

The Origins Cruise (conclusion) Darwin to Kinvara 2011-2012

Fergus Quinlan

Darwin: 33°C under a hot blue sky, all sunshades are rigged. Several days are spent lugging essentials as *Pylades* is provisioned. Kay goes to the hospital for final check up on her mending fingers and meets a County Clare nurse who opens gates as it were. Surgeons appear and opinion that all is well, the plaster is removed. A physiotherapist arrives minutes later and works on Kay's hand for an hour and insists she returns for more sessions before we depart. The power of the Irish diaspora knows no end. On 8th August 2011 we sail for Kupang in Timor, 450 miles west. Wind proves unreliable over the next few days and progress is made mainly under engine. Eventually the wind arrives and Indonesia is closed under fine sailing conditions.

Indonesia: On the morning of the 12th off the beach at Kupang we are hailed to come ashore to pick up an officious official who objected both to getting his feet wet and to the size of our dinghy; on board he produces an amazing array of documents and stamps, it was Peter Sellers at his most bizarre. He states repeatedly that he had not eaten or drunk since dawn as it was the holy month of Ramadan, he then requests wine, the skipper goes to get a glass, but quick as a flash the light-fingered inspector had stuffed the full two litre box into his official bag.

Sleeping fitfully in this uneasy anchorage an unearthly wailing fills the air at 04.00. The mosque is calling the faithful to prayer and everyone else at megawatts with high speaker towers. However, it is not just a call to prayer it broadcast the whole hour-long service sung as would a demented sheep. This was to occur five times per day. Our guide, who is a Christian, is very abusive about the noise, but at least he says peace reigned. Fifteen years previous the Muslims had soaked the local priest in petrol and set fire to him, the Christians retaliated by burning out a load of Muslim houses and cars. All sounds a bit familiar, where would we be without it.

08.00 Saturday we meet our English-speaking guide Ayub on the beach he explains that we had to check in with customs, immigration, back to customs, then the harbourmaster. As it was Saturday official offices were closed but he had friends everywhere, they all might have to be helped a little he added, as pay was poor and to get a government job, which was precious, one had to borrow for the substantial bribes. A customs officer arrives on the beach where many forms are filled and stamped. He explains that after immigration we must return to him. First we go to an ATM and withdraw 3,150,000rp. We are now multi-millionaires, one euro equals 10833rp. At the Immigration office the only sign of life is a pile of rubbish smouldering at the gate. The official arrives on a motor bike. Ayub passes 15,000rp from us to him, who informs us that he was locked out of the office, but fair play; he piles furniture up against a wall and effectively breaks in to get our clearance stamps. Everybody appears to be constantly dialling, talking on or at least fiddling with their mobile phone; the way to an official's heart we found was to admire his device.

Many smiles and handshakes and we are back to 'Teddy's Bar' to meet and inform Teddy we had the 'stuff' for him. This was a soda-stream kit brought from Darwin, carefully checked out by us, as the penalty for bringing drugs into Indonesia is death! Just then three customs officers reappear. Teddy whispers "hush" and disappears. Sweet hot coffees arrive to the table. Customs officers, Kay, Ayub, taxi driver and I all sit around the table, filling forms with much stamping, hand - shaking and paying bribes, then off on a long drive to the Port Captain. Another pile of forms filled, signed, stamped and new ones typed on an ancient typewriter by a man with one gold stripe. All the papers then passed to a man with two stripes who on altering a few things passes them to a man with three stripes. Finally we are ushered through a door framed in pink nylon drapes to a carpeted office with the ambience somewhere between a funeral parlour and a brothel, into the presence of the Port Captain. He is sitting on a large chair under a coat of arms and portraits of the incumbent President and flanked by two secretaries. Swathed in gold braids and oozing charm he signed our copious forms with a bejewelled hand.

On leaving we looked down at the port below, a single ship was docked with no activity apparent.

