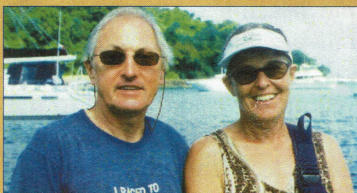


Ian raising Tunisian courtesy flag

## The highs and lows of a circumnavigation

On 6 June 2011, *Fidelio of London*, a 37' Najad sloop, completed her global circumnavigation after 13 years and 44 days, and 47,792 nautical miles. Her crew were Ian and Anne Gatenby, ably assisted by a Hydrovane. Ian and Anne start their story on a Spring morning in 1998 on the Hamble and recall their adventures to their departure from the Galapagos almost four years later.



Routing strategy was determined by Mother Nature. You can only cruise the tropics for half a year outside the hurricane season. For the other half year, you have to keep out of the hurricane zone, either by leaving the tropics, which is what we and most other cruisers do, or by going close to the equator to a zone where hurricanes (in theory) do not form. There is, thus, a half-yearly natural pattern to most of the cruising and, because of that, at any one time there are many other cruisers in the same general area following the same general pattern, and it is those with whom one has daily radio contact, in addition to meeting some of them from time to time at the well-known stopping places en route. We never really felt lonely. On the contrary, we formed some enduring friendships, the periods of isolation at sea alternating with a stimulating social life at anchor.

OUR JOURNEY BEGAN on the morning of 23 April 1998, when we slipped our berth on the Hamble and headed for Cherbourg, then Alderney and Guernsey. We cruised along the Brittany and French Atlantic coasts to La Rochelle, from where we crossed the Bay of Biscay: there, we had no wind, abundant marine life, and astonishingly deep blue water.

The northern Spanish coast and Rias were a delight, albeit we had some strange encounters in the Ria de Arosa. We were boarded, whilst underway, by Spanish customs officers carrying large torches. Some days later, on a Sunday, whilst tacking towards the mouth of the Ria in thick fog, we heard a plaintive 'Ayudamos, Ayudamos!'. We hove-to, as a small open boat, bearing three men in dark suits, white shirts and life jackets, emerged from the fog. We had just plotted our position on a chart thanks to depth readings and a nearby fairway buoy booming in the fog. The men calmed down as we indicated their current position and the direction of their village (known, we learned later, for drug trafficking), and they zoomed off into

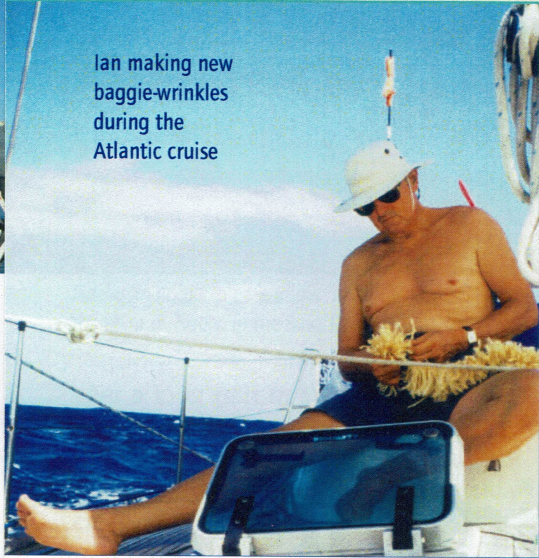
the swirling whiteness. Church goes, or drug dealers?

We followed the Atlantic coast south to Portugal, visiting Porto and Lisbon (for Expo '98), and the Algarve, and eventually entered the Mediterranean, where we headed straight for the Balearics: the highlight was sailing into magnificent Mahon harbour – both harbour and town exuding history.

We sailed to Tunisia at the end of October, making landfall in Tabarka, then cruised along the Tunisian coast calling in at most ports en route until we reached Monastir where we spent the winter – our last winter for many years. It was quite a shock for us to live in a culture where women were not seen with men in public, though it was generally tolerated in foreigners. The culture of secret police was also difficult to live with – there were many around the marina posing as fishermen. Their presence meant that you could never really get to know local people who had to be careful to whom they spoke and guarded in everything they said. We were not allowed to invite locals on to our boats. Even the sail-maker had to have a special



Ian making new baggie-wrinkles during the Atlantic cruise



Fidelio ship-shape for Atlantic crossing



Fidelio wearing baggie-wrinkles in the Turks and Caicos

permit for every boat he worked on. That said, it was a formative experience with many benefits. We lived very healthily and cheaply. Fresh produce from the oases was brought in daily to the indoor market where most of the local customers were men carrying baskets; a particular type of woven shopping basket which we quickly adopted as a sign of residency. It gave us the freedom to move around the medina without being pestered by hawkers and traders.

