if we turned left at this point, we would be there a week or so before them. I suggested this change of course to Sarah on the grounds that we could have another year in the Caribbean, but sadly this suggestion did not meet with approval.

We now had to think about where we should head for, because even though the Canaries Islands were approximately nine days away, it looked like the Azores would be a more suitable destination, not least because this was the usual route from South Africa to Europe and would be in a more favourable wind direction.

From here on our days were spent sewing. This was not an easy task because the sunbrella was thick, waterproof, and tightly woven so pushing a needle through this material and the sail cloth took its toll on our fingers. The yankee was beginning to look like a patchwork quilt, but we were still bouncing along into the headwinds using our staysail and main, and most of the time recording 6 to 7kts.

On the19th, At midnight on 18th April, Moonbeam completed her circumnavigation when our plotted position on our chart crossed our outbound, track, which was plotted at 0300 on the 19th January 2007, five years and three months previously and with a total distance between them of 39,201 nautical miles. What an achievement.! We had a glass of champagne at lunch to celebrate and it made us feel very emotional because we had experienced so much wonder, joy, sadness and at times even terror, but we had never ever felt that Moonbeam would let us down. However, just to bring us back down to earth we nearly ran over another yacht! We had heard them calling another yacht on the VHF, who had a broken shroud, and talked to them over the radio to discover that they were just 25 miles or so away from us. Given our exchange of positions we thought that they were behind us even though we could not see them on radar, and because they were smaller than Moonbeam, they would be slower. It was therefore a bit of a shock to see them the following dawn just a mile or so behind us! It is always strange to meet another yacht in the middle of the ocean thousands of miles from anywhere.

David, Sarah's brother had been doing a magnificent job of weather watching for us and at the same time encapsulating the news in a paragraph or two so that he could email us on a daily basis. This information was invaluable to us as the only other source of weather forecasting was from the daily grib files which showed the wind direction and strength and the occasional downloading of a synoptic chart from the SSB. He amused me by reporting that a Canadian co-pilot had caused injury to passengers by violently altering course to avoid Venus, because it reminded me of the numerous occasions that I had witnessed pilots (including me) altering course around the moon!

The repair of the yankee by hand sewing was finally completed on 21st April when we said goodbye to the tropics as we crossed the Tropic of Cancer. We spent the following morning bending on the sail, only to see a small tear on the foot so we promptly furled it away until I could drop the sail sufficiently to be able to fix it the next day. Apart from replacing the impeller on the generator, it had run without problems and enabled us to keep our water tank full and the fridge and freezer cold as well as recharging the batteries. It was run night and morning for a couple of hours which was sufficient for our needs.

As we were continuing northwards the sea temperature steadily decreased and we started to need warmer clothing. At the same time David reported that a low-pressure system was developing to the north of us, which would make landfall in the Azores somewhat of a challenge. We thought that we would watch the situation and decide on whether or not to continue towards the Azores or change our destination in two- or three-days' time.

We were beginning to see ships more frequently now and saw one which was even going to Gibraltar! We were now 3500 nautical miles from St Helena and the forecast low that David had alerted us to, was intensifying, so we changed course, due east and motor sailed for a while, whilst declaring Madeira as our destination in Europe. Our reward that evening was to see the green flash once again, which was only the third time this entire trip.

We were beginning to get pretty tired, because we were spending most of the time close hauled in generally overcast weather and quite large seas, but this was being offset by our steady countdown of miles to Madeira. We had now lost contact with all the yachts on our radio net as we were getting close to Europe, and they were continuing on to the Azores or the Caribbean and for the first time we were waking up feeling cold as our duvet was not really warm enough which reflected the drop in temperature over the past week or so.

Our plots were satisfyingly closing Madeira and with the help of the engine the last day of the month saw us just 149 miles to go at dawn, when we were surrounded by a pod of Atlantic Spotted Dolphins. It turned out that our position looked so close to Madeira on 'Yotreps' that Gemma tried to ring us, on our mobile rather than the sat phone!