Behind, on the hill overlooking the harbour was a large dominant cement factory; we were told that nothing had been produced there for many years. It had been closed due to endemic corruption, we can't imagine why! Now free to roam the town on foot we take stock. Being the only white or indeed tourist of any shade in town, everywhere we were a curiosity, keeping a low profile was not an option. The vast majority are very friendly, the roads abuzz with thousands of light motorbikes some with husband, wife and three children on board, most, but not children, had helmets. A bike would whiz past with dozens of live screaming chickens tied to poles. Weaving through all this are the boombox busses, small vans that could pack in about 12 people, festooned in decorations, and blasting heavy rock. We used these buses on occasion much to the surprise of the incumbents.



Running rig

Kupang: vibrant, exciting and filthy

A vibrant exciting place was Kupang but one could understand the dearth of tourists. The city is filthy, it has never seen a bin collection, piles of rubbish everywhere some smouldering, ruined buildings, filthy water lapping on the shore, the rivers and sea are where rubbish is dumped. With broken footpaths and open drains you have to watch every step. Ayub tells us of endemic poverty with people in the countryside eating leaves and starving. He told of corruption at every level, that in the hospitals there are no medicines without a bribe and the expense of schooling. There is little or no work he said for anyone, with a huge and young population growing by over 2,250,000 a year. His only income was the occasional visitor, every morning he goes to the airport hoping to meet someone he can perhaps help, and then back to the beach to see if any yachts have arrived. We meet Toba who has a wife and children inland but sleeps under the broken pier by the beach; if a dinghy comes ashore he helps them up the beach and minds the dinghy for 30,000rp (€2.50) a day. he is a lovable man worth his weight in gold. He says his income will cease with the departing of the yachts. We think we are the last this year.

Later in the day Teddy "goods" are finally delivered; he is most grateful, offering us a bed for the night in his hotel, which might well have proved to be very interesting! An establishment that could have been a set in a Vietnam War movie complete with flags, girls and sixties music. The skipper is deposited at 'Teddy's' to chill while Kay goes to the street market for a few bits. As soon as she

disappears the skipper, while looking on a tranquil sea, sipping a cold beer and listening to 'Hey Jude', feels a warm hand caress his shoulder... "Hi, you on your own?" a soft voice says. "You could say that" I reply. "Mind if I sit down?" "No not at all". "What is your name?" she intones. Ferruggus". "That's a lovely name"—"thanks"—"and yours"—"Cynthia" she purrs. "And what age is Cynthia" I ask? —"twenty four", "so similar" I say. "Are you REALLY on your own?" she asks again. I explain that my wife will return shortly. There is a longish pause and as she places her hand on my thigh she says "So I suppose ... no boom boom!". "No boom boom today" I say. I ask her if I could photograph. "Absolutely" she says, and I do. As she exits the yard on her motorbike, prayers from the mosque drift over, mixing with bar music and Kay returns. Any news she asks...

16th August. We exit Kupang with fickle winds, to anchor at Lehok Gingg. For the first time in months the skipper goes hull and prop cleaning and fits a new prop anode, resulting in a panting session; getting less fit methinks! We had hoped to see Komodo Dragons on the beach; we find fresh footprints but encounter none. Next day we sail making over 10 knots between the islands in a swirling tide, to North Komodo. Here the water is crystal clean and we can see our anchor down in 12 metres — such a relief after the murky waters of the past months. In Monjo we have some of the best snorkelling since Tonga. A riot of coral colours and reef fish lie beneath our ship. As we raise anchor the next morn, the clear visibility allows us to manoeuvre the boat to unwind chain from the coral heads and minimise damage. Anchoring near coral always raises such ethical issues and while large sections of Indonesian coral had been destroyed by locals fishing with explosives and cyanide, that still does not change the issue. As the sun rises on the 23rd we pick up a mooring at Gili Air, a tourist resort island with the only transport being by horse and buggy. Here for the first time in Indonesia we meet some of our fellow travellers. We spend two very chilled days here and even eat out twice, the food being excellent and the costs minimal.

