

Mina² in the Land of the Lotus-Eaters

**The Western Mediterranean Cruise of Mina²
May and June 2007**



Tim Barker

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“It must be fabulous” gushed Libby “spending all your time on holiday like this”. “You may be on holiday, Libby” I snapped, “but I am not. This, for me, is an expedition”. Nobody was much convinced, least of all me, as I turned the prawns on the barbecue, glass of wine in hand. Around us the gin-clear turquoise water of the idyllic bay in Ibiza reflected the cloudless sky as the still-hot Mediterranean sun edged towards the horizon.

Thirty five years of puritan work ethic takes a while to shake off. I did not, I told myself, retire to lead a life of hedonistic lotus-eating. High latitudes, tempestuous seas and the exploration of hitherto unexplored anchorages was my noble ambition. We had got off to a reasonable start with our cruise to the Lofoten Islands and down the coast of Norway, followed by a circumnavigation of the Baltic Sea, so it grated somewhat to find myself heading towards the fleshpots of the Mediterranean which was by all accounts too hot, too crowded, too expensive, and with too little wind, but I was prepared to grit my teeth in the cause of marital harmony.

Our plan was to split the cruise into two parts: in May and June we would make our way from the Atlantic coast of Spain to explore the Balearics, flying back to the UK to enjoy the English summer when the Mediterranean gets insufferably hot and crowded, returning in September to continue our cruise to Corsica and Sardinia until the middle of October.

Mina², our cutter-rigged Oyster 485, had overwintered in Chipiona just north of Cadiz. Maria, the Dowstairs Skipper, and I cast off at 1050 on Friday 4 May for a leisurely 14 mile passage south to Rota where we had been invited to join some friends at the annual Feria – the spring fair. All the ladies don figure-hugging traditional spanish dresses – the more garish the better – and wear a large flower in their hair. There is much dancing of the Sevillaña which is like a slow flamenco without the foot stamping, but most of the emphasis seems to be on the never-ending consumption of delicious tapas washed down with vast quantities of the local manzanilla sherry. The spaniards certainly know how to enjoy themselves and seemingly the party continues day and night for two days without a break. The welcoming warmth of our hosts and their friends was incredible. Visiting a country by boat, one’s contact with the local people is largely restricted to harbour staff, shopkeepers and waiters. Frankly, we hadn’t been that impressed with the lack of friendliness, but the enormous hospitality of Ignacio and Sole and the friendship shown by Javier and Paula painted a very different picture of a warm, generous, fun-loving people with a rich culture of which they are rightly proud. We spent a very memorable few hours with them before staggering back to the boat to sleep it off.



The Rota Feria – not known for its subtlety

We made an early start on the Friday for the longish 40-mile passage down to Barbate broad reaching in a westerly F4 arriving in the late afternoon where we met François Salle, a larger-than-life frenchman from Lézardrieux who was sailing his elderly Nicholson ketch *Waratah* with a couple of friends. We told him that we had heard that Tangier harbour was not a good place to go. It was a disgusting cess-pit where anything of value would be stripped from your decks within minutes. It was therefore our plan to sail to Ceuta, the Spanish enclave on the African coast south of Gibraltar and from there take a taxi to Tangier. “Poof” François said dismissively with an exaggerated gallic shrug “You merst be mad. Ceuta haz nussing to recommend eet. Tanger ees wonderfool. You weel haf no problème. I know zee chef de poleece. Tomorrow you follow me!” The decision, it seemed, had been made.

François had met up with some friends on another boat so, the following morning, our little convoy set off with *Waratah* nannying us along like a mother duck, motoring the whole way in flat calm conditions. Having tied up on the visitors pontoon at the Royal Yacht Club de Tanger, François was greeted like an old friend, his popularity no doubt enhanced by the liberal distribution of generous tips (including one to the immigration policeman who was checking our passports and ships papers – something I would never had dared to do for fear of being banged up for bribery). The yacht club is right on the edge of town and within five minutes walk one is immersed in a culture as foreign as any I had experienced. It is only 24 miles from Barbate to Tangier but in terms of the cultural difference it could be a million miles away.



Tangier – a cultural polar-shift

Because of the cosmopolitan background of Tangier some of the people wear European dress but most still wear traditional dress; men in their elegant djellaba's with soft leather baboosh on their feet; women in colourful kaftans. Having shopped in the bustling markets crammed with exotic produce, we wandered through the narrow streets to a terraced café with spectacular views over the straits of Gibraltar and enjoyed a glass of hot very sweet mint tea (also enjoyed by four million wasps).

For dinner we went to a very grand restaurant which put on a floor show of Moroccan music and, finally, an exotic belly dancer. All rather touristy but interesting nonetheless and the food was authentic Moroccan dishes including Tajine, a deliciously meaty and spicy stew.

Our first full day in Morocco we explored Tangier and we spent a delightful evening with Micky, the step-father of a great friend of ours. Micky has lived in Tangier for many years and he and his friends gave us an insight into the rich and cultured life of the expatriate in Morocco.

The following day we hired a mini-bus to explore with François and his two friends some of the interior of Morocco. The minibus wound its way through the spectacular valleys of the Rif mountains. These enormous valleys were incredibly lush and green and absolutely covered in wild flowers. Passing Berber women in their traditional dress selling goats cheese wrapped in plaited reeds, we ended up in the mountain town of Chefchaouen. Postcard pretty with narrow twisting streets climbing the steep hillside, beautifully carved wooden doors lead into cool courtyards crammed with palms and flowering shrubs. Virtually all the buildings (and, indeed, some of the roads) in this delightful town are painted a uniform sky blue. Apparently the colour keeps the mosquitoes away. It must work – there weren't any. The streets are lined with shops selling kilim rugs, jewelry made from semi-precious stones and amber, antique Moroccan silverware and intricately engraved brass dishes. It doesn't come naturally to the British to haggle but here it is a way of life. If you simply asked the price and paid it they would consider you to be a) mad, and b) depriving them of half the joy of doing business. We took our lead from our guide and mentor François. When given a price he would shriek incredulously "Combien? Je ne suis pas américain!" turn on his heel and stomp out of the shop to be followed by the trader who would grab his arm and hussle him back inside for Round 2. Eventually a mutually agreeable price would be struck, hands would be shaken and goods and

money exchanged. After several hours of sightseeing and bargaining, and after an excellent lunch, we all staggered back to the minibus laden with parcels.

Whilst we had been away, I had paid the marina staff to T-cut and polish my superstructure which had become very dull and oxidised over the winter. We arrived back to find it gleaming. I reckon the savings compared with the cost of having the work done across the strait had more than paid for all our meals, and the cabin full of rugs, bowls and plates we had bought.

Whilst the majority of Moroccans seemed happy and contented, we were aware that life was not a bowl of cherries for all. We witnessed on a couple of occasions the police treating individuals in the street with some brutality – and that was in the public gaze. One hates to think what treatment was to be meted out to them in custody. Young men would also go to considerable lengths to get across the straits to Spain. Right behind the visitors pontoon was the high-security area where lorries awaiting ferries to Spain trundled through X-ray machines looking for potential illegal emigrants. A succession of young men on the mole the other side of the harbour could be seen stripping off, stuffing their clothes into plastic bags with which they would swim across the harbour, dodging the fishing boats, to the goods terminal. The wire fencing surrounding the supposedly secure area had gaping holes and you could see groups of youths crouching behind the rocks waiting for an opportunity to spring through the fence to the lorries which had passed the security checks. Occasionally you saw one of them being led away by police but on the whole nobody seemed to be that fussed.