At sunrise on 1st May 2012, we could see Madeira rising up on the horizon and we were able to drop anchor in Funchal Harbour at 1645 that day. It had taken us 31 days six hours and 45 minutes to cover 4498 miles from St Helena and to arrive safely albeit with sore fingers! We celebrated with the bottle of champagne that Bill Barrett had given us in Singapore and that we said we would not open until we arrived home in Europe.

Madeira

The following morning, we waited for a squall to pass before moving into the marina with the assistance of the friendly marina staff. We checked in with Customs and Immigration which was all very straightforward and efficient and parted with €60 a day for marina fees, which reminded us that we were definitely back in Europe. We had to pinch ourselves that we could actually walk ashore to find a bank and supermarket and to have lunch on the front overlooking the marina. What a fantastic feeling! To add to our euphoria, we had a message

from Tom to say that he had decided to fly out for a short break and so we booked a hire car for a week.

We spent the next few days catching up with all the washing and generally cleaning up the boat. We collected the hire car and drove around to Camara De Lobos, where Churchill liked to paint. We had a couple of beers just sitting there, people watching, and it was just wonderful to do nothing and be totally lazy. Once we had collected Tom from the airport we decided to drive up in the hills behind Funchal and down to the waterfront at Machico before returning to the marina where we had lunch at a restaurant where we cooked clams and steak on a stone which was absolutely delicious and Tom's treat to us.

After returning Tom to the airport, we decided to go for a drive around the island with its amazing scenery and high mountains. The north of the island was particularly scenic. Before long, it was time to return home for a short visit so on my birthday we caught a flight to Gatwick. We spent a lovely couple of weeks visiting with the children and grandchildren and going to Charlotte Rees's wedding, before I returned to Madeira to bring Moonbeam home via Lagos, where Sarah would join me.

I left Funchal on the morning of 26th May with a relatively good forecast: a slack pressure gradient for the next three days but with the wind in the North, so it was down to the engine to push me towards Lagos. The first day's run of 158 miles was followed by the second of 163, by which time I had started to see several ships on radar and AIS, and I started to pay much more attention to ensuring that Moonbeam remained safe. By the third day there were ships all over the place, so sleep was in short supply. Nevertheless, even though exhausted, I was rewarded with a remarkable and outstanding sunset with a double green flash. I think that it has only been the fourth occasion throughout our trip.

By 29th May the AIS was tracking ships all over the place but, at last, it appeared that they were following the traffic lanes. After 493 miles I arrived on the waiting pontoon off Lagos and then moved into the marina a little later. It had taken me four days using 560lt of fuel to run the engine for 72 hours. So much for sailing!

Meanwhile Sarah had arrived at the wrong terminal at Heathrow and only just made it to the correct one, to arrive in Faro on 30th May. Tom arrived on the first day of June to spend a few days over his birthday, and we were able to dress ship on 2nd June for my sister's birthday and in celebration of HM Queen Elizabeth's 60th Jubilee.

So now it was time to move on, and we left Lagos on the 8th of June having returned our car and stocked up at the supermarket for the trip. Essentially it was an uneventful 456 miles sail northwards, other than the staysail halyard parting and the staysail handed and stowed below. Our arrival in La Corunna followed an exhilarating last 50 miles along the North Coast of Spain with the wind behind us and Moonbeam surfing along at over 9 knots. The sun was out, which always cheers the spirit, and apart from avoiding fishing boats sailing haphazardly all over the place we came round the point at last to see the recognisable approach to the harbour with the tall H building of harbour control. We observed the large new marina, which was fairly empty, and as we knew it was a long walk from the town, we decided to berth in

the marina in the main town. We were welcomed by a boat boy who directed us to a pontoon and helped us tie up, and where we collapsed for a 24hour sleep!

After a day off, it was time to celebrate Sarah's birthday on the 13th of June. We were delighted to have telephone calls in the morning from all of the children and Annabel and Gemma were supported by the grandchildren in the background.

We spent the morning trying to thread a mouse so that we could replace the staysail halyard with me going up and down the mast, but to no avail, as something was preventing the mouse to fall far enough down the mast. We gave up and unbent the sail and stowed it below, all in glorious sunshine. A job for another day! We went out to lunch after a glass or two of fizz to La Petite Bretagne brasserie on the front amongst the arches, before having a lazy afternoon.