Bali: On the passage to Bali with a favourable current speeding us south, we encounter the amazing Balinese spider boats, dozens of tiny triamarans with colourful sails whizzing along in a big rolling sea. Bali International Marina is rundown but with a certain charm; over the coming days we stock essentials. The centre of town is a 10 kilometre taxi ride away, everywhere there are shrines and temples to the many and varied gods of the Hindu. Thousands of statues are swathed in colourful materials with offerings of flowers and incense at their feet. It appears to be a gentle private religion, in contrast to that blaring from the mosques. However, they are not alone in the volume stakes, a large three-storey tourist ship docked close to our marina berth makes out to sea and back twice a day accompanied by megawatts of angry foul-mouthed ghetto rap. We fail to see the connection between the noise and relaxed tourism; requests for mitigation are scorned. Somewhere there must be a virus that preys on man's most vile invention, amplifiers!!

The skipper has a snack in one of the thousand restaurants and spends a few very ill days regretting. Eating out drops back off the agenda. We stock from the vast Carrefour's supermarket, fill our tanks with 20 litre bottles of water, top up the diesel and gas. We have unearthed an international conspiracy. This is expressed by a surplus of officials in most harbours whose sole purpose in life is to harass the cruising yachtsman, the multifarious types of gas bottles and fittings which forces clandestine fillings threatening entire marinas if a smoker should pass at the wrong moment, and finally the fact that each local water tap has its own unique fitting. But it all adds to the challenge and the charm. Finally on 1st September with favourable winds and current we leave for Cocos Keeling 1120 miles to the west.

Cocos Keeling: After eight days we negotiate our way in through the stunning colours of the lagoon and anchor in the lee of Direction Island. 'Customs' arrives on a jet ski and provides a wealth of information. Snorkelling is magnificent but the boat has one reef shark circling, and when two more join and begin to circle the skipper abandons hull cleaning and the water. The adjacent beach is a classic white sand atoll scene with over hanging coconut trees. When Darwin arrived here in 1836 he commented on the abundant bird life, however in 1854 a ship was wrecked and the abandoning rats found a seemingly inexhaustible supply of food, chicks and eggs. Like humans they quickly expanded their population to ensure non-sustainability. The birds have disappeared but moves are afoot to change the order of things. A rat-eliminating team with tons of poison is at work. We walk down the windward side of the island and find other phenomena that Darwin would not have witnessed, thousands of discarded flip-flops and plastic bottles ranged along the high water line. This is where some of the rubbish we witnessed being dumped in every drain, river and beach in Indonesia goes.

The rip is an opening in the reef where the nutrient-rich waters of the ocean pour through the outer reef into the lagoon, at about 4 knots. To snorkel it one jumps into its centre, you are then whisked through the chasm filled with myriads of fish species and a fabulous background of coral. It is amazing; the skipper did it thrice. Two of the other islands of the group are permanently inhabited and ethnically divided; Home Island has about 500 mainly ex-Malay Muslims, West Island has the airfield and 150 non-permanent Australians mainly in administration and services. There is no discernable income to the island group; all are apparently funded by the mining resources of Australia.

13th and 14th September respectively sees us celebrating both our birthdays with a fire on the beach, guitars and boxes are played, songs are sung, food and wine is quaffed – a most memorable 65th for the skipper. Where is time going? Also fêted is news of the release of our fellow cruisers and friends from Denmark, Jan, Marie, their children and crew of sailing boat *ING*. They had been held captive by Somali pirates for seven months. Next day begins the 2300 mile haul to Mauritius. The first day or so is fine sailing with 15 knots and light seas, but by the 18th the wind is gusting 20 to 30 knots and the seas are 3.5 metres and confused with a swell from the south battling the following sea, we roll horribly in the melee and are oft swept. For the next few days the cockpit is uninhabitable and below is to put it mildly, uncomfortable. With the main and staysail stowed, we are running under a third of the genoa. The washboards and hatches are locked in position, below decks we read, popping our heads up every 15 minutes like marine moles, to watch for shipping; we sight a few far off.

Every morning Kay runs an SSB radio net, at 10.00 local, her dulcet tones call out, “this is yacht *Pylades*, Kay calling, is anyone on frequency”? Information is then exchanged on positions, weather and news. We’re not the only ones connecting. Tuning-in to frequencies for email, weather traffic, or the morning net, a whimsical medley of background sounds emanate from the radio’s scratchy speakers: clicks, whirrs, chirps, hums, pulsating tones, the odd garbled word, maybe English but probably not. They echo in our tiny cabin on a tiny boat in this vast ocean. Some of the sounds represent nature’s glory – the crackle of electricity in towering thunderclouds; the static of solar storms. It’s a mess up there.