Notwithstanding, our over-riding impression of Morocco was of a booming economy and a happy and proud people with a rich culture. Everyone was extremely friendly and, contrary to expectations, the hassling in the streets was minimal. Never once did we feel in the slightest bit threatened and we never had concerns about the security of the boat. It was a wonderful experience and I cannot imagine why everyone seems so nervous about bringing their boats here. In the three days we were in the harbour not one other visiting boat came in.

Having had absolutely no wind for four days we awoke the following morning to find the wind had moved to the east and had picked up somewhat. This was the dreaded Levante which screams through the Straits of Gibraltar funnelled through the narrow gap by the high mountains either side. As the tide is permanently east-going replenishing the evaporated water in the land-locked Mediterranean, the wind against tide throws up a fearsome sea. It was likely that the wind would last a good few days and meanwhile Maria had a plane to catch in Gibraltar and my passage crew to the Balearics was due to arrive there. The logistics of getting the crew over to Tangier was complicated, so what the hell: we had a strong, heavy boat, the sun was shining and it was only 31 miles. We cast off and made our way out of the protection of the harbour to find a full gale blowing from the northeast – bang on the nose. The running tide was clearly defined by a line on one side of which the sea was rough and on the other side it was very, very rough. We motor-sailed up the Moroccan coast, tacking whenever we got to the tide line, and whilst we didn't have the advantage of the push from the tide at least we didn't have a constant wall of breaking waves washing over us. By the time we were south of Gibraltar the waves were less

threatening so we headed north, dodging the motorway of the shipping lanes into the protection of the Bay of Algeciras.

The culture shock of going from Spain to Morocco was as nothing compared with the culture shock of going from Morocco to Gibraltar. Gibraltar is like a British time warp. All the shops are British, from Marks & Spencers to Morrisons supermarket. Just over the border all the restaurants serve the most fabulous Andalucian cuisine. But in Gibraltar, catering to not exactly the aristocrats of British tourists, the restaurants serve up an unrelenting diet of the Full English Breakfast, pizzas and steak 'n' chips. One thing that did surprise me was that, notwithstanding the extreme Englishness of Gibraltar, many of the workers spoke no English at all.

We were in a marina right next to the airport runway and when it was time for Maria to leave, it was somewhat novel to walk her to the terminal, return to the boat and then wave her off as her plane soared into the sky just feet away. When I returned to the boat, tied up alongside the pontoon was a familiar ketch. *Gipsy Moth IV*, Francis Chichester's historic yacht, had stopped by prior to her passage to Plymouth to complete her second circumnavigation.

I had three days before Richard Gaunt and Jon Heyman arrived to help take the boat to the Balearics, and a lot needed to be done. I had had new sole boards shipped out to the boat in Chipiona which needed making up and varnishing, and a long list of other work that needed to be done, not to mention the victualling for the passage. Would it be one of those absurd situations when I had taken the boat thousands of miles to an interesting place and wouldn't have time to see it? But by the morning of Sunday 13 May, with Richard and Jon now on board, *Mina*² was shipshape and ready for our planned departure early that afternoon. We had a couple of hours for a bit of sightseeing.

The local taxi drivers are well geared up for conducted tours of the Rock and our whistle stop tour was accompanied by a running commentary of the history of the Rock. During the tour we visited the stunning limestone caves with their dramatic stalagmites and stactites, stopped to have photos taken of us with the Barbary apes sitting on our shoulders, finishing off with a visit to the fortification tunnelling hewed by hand through the rocks – a mind-blowing bit of engineering. It was all fascinating and I am very glad that I did find the time.

We returned to *Mina*² with just enough time to crack open a bottle of champagne and stick a candle in a brownie to celebrate Jon's birthday before casting off at 1400 bound for Ibiza. Our plan was to break the journey at the pretty and historic town of Cartagena, a distance of 240 miles. The start of the passage was a east-nor'easterly run up the coast under main and poled-out yankee in a very pleasant F4. Overnight the wind slowly built and by 0400 on Monday the wind had increased to a full gale and by 0600 the seas were getting disturbingly high and violent. For some reason we were unable to get any forecasts on Navtex or VHF, so we didn't have a clue whether the conditions were likely to abate or get worse. As I was deliberating whether or not to dive into Motril which was 17 miles to our north, a particularly large and breaking wave caught our port quarter. For some inexplicable reason I had not secured the large hatch above my aft cabin. The boat was thrown over onto her side, the hatch flipped open and half a ton of water dumped onto my bunk, soaking my duvet.

Decision made. We bore away and at 0900 we tied up in the marina at Motril. The sun was shining so out came all the damp clothing and bedding and we retired below to catch up on some sleep.

Motril has nothing to recommend it. It is a dusty, noisy, industrial harbour miles from the town. The secretary of the yacht club was surly and unhelpful even when he was relieving me of an excessive €50 even though we were only to be staying a few hours. I said we very badly needed to see a forecast but despite hourly requests it took him seven hours to turn on his computer and press the print button. I can't imagine they get much passing trade – well, certainly not repeat trade. When we eventually got the forecast, it was for the wind to moderate and, indeed, it already had. By 1900 our bedding was dry and we were relieved to leave Motril even though we were motoring into a very gentle F3 which had by now swung round to the east. In the early hours of Tuesday morning we at last rounded Cabo de Gata and, the wind having picked up a little we at last turned the engine off, heading for Cartagena.

At about 0800 and alone on watch I was passing Carboneras, beating in flat waters, when I saw the fishing fleet on its way out of harbour on a course that would cross us at right angles. I have a policy of avoiding working boats regardless of the rights of sail over power. After all, they are earning a living whilst I have all the time in the world pursuing my hedonistic dreams. I bore away 30° to port make it clear that I intended to pass astern of the lead boat at which point it stopped dead in the water ahead of me. After a minute it seemed clear that he was waiting for me, so I resumed my initial course to pass ahead of him. A couple of minutes later he was about 100 metres off my port bow, still absolutely stationary, when suddenly there was a roar from his engines and he shot forwards at full speed. I threw off the main sheet and bore away as quickly as I could as he missed my bow by no more than a boat's length. Then, to my horror, I saw that he was throwing his trawl out. I crash jibed as the steel hawsers of his trawl sliced through the water almost scraping my hull. On the deck of the trawler the crew were laughing.

It was at best a deliberate act to frighten us badly (successful) and at worst an attempt to damage us. I hate to think of the consequences of our keel or rudder hitting a trawl that is slicing through the water at 15 knots. We had been just feet away from disaster. I was shaking with shock and anger. I should of course have taken a note of the boat's name and reported the incident but, frankly, I was too shocked at the time and in any event I have little doubt that any protest would have come to nothing.