The makers of the Spade anchor were, at the time, based in Monastir, and a beach-side comparison of anchor-holding convinced us to buy a Spade, a move we have never regretted.

In early Spring, we headed for Malta and then Sicily where we explored the east coast.

## Spade held in F9 on 5.5. scope

**When anchored at Giardini near Taormina, a note in our log reads: 'Spade held in F9 on 5.5 scope'. We spent some terrifying hours anchor-watching in full oilies through the early morning hours, taking perverse pleasure in seeing demonstrated before our eyes the various sea-states described by Beaufort as the wind increased in strength. We had dropped in only 3.2 metres on sand and we feared being bounced on the bottom or dragging back on to the beach. So when the wind dropped to a mere F7, we re-anchored in 6m. It was an unforecast wind off Mount Etna. By 0900 there was no wind at all and an attempt to move north had to be abandoned.**

We continued via the Aeolian islands to Sardinia, Corsica, Elba and ports in NW Italy, then along the Cote d'Azur, crossed the Gulf of Lion, and day-hopped along the Spanish coast, anchoring off beaches until Gibraltar, where a number of improvements were made to the boat including renewing the fridge and the radar.

We left Gibraltar in late September and headed for Porto Santo, in the Madeira group, where we left the boat safely moored in a well-protected harbour and took the ferry to Madeira, thus avoiding the miseries of anchoring-off or rafting-up in Funchal harbour. Madeira abounds in exotic flowering trees and plants thanks to its role in maritime history when traders competed to bring back exotic plant species on their return from the Americas. A not-to-be-missed destination.

On, then, to the Canary islands where Lanzarotti was a revelation – a stark volcanic landscape punctuated by the 'works' of local architect and artist, Cezar Manrique: a concert hall in a volcanic tube, a cactus garden in a disused quarry, a modern art museum in an historic fort, a restaurant built beside an active volcano – the steam harnessed to cook the food, and more. But perhaps Manrique's greatest contribution was in restricting the height of new development on the island to tree level and planting simple gardens at street corners and roundabouts, each a work of art.

We prepared for the Atlantic crossing in Santa Cruz and left on 25 November 1999. Twenty-five days later, after a

crossing distinguished by ever-changing wind systems and only a few days of regular trade winds, we made land-fall in Tobago where we were greeted with lively Calypso-style renderings of Christmas carols. We welcomed in the Millennium at a simple beach-bar where at midnight, old marine flares were let off over the water.

We moved up the island chain to the Bahamas where we encountered a family of ferocious electric storms, especially frightening in shallow waters. We called at Bimini to sleep, and dry off, then crossed to Fort Lauderdale. From there, we headed up the US east coast, sometimes inside, via the Intracoastal Waterway and sometimes outside, to Chesapeake Bay. A highlight was going to Washington DC (a four-day sail up the Potomac River), where we had to book the opening of the Woodrow Wilson bridge to gain access. This meant that six lanes of early morning traffic had to wait patiently for 20 minutes until we were through – a powerful experience. We were royally welcomed at the Capital Yacht Club, and very thankful that the club-house had air-conditioning. It was late June and the temperatures were around 90 degrees F with 90 degrees humidity.

In New York we moored at the 79th St Boat Basin on the Hudson River where we entertained family and friends. In



Grandchildren, Gaby and Jo enjoying a sail with Ian



Kuna Indian women trading

We spent Christmas and New Year 2000/1 in Hemingway Marina in Havana – a lovely, somewhat decaying, city with wonderful street music on every corner – then sailed west to Isla Mujeres in Mexico, and south to the Colombian island of Providencia (actually off the coast of Nicaragua), where we sought refuge from bad weather.

Then came the worst incident of the whole trip. Anne remembers:

'At 0515 of the third day out of Providencia, when we were 30nm from the San Blas islands, the forestay deck stem fitting severed – the forestay, roller furling and genoa swung wildly across the foredeck, attached only by the halyard from the mast-head and sheets. Ian was helming. I was woken by a violent shudder and roaring sound. Ian had already turned downwind to save the mast, and I donned jacket and harness and rushed on deck to lower the halyard, hoping to drop the thrashing mass on to the deck. But as I began to do this the whole assembly of forestay, furler and sail flew out to leeward, breaking the halyard and fittings at the top of the mast. I immediately secured the spare and spinaker halyards forward to provide support for the mast. We trailed the unwieldy burden, sheets still attached to

the boat, for four hours, whilst trying every means to recover it. But the drag, weight and angle made it impossible, and we were obliged to cut it away.'