On the 24th the half way mark is celebrated with a glass of wine, the wind and seas ease back and it is now possible to sit in the cockpit again, we even manage saltwater showers. With full genoa poled out to port and staysail to starboard, but no mainsail, we are holding over 140 miles a day. And so the Indian Ocean is traversed, we get the occasional day of glorious sailing and then back to squalls and cross swell. When Joshua Slocum passed this way in the late 1800s he wrote that never had he been drenched so often. Not much has changed.

28th September. 03.30 the baby-stay SS strap-toggle securing it to the deck, snaps. It is re-attached with a high-load shackle and tightened; the load is now out of line and a weak point. We proceed under reduced sail and hope for an easing of conditions. Later that day Rodriguez is passed, we had planned to stop, but we hear that no water is available and as our tanks are low, we press on. More than expected shipping is sighted on passage, perhaps driven around the Cape by pirates.

Mauritius: 2nd October: 02.00 arrive Port Louis, failing to raise the port authority at entry, they unfortunately respond as we prepared to tie at the customs dock. After a tense discourse on the radio, they order a very cranky skipper back out to sea were we drift aimlessly offshore until 06.00. The marina, however, is one of the most charming and cheapest we have ever stayed in. The town had a lively market packed with colourful luscious fruits, spices and vegetables, the general vibrancy and good humour of the people is a treat. Rashid, the Indian taxi man and general Mr. Fixit appears each morning on the marina, he could and did fix and organise for the sailors; nothing is a problem for Rashid. Our broken stay-toggle is replaced, a rig inspection shows that our port lower spreader had jumped about 75mm up out of line, gremlins having loosened the lock nuts. This is eased back with a block of timber and a lump hammer. It is a very social period with about 10 boats preparing for the haul to South Africa. An Irish dinner is hosted on board ‘*Second Wind*’ in honour of Kay, for her radio work on the Indian Ocean.

Natural Selection, the driving force of evolution, has no foresight. When the ancestral pigeons of the Dodo arrived in Mauritius a few million years ago they found a land of plenty with no predators. Thus they evolved into large ground-feeding birds, and with no one to flee from, lost the ability to fly. In

1507 sailors arrived, the fearless birds apparently almost inedible but easy prey were clubbed to death in their thousands. The introduction of dogs, cats, rats which ate their eggs, and extinct by 1700.

Reunion: A boisterous overnight passage of 140 miles sees us to Le Port. The friendly check-in takes about 30 seconds, stamp, stamp, "bonjour" and they are gone, never having even asked for our clearance papers ... *vive La France*. A fabulous island for walking, we enjoy our hikes high into the hills. We meet again *Wizard of Africa* a powerful 60 footer with five hardy South African sailors on board. During drinks on-board *Pylades* they persuaded us that Richards Bay would be a more pleasant landing than Durban.

Worst 24 hour run ever

31st October; we leave Reunion and make for a waypoint about 120 miles south of Madagascar. After two days of sailing in light winds and little sea we run into a rain cell which lashes us for about 12 hours and switches the wind from the northeast to the south. Swells breaking on the bow snap the anchor tie, but we eventually regain control. The next day, close-hauled in light airs, we do our worst 24 hour run ever of 89 miles. The SSB brings shocking news that *Wizard of Africa* has hit a drifting container during the night and gone down. They had no time for confirmation of their DSC call, thankfully however their EPIRB worked and all crew were picked up from their life-raft by a freighter, 8 hours later. A dirty enough night as we round the southern tip of Madagascar, wind goes 20 to 30 knots and we run into a counter-current which turns the waves into furies. We get pooped.

Had we been sailing this route 165 million years previously our way would have been blocked by India, and rounding the Cape we would have had to plough through Antarctica and a bit of South America. That is before all those land masses started off on their tectonic plate voyages, which continue at about the same speed our fingernails grow.