In the afternoon we were tacking very close to the rocks west of Caratagena in our final approach to the harbour when, a couple of cables away on our starboard beam, we saw a periscope appear, shortly followed by a conning tower and finally the hull of a submarine, on the foredeck of which were two inflatables filled with marines. We tacked close to the rocks and bore away to place us well astern of the submarine. But this was not good enough. The two inflatables came roaring towards us with machine-gun toting marines shouting at us to clear the area. Frankly I had had it with aggressive spanish mariners for one day but, given that these ones were actually armed, we had little alternative but to head away from our destination in the direction from which we had just come. We turned the engine on and made a very wide loop

round the slow-moving submarine eventually reaching Cartagena to which we had been so very close an hour earlier.

Cartagena is a lovely walled town of a great maritime history and it was a very pleasant stopover on our way to the Balearics.

At 0945 the next morning we slipped our lines bound for Ibiza 125 miles away where we were to meet Richard's wife Libby, and Maria the Downstair's Skipper. In very light airs we had motored past Cabo de Palos and were heading for open water. Richard was briefing me at the change of watch: "There's a ship ahead" he said, "looks like he's towing something but I think we'll miss her if we maintain our course". And as well we did – it turned out to be La Horniga, a large rock with a lighthouse on it.

Jon had done this passage some years before and as we motored slowly through a beautiful star-lit night he said, "On my last trip, it was about here that we came across some dolphins". Bang on cue, a streak of light shot past the boat, then another and another. A pod of dolphins had arrived, their bodies and wakes brightly illuminated by phosphorescence. Jostling for pole position ahead of the bow, they were barging each other out of the way. The displaced dolphin would then rocket away like a torpedo in a shower of phosphorescence before looping round to jockey for position once again. We enjoyed this brilliant display for over an hour before they disappeared as quickly as they had arrived. A wonderful experience.

At 0945 the following morning we tied up at the Club Nautico de Ibiza having frustratingly motored for 15 out of the 24 hours. After tidying up the boat and doing a bit of sightseeing, we headed into town in the evening to see what delights it had to offer before the arrival of the balls and chains. It's all now a bit of a blur but we were tempted into a lively bar with the offer of "buy one drink and get one free", and ended up overdosing on Red Bulls and vodkas all night. It's certainly the first time in many years I had been thrown out of a bar at closing time by which time dawn had broken. Getting any sleep before Maria arrived mid-morning was difficult as the amount of sugar and caffeine coursing round my blood stream meant I was still bouncing off the walls whilst my heart was trying to escape from my rib cage.

After the DS's safe arrival we went off to Puerto de Espalmador, the pretty protected bay in the island of Espalamador nine miles south of Ibiza town where Richard, Jon and I passed out for the afternoon before returning to Ibiza at 1930 for Libby's arrival.

Shopping comes high on the list of life's priorities for Libby, so the following morning several hours were spent scouring the boutiques of Ibiza Town before we were able to head off once again to Espalmador for the night, picking up one of the few mooring buoys. The anchorage on this lovely low-lying unpopulated little island is extremely well protected from winds from most directions, which made one wonder why the otherwise spotless sandy beach was littered with the hulks of wrecked boats. We were to find out later!

After a peaceful night we left the mooring for the short 3-mile trip to La Sabina, the only port on the island of Formentera. We arrived in a very stiff easterly wind to be

told there would be no room for us overnight but we were welcome to tie up alongside the fuel pontoon for a couple of hours. The marina looks brand new with pristine concrete pontoons and a very swanky “Terminal 5” type clubhouse, with bars, roof-terrace and a restaurant. Time being short we grabbed a couple of taxis for a whistle-stop trip round the coast to the little town of Pujols where we enjoyed a lunch of grilled sardines overlooking the little harbour full of tiny, local fishing boats. On our return to the marina, the mariner said that it would after all be OK for us to stay the night on the fuel pontoon so long as we didn’t object to boats coming alongside to refuel. That night there was torrential rain and I awoke to find the boat and everything else covered in thick brown sand which had been picked up in the Sahara and dumped during the rainstorm. Sadly today was the day Jon had to leave, jumping on the ferry back to Ibiza for a plane to Barcelona then by train to his home in Toulouse – a long journey.

The wind had abated and swung to the west and the mariner recommended an anchorage at El Caló in the Cala Racó d’es Mares on the north side of the eastern peninsula. We went round the top of Espalmador, through the Freu Grande and then beam reached the rest of the 14 miles to the anchorage where we dug into sand over gorgeous turquoise water in a picturesque bay backed by semicircles of rickety boathouses high on the rocks into which the fishing boats are winched up rails. Formentera is the most laid back of the Balearic islands and this outpost of the island was even sleepier still, and charming for it. We went ashore for dinner, returning to the boat well after dark. I commented to Richard “I should get the dinghy onto the davits, but it looks pretty settled so I won’t bother”. Mistake number one.

I awoke at 0300 to hear the wind whistling through the rigging. It had backed northeast and was blowing onshore at 28 knots. The sea was by now too lumpy to get the dinghy onto the davits or the outboard off the dinghy and onto the boat. But the anchor was holding well and whilst not particularly comfortable I decided to stay on anchor watch until the morning. By 0730 conditions had improved not at all. The boat was bucketing in the now biggish waves and a fair amount of water was coming over the bow. With the anchor holding, I was inclined to stay where we were in the hope that the wind would abate, as I was concerned that towing the dinghy broadside to these steep and sometime breaking waves would be tempting disaster.

A car drew up on the shore behind us and a man got out, shouting and gesticulating. I couldn’t make out what he was saying but my best interpretation was “Get out! Get out whilst you can or you’re doomed!” He was clearly a local and given the possibility that he knew something that we didn’t, I decided to heed his warnings and leave. We put the dinghy on two very long lines, weighed anchor (a very wet exercise for the foredeck crew), raised a scrap of main and slowly motored out to sea before turning with great trepidation broadside to the waves. My heart was in my throat and a sharp knife was in my pocket waiting for the dinghy and her heavy outboard to flip. But somewhat to my surprise she bobbed along behind us, sliding down the vertical faces of the breaking waves, taking it all in her stride. My confidence increased along with our speed and once we had returned to the anchorage in Espalmador and picked up a mooring buoy, I was impressed to find barely a couple of cupfuls of water in the dinghy. So, lesson one, ALWAYS get the dinghy on board before retiring for the night, just in case you need to make an escape but, lesson two, *in extremis* the dinghy will look after herself.

We had read about sulphurous mud baths on Espalmador which are supposed to be very good for the skin, so we went ashore to explore for them. I had images of the ladies stripping off and covering themselves with black mud and, judging by the discarded bikini bottom we found by the mud pools, this did occasionally take place. But once we had smeared a little of the glutinous slime onto our arms and discovered it smelt of raw sewage, we all rather went off the idea.