The following day was overcast, and the forecast was not good, so we spent time wandering around the main square and having tapas in the narrow streets of the old town. Then on the Friday Sarah took a bus into the shopping centre whilst I serviced the engine, which when it was completed revealed a problem with engaging reverse gear. Once again it was necessary to take the gearbox out and strip it. It appeared that movement of the drive shaft due to insufficient shims was preventing the clutch to engage. New shims were inserted on the input shaft, but it was clearly badly damaged with significant swarf evident in the gearbox case. Even after the rebuild in Singapore it was clear that the gearbox needed a new input shaft. However, once it was reassembled, the engine was run, and the gearbox was checked OK, so we agreed a plan to depart next morning.

Sunday dawned overcast with the forecast indicating heavy rain after midday, but we decided that nevertheless, it was time to go. We motored around to the new Marina only to find that the fuel berth was occupied by a yacht with the crew fast asleep. However, the Marina staff were very helpful and woke them up and moved them so we could top up our fuel tank.

It turned out that the Marina had only been open for three years but sadly it looked as though it was going out of business as so few berths were occupied. At last, we were ready and departed at 10:30 into uncomfortable strong north westerly winds in heavy rain. Happily, the sky cleared slowly from the West in the evening and the wind abated so we were able to motor in a much more pleasant sea state. In the morning the sun came out with bright blue skies and a light wind. We discovered 2 seagulls sitting on our Bimini, catching a ride, probably having a rest from the previous bad weather. Twice during the day, we were delighted to have a visit, and be surrounded by dolphins. They are such a beautiful sight!

At midnight I recorded in the log that we were only 230 miles from Dartmouth, but when I stopped the engine to clean the racor and check the engine and gearbox oil, it would not restart as it appeared that the starter motor had failed. As the wind was light and variable, we just drifted for the rest of the night waiting for daylight so that I could take the starter motor apart and find out what was wrong.

Once the sun came up and a light north easterly wind set in, we flew the main whilst I took the starter motor apart. I stripped it down with the exception of the contactor (which of

course subsequently turned out to be the problem), however, I was not to know this until much later. So, with no engine as I had been unable to start it by spinning it with a line to the main winch, it seemed sensible to divert to La Rochelle which lay 130nms to the southeast. We knew that La Rochelle was easily accessible, and the marina would be able to assist us if we needed it.

After an uneventful 36-hour sail, we were towed into Les Minimes marina by the Capitainerie, having called them to advise them of our problem. Moonbeam was to stay here for two months.

We flew back from la Rochelle to Stansted and hired a car so that we could celebrate Norlan's 70th birthday and Marie Macleod's wedding. We collected our new puppy cocker spaniel, Coco. The Olympics were being held in London and we were lucky enough to get tickets for the rowing at Windsor and volleyball at Horse guards, before I returned to Moonbeam to start fixing the problems.

Poor Moonbeam was showing her age. The inverter was no longer supported by Victron so a new one was ordered. The starter motor had a broken resistor which was revealed when the contactor was removed. Once soldered and repaired the starter motor was fine. The fridge/freezer compressor was found to be seized with no option but to replace it in due course. It would be necessary to rely on the electric bar fridge in the meantime.

So now it was time to complete the voyage. We had determined that Moonbeam's home port would be La Roche Bernard, where Chrissie and Rory Macleod had settled with their Oyster 485, Barefoot. I set off from La Rochelle at lunchtime on 22nd August on a good forecast and anchored off Les Sables D'Olonne that evening. The following day was once again uneventful, but there was a strong wind warning, so I decided to anchor and shelter north of the estuary of the Vilaine river, where I discovered that the reverse gear was once again u/s.

With a forecast of a south westerly gale the next morning, I ventured into the Vilaine river and picked up a visitor's mooring off Trehiguer, where I once again dismantled the gearbox. Once the input shaft was re-shimmed the reverse gear was operational, I set off for the lock to gain entry into the river. Once through, it was straight forward to arrive in La Roche Bernard, where I moored up alongside Barefoot.

Moonbeam was home now, set between two buoys in the river.

Our circumnavigation adventure was now complete. What a privilege to have been able to do it. 44500nms over 6 years, in one piece and still married!

The End.