7th November. A calm day under engine, our Auto helm dies however we are saved from hand-steering as the wind springs up and we can revert to the Monitor; two glorious days of sailing follow. Eventually the wind rises to 25 knots and with counter-currents so does our discomfiture, as we twist and turn in the Mozambique Channel. We are now in contact with the South African 'Peri-Peri' SSB net, which gives invaluable weather and routing information to cruisers. We are warned against entering the dreaded Agulhas current in a southerly, so we hove-to 80 miles out from Richards Bay, with a 30 knot south wind whistling through the rigging and 3 metre seas. To add to our discomfort on checking the engine compartment we find it has flooded almost up to the batteries; something is caught around the prop vibrating the shaft and causing a leak from the stern gland. After pumping we start the engine and spin the prop fast forward and reverse, it seems to work. Out of the night a ship bears directly down on us; calling it on the VHF, it changes course and misses. It's a long night.

South Africa: 11th November. At dawn the wind backs easterly, we press on for Richards Bay: getting into the grip of the Agulhas current we start to fly at 9 knots. By the time we enter the Bay the rig is over-canvassed, the self-steering cannot cope and Kay hand-steers the last few very quick miles. Elation grips us as *Pylades* sweeps through the entrance in sheets of spray. We are ecstatic to have crossed the Indian Ocean, a crossing we had never planned from the start and which we had approached with a degree of trepidation. It had proved to be a testing ocean indeed. We tie in the small boat basin at 19.00, open a bottle of champagne and crash asleep. Dawn brings vervet monkeys gambolling about on dock and deck; we had been warned to keep our hatch and washboard openings less than monkey size, as they raid at great speed. We are overwhelmed by welcomes from local people and fellow sailors. The dockside has bars and restaurants and we treat ourselves to an excellent meal ashore. The town of Richards Bay is a 15 minute taxi ride away; we restock at the shopping mall, the biggest apparently in the southern hemisphere, and perhaps the most architecturally challenged. However the super markets are amazing for the range of goods, the excellent quality and value. Sarah, Fergus's daughter arrives to visit with boyfriend Rupert, and informs of marriage plans on our return. Celebratory dinners on *Pylades* and ashore are accompanied with much bubbly and toasting.

A wonderful day is spent at the game-reserve of Hluhluweimfolozi with guide and jeep; we encounter an amazing range of animals from the huge bull elephant to the busy dung beetle all displaying the astonishing complexity of evolution. Our guide tells us how the unfortunate belief that eating ground

rhinoceros horn improves sexual performance, has led to the death of 420 rhinos in 2011. He says that the park rangers now have a shoot to kill policy on poachers. After a week in the small-boat harbour of Richards Bay, *Pylades* moves to the Zululand Marina, a social hub of boats awaiting passage south, and carrying out repairs.

Crocodile and sharks

Diving on the prop is unpleasant in the murky water so we run *Pylades* onto a grid, which only drops the water a metre but enough to polish the propeller and change anodes. Having been informed that crocodile and shark are about, ensures the work is carried out smartly. Kay returning to *Pylades*, over-burdened with provisions, is surrounded by a troop of monkeys who spot a possible lunch. She drags all the bags to a workshop where the workers agree to keep nicks on the food. Under the watchful eye of our ancestors she shuttles bags back to the boat. Harassment of cruising yachswomen comes in many forms.

Weather windows open and close with rapidity. On 26th November we exit Richards Bay with a forecast of fair winds 15 to 20 knots from the northeast, and this is the case until past Durban. However the wind increases during the night 25 to 35 knots; ahead of us a French catamaran is reporting gusts of 65 knots. Constant solid rain, lightning and thunder accompany the rising wind, making a horrible sea and a challenging passage. To compound the misery the plotter throws a wobbly, refuses to give positions, wipes most of the detail off the charts, and no longer shows AIS targets. As visibility is almost nonexistent we try radar but the peaking pyramidal waves bury the screen in clutter. Our hearts miss a beat when a freighter looms off the bow, silhouetted by lightning, and disappears seconds later in the driving rain. 30 miles out from East London the wind dies, leaving us motoring slowly in a confused sea. We tie there after only two days sailing but seldom has a passage taken so much out of us.