There was something about 0300. I awoke and felt something was wrong. The wind was again whistling in the rigging and I felt the boat slightly heeled. On a mooring? I went on deck in the pitch darkness and felt the wind on the beam. Warning bells were ringing. As my eyes became accustomed to the dark I realised that we had moved across the bay and were on the shore. I assumed that the mooring tackle was lightweight and we had dragged it in the strong wind. Clicking into Captain Aubrey mode I shouted out “ALL HANDS ON DECK”, switched on the instruments and gunned the engine. I managed to claw the boat off the shore going astern and held her position until the crew were on deck to detach us from the mooring tackle. It took a little while for Richard to surface (he explained later that he was in a quandary what T-shirt would go with his pink boxer shorts – perfectly reasonable). “Right” I said to Richard and Maria, “untie us from the mooring buoy and get the anchor ready”. Richard came back with a very short length of 22mm multiplait that had been sawn through by what had clearly been a razor sharp ring on the mooring buoy. No wonder the shore was littered with wrecked boats.

Having securely anchored the boat, Richard went below to his cabin where Libby was snugly curled up in her duvet. “OK” he said to her “So what part of ALL-HANDS-ON-DECK didn’t you understand?”

Wednesday 23 May and we sailed off the anchor in a moderate easterly, ran out of the bay and beam reached for an hour to Cala Yondal, half way along the south coast of Ibiza, and dropped the anchor in front of a tempting looking beach bar. After a spot of sunbathing I went to bring the dinghy round from the stern to take us ashore for lunch. It was gone! Looking downwind we saw a man in another dinghy with ours strapped alongside, heading for the beach bar. After much shouting and gesticulating he altered course and returned our dinghy to us in exchange for a folding note of gratitude. The fault was mine alone. I had carelessly tied the dinghy on and it had escaped. You would have thought that the crew would have discretely allowed me to wallow in my own embarrassment. But no. Just one crack in the fallibility of an otherwise perfect skipper and the foredeck hands are in there like a pack of hyenas rubbing salt into the wound (to mix a metaphor or two). We lunched at the beach bar (the rescuer of our dinghy was the proprietor) followed by a lotus-eating afternoon of sunbathing on the deck.

Not again! 0300 and I awoke once more to the sound of howling wind and, this time, flashes of lightning. There was an enormous electrical storm in the north but it was clear overhead. Nevertheless I was glad we had let out a further 15m of chain before retiring and after a while of enjoying the spectacular light show I went back to sleep.

We weren’t going to have time to circumnavigate Ibiza but I wanted to have a quick look at the western coast and this involved passing through the passage between

Ibiza and Isla Vedrá. This spectacular rock was used as the location in the film *South Pacific*. It not only develops its own cloud, but it also has a reputation for funnelling strong gusts through the channel. Its reputation was well founded. We were running before the wind in a modest 18 knots of wind when we saw the surface of the water in a state of some agitation just ahead. Within a few seconds we were screaming along under full main and yankee in 40 knots of wind. There was no point in shortening sail as by the time we had done so we would have been through the funnel, so we just enjoyed the ride. We shot out the other side and poked our nose into Cala Carbo but found it really too small and rather hot so we back-tracked to the wide bay of Cala D'Hort and, after a couple of attempts to get the anchor to hold, we settled down for the afternoon in beautiful clear water.

Friday 25 May and it was time for Libby to leave us. We had motored back to Ibiza Town the evening before and once we had said our goodbyes to Libby, we ran under yankee alone in a strong southwesterly up to Santa Eulalia in the east coast. Whilst Ibiza Town tended to cater for the hippy element, Santa Eulalia seemed to be taken over by retired English folk. The marina was crammed full of restaurants and bars which made it a lively place.

There had been some debate as to whether Richard would join us on the 60 mile passage across to Majorca before he left, but as a F7 or F8 northwesterly was forecast we decided to stay in Santa Eulalia for another couple of nights. Pending the strong winds, we beetled off to a fabulous anchorage for the day at Clot d'Es Llamp, eight miles up the coast at the north-eastern tip of the island. We had the beautiful bay and the turquoise water entirely to ourselves the whole day. Bliss.

Taking advantage of being holed up by the weather we hired a car the following day to see something of the interior of the island. To be honest it was rather disappointing. The development of tourism on the island has killed the rural communities and it was all rather run-down. We found a little farmhouse restaurant for lunch where the service was appalling – surly and unhelpful – and only two out of the three meals we ordered turned up with no hint of an apology. It was in the afternoon that Richard discovered that his flight was that night and not the following night so it was just as well we were not drifting across the sea to Majorca in blissful ignorance.

After Richard's departure, still the wind whistled through the rigging so we decided to stay yet another day in Santa Eulalia before heading for Majorca. Without the encumbrances of guests we slapped another couple of coats of varnish on our new sole boards.

We awoke the following morning to find the wind had abated to F4 northwesterly, perfect for our crossing to Majorca if it wasn't that there was still an uncomfortable 2m swell – a hangover from the previous days' winds. I made the mistake of heading straight for Palma only to find that the numerous high-speed ferries were, not unnaturally, on exactly the same track. However much I changed course to get out of their way, they seemed to delight in aiming straight at us, passing within feet in a fury of wash. After a couple of close encounters I headed a mile east, well off their rhumb line.

We arrived in Palma at 1715, having motor-sailed for the last four hours as the wind had backed to the southwest and died somewhat which made it rather sloppy in the still big seas which were running. We arrived to find Palma building up for the Superyacht Week and the harbour was stuffed full of the most spectacular collection of the largest yachts I had ever seen. This made accommodation rather tight but the Real Club Nautico de Palma accommodated us on a new pontoon they have installed and we found ourselves almost alongside fellow RCC members David Beckley and his son John on *Shady Lady*. Palma is an opulent, thriving city with narrow streets flanked by beautiful old buildings but during our evening walk we found it surprisingly dead. This may be because the majority of tourists here are German or British, both of whom eat very much earlier than the Spanish.

Wednesday 30 May and a day of work on a smelly holding tank, an underperforming new windlass motor and an autopilot controller which kept on turning itself off. Whilst I was busy on the maintenance, Maria went off and arranged for a permit to moor in the Cabrera Islands on the following Sunday and Monday.

The following morning, we headed off to explore the delights of Majorca, first stop being Cala Figuera eight miles southwest of Palma which we had all to ourselves for the day. Being a little exposed we decamped half a mile north to the rather more protected Cala Portals for the night. A short walk round the bay of Cala Portals and you come across the entrance to a cave. The cave is, in fact, man-made with stone being quarried from it in the 14th and 15th centuries to build Palma Cathedral and the church in Santa Eulalia. Inside the cave, carved into the rock face, is a large and highly ornate shrine. It was really quite spooky.

The following morning we headed 20 miles southeast across the Bahia de Palma to the marina at La Rápita which was to be our jumping off place to explore the Cabrera Islands the following day. One thing I have always done as a matter of habit is to adhere to the custom of lowering my ensign each evening at (roughly) the proscribed hour. In home waters, whilst by no means universally adopted, there is a noticeable flurry of activity at the given time. But since leaving home waters I don't think I had seen anyone ever lowering their ensign. But this night I knew I would not be alone as a couple of boats down was a Royal Yacht Squadron motor cruiser with white ensign fluttering at its stern. Come 2100 there I was at my stern waiting to take my timing from the senior vessel. At 0800 the following morning I would still have been standing there having watched the white ensign flutter away all night had I not lost interest pretty quickly and lowered my ensign with a slight feeling of disappointment at the lack of tradition now shown even by members of our most senior yacht club. Yes – I'm turning into a grumpy old man.