We continued on to San Blas, then limped to Colon in Panama, where we managed to locate a stainless steel man and a rigger. Parts had to be brought in from the US; in all, we remained in Colon for two months. Having lost our window for the Pacific, we deferred our canal transit to the following year and returned to the north west Caribbean to explore Belize with its fantastic reef snorkelling, the Bay Islands of Honduras and Grand Cayman, and to discover the delightful archipelago of Bocas del Toro in northern Panama. Despite its latitude at 9°N, Bocas is regarded as a safe-haven for sitting-out the hurricane season. We fell completely under the spell of the place: the landscape, the protected anchorage, and the relaxed water-based life-style of the local people. We attend-

Spanish by the Sea, at Bocas del Toro, Panama



## Cold sailing

We were so cold sailing that we followed local advice and wore two pairs of socks inside our sea-boots, separated by a plastic bag! It was in full oilies and this footwear that Anne dislocated her shoulder whilst preparing to move on after a night anchored off one of the entrances to the Intracoastal Waterway. We radioed the coastguard who sent the Fire Service – four large guys dressed in black neoprene suits in one vessel, and two more in a smaller one. The paramedic came up the new ladder through the new gate opening, and holding out his hand to Anne, said: 'Hi, I'm Randy.' Randy not being authorised to treat the dislocation, Anne was transferred to the larger vessel and taken to a dock where two fire-engines, two fire-trucks and one fire ambulance were waiting. Ian, meantime, was led by the smaller boat to the nearest marina and later joined Anne in a nearby hospital – still in full yellow oilies and yellow sea-boots. All ended well, but we were glad to have insurance cover for this costly rescue.

## From the Marquesas to the Mediterranean

Landfall anchorage at Fatu Hiva, Marquesas Islands and below, Anne and Ian



### 'Kidnapped'

It was in Kauehi that Ian was 'kidnapped': he was about to return by dinghy from the town pier when a dozen children scrambled aboard and directed him to take them out to the 1st navigation post, from where they would swim back to shore. Then they wanted to go to the 2nd post, at which point Ian firmly ordered his passengers out! It is difficult to imagine dumping 12 children offshore in any other setting! But in the lagoon they were in the most beautiful calm, clear, shallow light blue water, and they could swim like fish. About 30 children followed us around next day, asking for 'bonbons'. We had been forewarned and were forearmed, and enjoyed distributing them and chatting with the kids during our walk.

WE MADE LANDFALL at the island of Fatu Hiva after a passage of 2,693nm and 28 days at sea. We cruised the luxuriant Marquesas islands, then set out for the Tuomotu atolls. *Fidelio* was laden with grapefruit, lemons, guavas, papayas, bananas, mangos, starfruit, mostly picked wild. Four days later, we waited cautiously for daylight before approaching our first atoll, Kauehi. The atolls are so low, they can be detected only by clumps of palm trees on the motus – small islands formed on the encircling reef, or by the sight and ominous roar of surf breaking on the reef. You have to time your entrance for slack water, because otherwise the current through the pass in the reef will often be too great. Kauehi is inhabited, with one village of about 300 people, known locally as Kauehi City! Our first impression of being ashore was of the

incredible dry heat rising from the hard coral surface. Apart from coconut trees of which there were many, there was very little vegetation and only a rare fruit tree.

We moved on to Tahanea, an uninhabited atoll renowned for its beauty and tranquility. But not so for us – we sat out a week of adverse weather here, the only boat in the atoll, and only managed to get to shore once in that time. By the end of the period, the wind having been so strong and having changed direction so many times, our anchor was firmly wedged under one coral head, and our chain wrapped several times around others. Ian managed to 'fish' for the eye of the anchor using a large meat hook and rope, and succeeded in dislodging it. Then we spent hours trying to unwrap the chain with Ian shouting directions from the dinghy and Anne at the wheel,

### Whale watch

Soon out of Galapagos, we saw a seven metre beaked whale, rather like an outsized bottle-nosed dolphin. A few days later, we heard a noise like an express train running alongside the boat and there was another seven metre whale, which we identified as Cuvier's beaked whale from its unusual brown colouring and triangular fin. For several days we kept coming across pods of 30 or so pilot whales. At night, it was an eerie experience to be on watch surrounded by these unseen but heavily breathing, sociable creatures.