East London springs some surprises: We are the only boat on passage in the harbour. A couple on the dock take us on the tour of the town and surroundings and provide insights into the workings of South Africa, the good and the bad. The following evening before we cross the river to the yacht club for a sundowner, Kay notices smoke pouring from a large motor-boat moored just behind, we dial the fire service, men rush from all directions with extinguishers and hoses, the brigade arrives. The blaze is extinguished but the 13metre launch is gutted. A poor shore-power connection apparently was the cause. We now definitely need a drink.

The members of the club are welcoming; conversations range from blatant racism to measured observations. Everywhere we hear tales, and not just from the white side, of rampant corruption. We inform them that in this they are most certainly not alone, as we regale them with tales of blatant robbery in our own Fair Isle. On the positive side the newspapers and radio appear vigorous in reporting the ills of the state, so hope remains. We take a tour of the local Mercedes Benz factory, while it is fairly obvious that labour costs have something to do with its location, it is an amazing experience witnessing rows of robots whizzing panels around the place and spot-welding at speed, a few of those lads would have been very handy for us in the building of *Pylades*.

Port Elizabeth: 4th December. We sail for Port Elizabeth the forecast 15 to 20 knot northeasterlies are again optimistic. We reef and reef again before dropping the main altogether, and run off before the wind which rises to 40 knots and as we approach our destination to over 50 knots, the sea is very confused and white, matching the countenance of the skipper. After a fine pooping things improve. Entering the marina at 00.15 we manage to tie alongside a large racing yacht for the night. At dawn we get a slip, and are directed to observe how all the permanent boats are tied. Festooned they are, with myriads of hefty dock-lines, steel springs, and tyres. When a swell arrives we understand why, the motion is worse than at sea. Snatching, creaking docks, despite doubling all lines and making them as long as possible to increase spring, we snap many. The most dangerous action ever carried out by the skipper was replacing dock lines at night, crawling on all fours on a bucking pontoon, with heavy boats around crashing into it. Springs lying slack and crossing the dock to get length would lift and snap tight in a split second. Falling between the boats was curtains. The scream of steel pontoons grinding was like the wail of the banshee. Our dock lines after a few days were a sight to behold, knots spouting dread locks everywhere. Close by was a freighter loading manganese ore, which coats our ship in a fine black dust. Sometimes we question our sanity!

Apart from the negatives, the people are very welcoming and the bar in the yacht club provides abundant socialising. We hear that we have been awarded the Faulkner Cup the premier award of the ICC for the second year running. We are honoured and more than elated at this news, and have a celebratory dinner at the Club. Walking Port Elizabeth we visit many churches and notice that in the many stained glass windows festooned with saints and biblical scenes, not a single black figure or indeed anyone that resembled a Palestinian Jew appeared. All were strikingly white European; gods indeed we make in our own image. The days pass and contrary winds predominate, blowing hard around the cape of storms. We tend our warps and hold on. Finally on the 16th December we motor 180 miles to Mossell Bay. It is a feast or a famine as far as wind is concerned. This is where the Portuguese explorer, Bartholomew Dias landed in 1487 on an expedition to find a sea route to India; a replica of his ship is in the fine local museum.

Round the Cape of Good Hope

23rd December. The weather looks fair for the Cape, and as is usual in these parts, we leave on a falling barometer. The wind is light and we motor on and off to the much feared Cape Agulhas and pass from the Indian to the Atlantic Ocean. A southeast wind springs up and *Pylades* at hull speed rounds the Cape of Good Hope. The wind pulses from light to strong from the Hottentot Mountains, so after a few reefing and unreeling sessions, we start the engine and motor-sail. The myriads of lights at Cape Town harbour, shining jewel-like in the cold dry air, delight and confuse. Our plotter is still not plotting and the wind is 30 knots on the nose. But at 03.00 on 25th December, singing "we saw a ship come sailing in, come sailing in, on Christmas day in the morning," we pick up a mooring outside the boat basin of the Royal Cape Yacht Club. Joshua Slocum passed this way but without the benefits of forecasts, GPS and engine. He wrote as follows:

"Gales of wind sweeping round the cape were frequent enough, one occurring, on an average, every thirty-six hours; but one gale was much the same as another, with no more serious result than to blow the Spray along on her course when it was fair, or to blow her back somewhat when it was ahead. On Christmas, 1897, I came to the Cape. She began very early in the morning to pitch and toss about in a most unusual manner, and I have to record that, while I was at the end of the bowsprit reefing the jib, she ducked me under water three times for a Christmas box. I got wet and did not like it a bit: never in any other sea was I put under more than once in the same short space of time, say three minutes. A large English steamer passing ran up the signal, "Wishing you a Merry Christmas." I think the captain was a humourist; his own ship was throwing her propeller out of water".