Sunday 3 June and we set off early for what we had been told should be a highlight of the cruise. The Cabrera Archipelago lies ten miles south of Majorca and is a fiercely protected national park. No anchoring is allowed in the well protected bay "Puerto de Cabrera" but it has moorings laid for about 100 yachts, all of whom are obliged to have a permit. Whilst it is the unique ecosystems and wildlife, both above and below the sea's surface, that are protected, the principal island also has an extraordinary history. Following settlement in the Bronze Age, a monastery was established on the island as early as 390 AD. The excellent protection of the natural harbour was much sought after, and protected by the castle which was built

overlooking the harbour entrance in 1410. But it was the early 19th century which was the most infamous period in the island's history. During the Peninsular War 12,000 French prisoners-of-war were dumped on this tiny barren island to fend for themselves. Over the following five years lack of food, water and the outbreak of epidemics resulted in the deaths of nearly one half of the prisoners. A poignant monument erected in 1847 stands, rather overgrown and neglected, as a memorial to those wretched souls¹.

However rather than going straight to Puerto de Cabrera we initially went to the (day only) anchorage on the east side of the island, Cala Es Borri, where we spent a lazy afternoon – the only boat in the cala. Late afternoon and we made our way round to the bay and picked up a mooring. Early in the season there were plenty to choose from with only about 30 boats in the harbour. We went ashore by dinghy and checked in with the friendly park rangers who advised us that the best time to visit the famous blue grotto was the early evening when the sun was low. We immediately left the harbour in our dinghy and headed across to the grotto about a mile to the east of the harbour entrance. As we arrived at the grotto we were overtaken by a National Park launch who informed us that dinghy's were restricted to the harbour, but then obligingly allowed us to motor into the grotto and wow at the simply amazing colour of the brilliantly blue water.

We were expecting overcast conditions and some rain the following day so we made the most of the evening with a walk up to the castle and the spectacular views over the island before returning to *Mina*². There is a pier alongside the small cluster of buildings in the harbour reserved for local fishing boats. We were led to believe that only traditional fishing boats were permitted. The sea-going iron trawlers strapped two abreast on the quay were not my idea of traditional, nor was the sound of the generators and the glare of the lights which were kept on all night, rather spoiling the tranquility of this idyllic spot.

Notwithstanding, Cabrera Island is a fabulous place, full of wildlife and rich in history. There seem to be more personnel running the place with quiet, friendly efficiency than there are visitors. And even though this is the most sought after spot in the Balearics (and therefore a marketing dream) you can't give your money away. No charge was made for the permit. No charge was made for the mooring (when in high season the marinas just 10 miles away are charging £100 a night). The excellent museum guide is published in four different languages. I tried to buy a copy as a memento but they weren't for sale. You couldn't even buy a Cabrera Island T-shirt or postcard. But perhaps it is precisely because of the lack of commercialisation that makes it such a tranquil and unique place to visit.

The following morning wasn't as gloomy as forecast, but pleasantly cool for a walk (another permit required) along one of the defined paths to which one was restricted. Having visited the monument to the unfortunate Frenchmen we walked across the hills to the lighthouse on the southwest corner. On our way back we visited the island's museum which is only open for a couple of hours every day.

¹ The Prisoners of Cabrera: Napoleon's Forgotten Soldiers 1809-1814 by Denis Smith

Tuesday 5 June - our permit was expiring and it was time to move on to Porto Colom 24 miles to the north-east. With the wind F4/5 and bang on the nose it would have been a long and damp beat so we motored the whole way, breaking the journey to pop into Cala Ferrera for lunch.

All the mooring buoys in Porto Colom were occupied so we anchored in 3m opposite the town. The town is lovely with old-fashioned houses strung alongside the waterfront with lots of traditional small wooden fishing boats moored along the quay. It had a real Mediterranean feel to it, notwithstanding being occupied mainly by blond-haired, blue-eyed Germans who seem to dominate the tourism in this area. In the evening we went ashore and had a fabulously good (and good value) meal at "Florian Bar Restaurant" with delicious compositions such as seabass on a bed of lime rice. Really different and really delicious. You need to book, but it's worth it.

Our friends, Jeannette and Adrian Burn have a villa overlooking the small but very pretty Cala de Sa Font about four miles south of the north-east tip of the island. We had heard so much about the villa over the years and were looking forward to the visit. We called them on the phone as we approached, and the welcoming committee of Adrian and most of his family shot out of the cala in their powerful new RIB and escorted us in, perfectly timing our arrival to coincide with lunch. The villa was quite brilliantly designed by Jeanette's mother about 40 years ago. In a stunning location on the rocks overlooking the cala, all the doors, windows, corridors, and mirrors are angled to expose different views of the cala with its gin-clear turquoise water. Very clever and very beautiful. We returned to the boat for a siesta before returning to the villa for dinner on the terrace, overlooking *Mina*² at anchor. Before leaving the boat I surreptitiously hoisted some fairy lights up the rigging and turned them on. Invisible in the daylight but, as the sun fell, there was *Mina*² twinkling away like a veritable superyacht!

Prior to going ashore, quite a swell was running into the cala at an oblique angle to the wind, causing the boat to roll quite a bit. I experimented by attaching a line from the stern to the anchor chain and warping ourselves round to face the swell. End of rolling. But when we returned to the boat later that night we found her beam on to the swell rolling like a pig again. So lesson learnt: warping round on the anchor chain works brilliantly whilst you are counteracting a wind (or tide) but is hopeless when the wind dies. So we quickly recovered the now useless warp, deployed a stern anchor to turn us head on to the swell, and enjoyed a peaceful roll-free night.

The following day the younger generation of Burns were leaving so we left them to their goodbyes and set off earlyish to the north coast which, compared with the south of Majorca, is barren and unspoilt and beautiful because of that. The wind was light and on the nose so we motored round the north-east corner of Majorca, first to Cala Es Caló on the eastern side of the large Bahia de Alcudia. Initially we were the only boat there but it soon filled up so we headed north-west across the bay, round the Cabo Del Pinar to the cala on the north-western tip of the cape. However we found it buoyed and chained off protecting a military site, so we headed north (at last sailing on a shy reach) to Cala en Gossalba on the northern side of the Bahia de Pollença where we spent a peaceful night.

We were in need of a maintenance day so we sailed five miles west to the head of the bay to the big marina of Puerto de Pollença where we found the Flying Fifteen World Championships taking place which gave a great buzz to the place. However the distraction from Maria's point of view were the excellent facilities of the Reial Club Nàutic de Pollença which included a swimming pool with sun-loungers under large umbrellas and waiter service from the bar restaurant. Once she had polished the superstructure Maria felt she had deserved an afternoon by the pool whilst I grappled with the failure of the refrigeration pump (again).

After our (well – my) productive day of maintenance we hired a car to see something of the Majorcan hinterland. It is delightful; mountainous in parts with sweeping valleys of agricultural land and dotted with charming villages and towns. We stopped off first at the famous monastery of Lluc before meandering our way to Sineu, a delightfully pretty, sleepy market town in the centre of the island for lunch. We discovered the restaurant owner was Argentine (lots of young Argentines emigrated to Spain when the economy collapsed six years ago). She fed us with a challenging selection of typical Majorcan tapas, most of which consisted of unspeakable parts of dead animals. Absolutely delicious.

Sunday 10 June and our 35-mile crossing to Menorca was, sadly, a motor the whole way. We looked into Ciutadella on the west coast but found the yacht club quay, normally used by visiting yachts, had been buoyed off. We nipped round the corner to Cala Degollador and anchored behind a rock but it was too much like anchoring in a building site so we weighed and went round the south-west corner of the island to Cala Son Saura where we anchored in the east corner. The cala was full of small motorboats, but they all left as the evening approached, leaving us to ourselves in this delightful spot.

The following morning the first of the nudists (or nudants as they are known in the Barker family) had arrived on the beach to enjoy the discrete tranquility when, from afar, we began to hear what sounded like screaming children. After a while a large tourist boat swung round the headland and came into the bay. Our ears hadn't deceived us; the boat was packed to the gunwhales with hundreds of over-excited kids. It was like a scene from St Trinian's. They came pouring off the boat and stampeded round to the beach, sending the alarmed nudants scurrying for their clothes. End of tranquility.

We wanted to recce as many calas as possible ahead of the arrival of our next guests so we motored down the south coast of the island dipping into as many of the numerous calas as possible, as far as Calas Covas. This is an extraordinary two-pronged cala with steep-sided cliffs dropping into the sea, in which there are numerous caves, once the home of Neolithic troglodytes. Not content with the basic shelter provided by the caves, they carried out home improvements including carving windows out of the caves and creating flues for their fires. They probably invented net curtains as well. Even now some of the caves remain occupied by (mainly naked) hippies who make them their home during the summer months. We anchored well into the eastern arm of the cala with a stern anchor to hold our position. There are a wealth of birds in the cala (including, surprisingly, black birds) and the sound of their song reverberating off the cliffs was stunning.

Tuesday 12 June and we enjoyed a delicious sail down the south coast of Menorca and through the passage between the southeast tip of the mainland and the small Isla Del Aire. The passage is very shallow at six metres over pure white sand. If we had thought we had seen turquoise waters before, they were nothing compared to this. It was an enormous temptation to haul the sails in, drop the anchor and dive into the warm welcoming water. That was until we saw the soup of small pink jellyfish everywhere. This plague of jellyfish is variously ascribed to global warming or the demise of their natural predators such as turtles. Whatever the reason, they are becoming a serious menace in the whole of the western Mediterranean. They sting, badly. And whilst you can often find jelly-free water in the morning, the moment the onshore sea breeze picks up, in they waft leaving the holidaymakers on the beach and frustrated. The problem is becoming a major worry to the authorities who are concerned what effect this may have on the tourism on which their economy increasingly depends. If the Downstairs Skipper is anything to go by, their tourism industry will stop dead in its tracks. She bought a child's shrimping net and before she would dare get in the water, we had to declare the area jelly-free for a radius of about 100 metres around the boat. Even then I had to walk round the deck with the shrimping net ahead of Maria ready to scoop any offending jelly out of the way as she swam rapidly round the boat.

So we continued sailing round to the east coast of the island and into the historically famous harbour of Mahón. There is some doubt as to the veracity of the claim that Mahón Harbour, three miles long, is the second largest natural harbour in the world (second to Pearl Harbour), but it is certainly large enough to accommodate a mediterranean fleet or two and it was this that made sovereignty over the island so attractive. Thus ownership and use of the harbour facilities changed hands regularly during the 18th and 19th centuries. Although it was in British hands for a total period of only just over 70 years, the influence of British rule is obvious from the Georgian townhouses with their sash windows to the gin distillery on the harbour waterfront. We maintained sail all the way to the head of the estuary, gliding in the wake of Nelson, past the many forts and gun positions, and picked up one of the many mooring buoys opposite the town for the night.

After a quick exploration of the town we continued with our circumnavigation of the island and goose-winged up the north-east of the coast and through the narrow entrance to the Bahia de Fornells (pronounced Fornays). We found that anchoring in this large bay is now restricted to just a few small areas in the far reaches of the bay and that the entire area opposite the town was now full of mooring buoys. The Balearic authorities are now taking conservation very seriously and areas of the coastline have restrictions on anchoring to save the meadows of *Posidonia oceanica*, seagrass which harbours unique ecosystems. Whilst applauding their initiatives in saving their natural environment, they haven't quite got the details right yet. For instance the great majority of the laid buoys were for yachts of eight metres or less – of which there were none – leaving everybody fighting over the few buoys for normal sized yachts. Further evidence of the authority's commitment to the coastal environment was the fleet of launches that every day patrolled every single cala, monitoring the water for pollution and picking up any rubbish. Very impressive.

At nearly 2 ½ miles long and threequarters of a mile wide, the Bahia Fornells is big by most standards. Whilst it doesn't quite match Mahón in size, it is a lot more

tranquil. The picturesque village is a prosperous watering hole for the rich and famous (King Juan Carlos is a regular visitor) who come to eat Caldereta de Llagosta at one of the many waterside restaurants. The caldereta is the local lobster stew and whilst fabulously expensive (about €60 a portion) we felt we had to give it ago. It is, indeed, exquisite.

The following day we started heading back to Mahón, stopping for the night in Cala Es Grau. This is one of the few calas that has a river flowing into it, in this case from an inland marsh, although our dinghy expedition found that one could not penetrate for than a couple of hundred metres due to a very low bridge.

Saturday 16 June and the arrival in the evening of our great friends Christine and Fernando from Argentina who were making one of their very rare trips to Europe. Fernando brought with him two magnificent boat hook ends as a present for *Mina*² Newly cast in bronze, one was a replica from a famous Argentine boat – absolutely massive – and the other a replica from his own wooden boat *Capaliti*, which I had always admired.

The following morning we sailed off the mooring and back-tracked to Cala Es Grau. The beach here is popular with the locals and it was interesting to note the contrasting sight of topless beauties just feet away from Muslim women with covered legs, arms and heads.

Next morning, Christine was brushing her teeth in the for'ard head when she looked out of the hull port and nearly gagged at the sight of the genitals of the fine male nudant on the boat next to us. It seems that ever since throwing off the Franco yoke of oppression, when armed police patrolled the beaches to ensure that women were respectably covered, the Spaniards have reacted by getting their kit off whenever possible. In Argentina no one even goes topless on the beaches, so cruising around an area where it is difficult finding anyone with any clothes on at all came as a complete culture shock to her!

There was a brisk northeasterly which we didn't want to waste, so we headed south east, past Mahón, gybed round the corner and enjoyed a spanking beam reach to Calas Covas where we anchored with bower and stern anchors. Again, a revelation for Christine who had a veritable parade of nudants to inspect, disporting themselves on boats and the surrounding rocks. She said that she had seen more naked men that day than she had done in her entire life!

Since we had been here the week before, we found that the two spurs to the cala – perfect anchorages – had been buoyed off, ostensibly to protect swimmers. This was a useless exercise as the only people who swim here do so from the rocks outside the buoyed off area. This is a common theme – most of the calas have buoyed off areas for swimmers but in some cases the buoys are set so far out from the beach that they virtually bar yachts from entering the cala. I really don't know what the authorities are trying to achieve.

No cruise is complete without a medical emergency and this was supplied by Christine who bit into a Mars Bar, deftly extracting a crown in the process. Quick as a flash I got the emergency dental kit and the Bosch electric drill out, but Christine

decided she would prefer to live in considerable pain for as long as it took to find a dentist. Spoilsport.

Over the next few days we moved round the coast visiting Cala Trebeluja, about two thirds along the southern coast; Calas De Algaiarens and Pregonda along the northern coast, and then a pit-stop into Fornells to confirm our mooring for the weekend. The harbourmaster was a good-looking guy who had caught the eyes of the Downstairs Skipper and Christine on a previous visit. Although he was supposed to be on duty he was nowhere to be found. We eventually tracked him down to an anchored yacht where he was preoccupied with an exceedingly attractive and completely naked young woman. Nice work if you can get it!

Our next stop was Cala de Addaia - another long estuary, but with sloping wooded hills on either side reminiscent of Devon. In the whole of the previous week, having expected a good proportion of very light winds we managed to sail everywhere, barely using the engine at all which was a real treat. Entering the estuary in a light northerly breeze, we drifted down the cala and sailed onto the anchor in the pool behind the Isla Ses Monas. Before going ashore we paddled the dinghy to the shallow upper reaches of the estuary. It was all very tranquil and very pretty. The town itself was disappointing, consisting entirely of newly-built holiday villas. As Maria said, who had been boning up on the local history, "If this place has been in existence since the Phoenicians, where are all the old buildings!"

Saturday 23 June and we had to return to Fornells where we had arranged to hire a car to drive to Ciutadella. The 7-mile passage round Punta De Es Morter was accompanied by a strong northeasterly wind which had created a big and confused sea. Fernando and I were looking forward to putting *Mina*² through her paces but the anxiety levels of the prettier members of the crew grew exponentially with the amount of canvas set, so we were obliged to restrict ourselves to a well-reefed main and staysail – much to Fernando's disgust.

We drove through rolling pastoral countryside to Ciutadella which used to be the capital of Menorca and even when the British moved the capital to Mahón, the Menorcan aristocrats remained here. Whilst the city is beautiful, it was for the famous Fieste de Sant Joan that we had come. This is the Balearic equivalent of Pamplona's running with the bulls, but with horses. The local landowners, more than a hundred of them, parade their horses through the crowds in the narrow streets to the Plaça de la Catedral to salute the Seigneur standing on the balcony of the town hall, resplendent in white breeches, tailcoat and ceremonial sword. As each caixer (horseman) passed, he doffed his cap to the Seigneur and reared his horse, spurred on by the shouts of "Olé" from the crowd, who are juiced up on a cocktail of the local gin and lemonade. Once all the caixers had saluted the Seigneur, the parade leader, astride a mule, played a haunting tune on a wooden pipe, calling the Seigneur to lead the caixers. The massive doors of the town hall swung open; there was a roar from the crowd and out galloped the Seigneur on his steed, rearing and pirouetting, scattering the ecstatic throng. The procession then made its way past the magnificent houses of the aristocratic families to the main square where, once again, all the caixers wheeled, pranced and reared their horses through the delighted and increasingly drunken crowd.

At one point, the crowd seemed to be distracted from the equestrian gymnastics, all pointing to one of the grand balconies. Looking up, there was Catherine Zeta-Jones blowing kisses to the crowd. I called out to Maria and Christine, both avid readers of *¡Hola!* magazine, to come and have a look. Several large men were bowled over by Christine as she elbowed her way through the crowd and grabbed my shirt. "Is Michael there?" she yelled in my ear "Is he there?". As she turned to look up, the unmistakable profile of the lion's mane hair and the craggy features of Michael Douglas approached the front of the balcony. A look of ecstasy came over Christine's face as she stretched her hands out to her ageing idol and manically screamed "Michael, Michael, Michael, Michael". The crowd around us all turned to look at this middle-aged foreigner making such a pathetic and embarrassing exhibition of herself. It was all deeply humiliating.

The following day the fiesta continued with the equestrian trials: each of the caixers are summoned in turn by a haunting pipe call and, armed with a lance, charge at full gallop through the now hungover throng to skewer a small ring, no bigger than Homer Simpson's donut, that is suspended above the crowd. More than half the contestants successfully skewered the ring in this amazing display of horsemanship. This is then followed by pairs of caixers galloping side-by-side through the crowds. How no one is killed remains a mystery.

Attending most fiestas, one feels like an onlooker. But being right amongst and positively interacting with the rearing horses and the caixers, one really felt a part of it. It is an extraordinary, memorable experience not to be missed.

Menorca is exceptionally rich in megalithic structures from the Talayotic period. These stone built structures date back to between 1000 and 2000 BC. The largest and most complete of these is the Naveta d'es Tudons which is shaped like an upturned boat (hence the name naveta) and is 7m high and 14m long. We stopped off on our way back from Ciutadella to have a look at it. It was used as a burial chamber and, when it was excavated in the 1950's, it contained the remains of more than 50 bodies some with bronze bracelets still on their arms.

Having returned to *Mina*² in Fornells, we sailed to Cala Pregonda seven miles to the west of Fornells but when strong northeasterlies started being forecast, we moved a further 6 miles west to Cala De Algaiarens which, in theory, would provide us with greater protection. We joined half a dozen other boats anchored in the bay. In the evening the wind picked up to the forecast 20 to 25 knots and despite being tucked behind the NE facing cliffs a long swell started to roll round the headland at 90° to the wind. We warped round on the anchor chain to bring us head-on to the swell and retired for the night. By 0200 the wind had increased to 30 knots and the other boats were now rolling violently in the 1 to 1 ½ metre swell. One of the boats seemed to have relocated to the middle of the bay. I decided to stay up on anchor watch and over a period of time realised that the relocated boat was, in fact, dragging its anchor and was now perilously close to the rocks in the SW corner. In these conditions, there was no question of getting the dinghy down to alert the crew so I shone my zillion candle-power torch at their cabin windows. This must have lit up their saloon like a film set, but there was still no sign of life, so out came my fog horn which not only eventually raised them from their slumbers but also every other boat in the anchorage. When they must have been just feet from the breaking waves pounding

on to the rocks there was a flurry of activity as they gunned their engine and motored back into the middle of the bay to re-lay their anchor. I settled down to my anchor watch monitoring the ever-increasing swell rolling into the bay and hearing the breakers pounding behind us onto the beach. I then saw a particularly large swell approaching, rearing and then breaking - in front of us. We were now behind the surf-line. Enough was enough. Everybody was up on deck as quick as a shot with lifejackets on, the anchor was weighed and we headed out into 35 to 40 knots of wind and steep breaking seas. The Downstairs Skipper, whose only conditions of sailing are NO night sails, NO strong winds and NO big seas, now had all three in spades but she was terrific, securing everything below, dishing out the heavy-weather gear and tending to the sick.

We put up a scrap of main, really just to steady the boat, and motored west with the breaking seas on our starboard quarter. The occasional wave dumped itself into the cockpit but all in all it was a lot safer than remaining in the anchorage. Having gybed round the northwest corner of the island the waves started to abate although the wind was still increasing, gusting to 50 knots. Eventually we rounded Cabo De Banyos and into the tranquility of the protected waters outside of Ciutadella. Dawn was just breaking and at 0600 we dropped anchor in Cala Degollador just south of the entrance to Ciutadella harbour. What a night!

Over the next three days we made our way back down the south coast to Mahón, arriving at dusk on Thursday 28 June. We decided to anchor for the night in Cala Taulera to the east of Isla del Lazareto. The anchorage was full to bursting but we were delighted to bump into Bob and Cindy Cross on *Godspeed* – old friends we hadn't seen since St Katherine Docks in London. Sadly a reunion drink was not to be, as they were desperate to get some sleep before their 0300 departure for a two day passage to Sardinia. Bob said they wanted to get to Croatia for the summer. It was strange to think after two months on the boat in hot, hot sun that “the summer” was still to come!

Cala Taulera is picture postcard pretty and one got the impression that most of the boats were liveaboard cruisers. A lot of the crews seemed to know each other and it had a village-like atmosphere. They weren't in any way unwelcoming, but there was a feeling that we didn't belong. I almost felt as if one had to whisper the whole time. But in any event we wanted to get a final sail in before the end of the cruise so, at 1045 we left the harbour, hoisted the cruising chute and sailed south to the anchorage on the north side of Isla del Aire, 5 miles south of Mahón.

The tiny island has absolutely nothing on it except for an imposing lighthouse, now unmanned. Nothing, that is, apart from a population of little black lizards that are unique to the island. Not that they seemed in danger of extinction – there were so many of them that it was difficult walking without treading on them. The island is also a sanctuary for Andouin's Gulls which are undoubtedly the prettiest of all gulls. After a stroll up to the lighthouse we enjoyed a lazy afternoon of lunch, siestas and swimming in the jelly-free water. The afternoon turned into a beautiful evening and after dinner, now alone in the anchorage and under a full moon in a warm cloudless sky, Fernando and I sat in the cockpit in silence listening to Fauré's Requiem. It was one of those very privileged moments.

The following morning we headed back towards Mahón but on the way there was just time to pop into Cala Rafalet which is described as one of Menorca's most beautiful calas – narrow with steep rocky cliffs. The pilot book urges one to investigate by dinghy and “approach with great caution”. Throwing caution to the wind, we went straight for it. There is a right-angled bend at the very narrow entrance which required a three point turn before the tiny cala opened up before us. My first observation was that the cala was so narrow I doubted whether there would be turning room, requiring a reverse exit with rocks close either side. But my next observation was that the cala was deserted except for a magnificent example of womanhood standing stark-naked on the high rock at the end of the cala. Legs apart and arms raised she was beckoning us in like a latter-day Siren. Like Odysseus, I was tempted, sorely tempted but, after a sharp glance from the Downstairs Skipper, sense prevailed and I slowly and reluctantly backed carefully out.

Once back on a buoy in Mahón, we cracked open a bottle of champagne – not just to mark the end of our cruise but also to celebrate *Mina*²'s 10th birthday, with 18,000 miles under her keel and, God-willing, very many more to come.

I am considered increasingly eccentric in observing the custom of lowering our ensign in harbour every evening, but it is something I have done since I first started sailing in the middle of the last century and it comes as naturally to me as brushing my teeth every night. As it was Fernando's last evening on the boat, the honour was granted to him to lower the colours at the appointed hour, an act which he performed with great dignity. This was the ultimate declaration of friendship between us, being the only time in living memory that an Argentine has lowered a British flag and got away with it!

The following day Maria and I said goodbye to Christine & Fernando and set about de-commissioning *Mina*² for her lift on to the hard for July and August, prior to our next cruise in September and August to Corsica and Sardinia.

Whilst fighting the guilt, I confess to having thoroughly enjoyed the hedonistic lotus-eating in the Balearics. Each of the islands are different, and all offer wonderful cruising in warm gin-clear turquoise water – I could certainly get used to it!

APPENDICES

A. Log Details

Date	From	To	Lat (N)	Long (W)	Log distance	Av speed
		Helford	50.05.84	005.07.62		
09/07/06	Helford	La Coruna	43.36.35	008.22.66	480.4	5.9
15/07/06	La Coruna	Camarinhas	43.08.00	009.10.94	48.1	6.2
16/07/06	Camarinhas	Muros	42.46.91	009.03.41	37.8	5.9
17/07/06	Muros	Bornalle anch	42.47.822	009.01.592	1.6	2.7
18/07/06	Bornalle anch	Carril	42.36.754	008.46.837	35.4	6.2
19/07/06	Carril	Isla de Arosa bay	42.34.131	008.53.308	6.4	6.4
19/07/06	Isla de Arosa bay	Combarro	42.25.927	008.41.990	23.1	4.6
20/07/06	Combarro	Isla Ons	42.23.318	008.55.490	11.0	5.7
20/07/06	Isla Ons	Islas Cies	42.13.906	008.54.011	10.0	5.5
21/07/06	Islas Cies	Bayona	42.07.35	008.50.75	8.3	5.5
25/07/06	Baiona	Foz do Minho	41.51.271	008.52.388	19.1	6.4
25/07/06	Foz do Minho	Viano do Castelo	41.41.634	008.49.306	11.7	3.9
26/07/06	Viano do Castelo	Leixoes	41.11.264	008.42.548	30.7	6.4
29/07/06	Leixoes	Sao Jacinto	40.39.52	008.43.81	27.8	3.7
31/07/06	Sao Jacinto	Figueira da Foz	40.08.744	008.51.545	30.0	5.5
02/08/06	Figueira da Foz	Nazare	39.35.008	009.04.490	33.0	5.3
03/08/06	Nazare	Berlinga Island	39.24.651	009.30.184	20.5	5.0
04/08/06	Berlinga Island	Lisbon	38.41.996	009.09.508	55.1	5.2
		Arrabida				
06/08/06	Lisbon	Anchorage	38.28.6	008.58.7	35.1	5.1
	Arrabida					
07/08/06	Anchorage	Sines	37.57.044	008.51.936	31.9	5.3
08/08/06	Sines	Praia da Arrifana	37.17.520	008.52.180	36.8	6.1
		Ensenada de				
09/08/06	Praia da Arrifana	Sagres	37.00.146	008.56.478	26.8	5.5
	Ensenada de					
10/08/06	Sagres	Lagos	37.06.37	008.40.241	17.3	5.5
		Culatra				
13/08/06	Lagos beach	anchorage	37.00.338	007.49.162	46.4	6.0
	Culatra					
14/08/06	anchorage	Ayamonte	37.12.492	007.24.728	30.4	5.8
15/08/06	Ayamonte	Mazagon	37.07.817	006.49.831	31.0	7.8
16/08/06	Mazagon	Chipiona	36.44.976	006.25.655	32.2	7.2
17/08/06	Chipiona	Sevilla	37.19.982	005.59.537	39.9	6.6
		Sevilla (Yacht				
18/01/00	Sevilla	Club)	37.22.2	005.59.6	2.3	6.8
	Sevilla (Yacht					
22/08/06	Club)	Chipiona	36.44.976	006.25.655	44.3	6.8

1313.2