While in South Africa, Slocum met Mr. Kruger the Transvaal president and mentioned he was on a voyage around the world; this unwittingly gave great offence to the statesman. Kruger corrected rather sharply, reminding that the world is flat. "You don't mean *round* the world," said the president. You mean *in* the world. Impossible! He exclaimed firmly. The incident greatly amused Slocum. Perhaps it's just as well the venerable president never met with Mr. Darwin.

Cape Town is magnificent: Table Mountain dominates the harbour and provides a constantly changing backdrop of light, shade and cloud formations. We find much to explore and enjoy besides the multifarious repairs to our ship. We fit a new VHF and autopilot, carry out work to the mainsail batten cars and a fellow sailor reconfigures our plotter and AIS. After all the bashing *Pylades* had been through, we could not complain too much. New Year's Eve we dine at the Royal Cape Yacht Club and celebrate with a bottle of bubbly. At midnight we are swamped by the deafening blast of the harbour ships sounding and echoing between the bastions of Table Mountain. Speculating on the coming year and our voyage home with a degree of nervous excitement we party into the night.

The cable car and walks on Table Mountain are wonderful. The tour of Robben Island is interesting if a somewhat somber reflection on what man can do to maintain power and privilege. The guides are ex-prisoners and when it was discovered that we were from Ireland they explained how the strike by the girls of Dunnes Stores who refused to handle South African goods had made such an impact in the prison. It was a proud moment and made all those years supporting the anti-apartheid struggle worthwhile.

28th January 2012. Under the shadow of Table Mountain we exit Cape Town. The wind fills and in the company of a pod of whales we square off for St. Helena 1700 miles to the northeast. Yet again, the wind is in surplus quantities, a cross sea from port dumps right over the cockpit and shreds the

connections of the starboard dodger, which had all been carefully re-sewn in Cape Town. As the first darkness pales the sound and the fury die away, by full light all plain sail is reinstated. Over the next 12 days we run under easy blue skies with full canvas, the nights, a brilliant star field dimmed only by the passage of a full moon which nightly waned.



Sail repairs in SA

St. Helena: 9th February. Growing from a faint outline, it looms brown and haggard. Its tip rose 5 kilometres from the sea bed 14 million years ago, spat fire and brimstone for another 7 million years and has been sculpted by wind, rain and wave since. Off Jamestown our anchor runs down 18 metres bedding in a mixture of rock and sand. There are four cruisers at anchor to warm welcome us, two of which we had met down at the Cape. We wine and dine in celebration of our arrival. Next dinghy the swell is surging 1.5 metres at the pier, we lay a stern anchor, grab the ladder and move fast, it has been the undoing of many. However, if one did go in the water it is beautifully clean and pleasant. Every occasion of landing and departing particularly with fuel and water cans was challenging, it dissuades somewhat against drinking in town and late returns.

The 5000 people of St. Helena must rank as the world's friendliest, it is a little piece of Cornwall in the south Atlantic. First discovered in 1502 by the Portuguese and kept a secret of 90 years it was taken in turn by the Dutch then English who heavily fortified it as a supply base. In its heyday 1000 ships a year called for water and supplies. It was a major slave trading post, later a player in the breakup of that trade, although why there are 5,000 victims of that despicable 'trade' buried here after the abolition remains an unanswered question. The island was host to Cook, Nelson, Slocum, Darwin, the astronomer Halley, Napoleon and 6000 Boer prisoners, all of whom fashioned its fascinating history. We hire a car and enriched our historical perspectives touring the haunts where that pompous usurper of the French Revolution ended his days. Seated at his burial place we contemplate the rivers of blood spilt across Europe and Russia so that in glory and triumph, he, his generals, and many of his like could become momentary masters of a fraction of this pale blue dot.



St Helena – the Emperor's end

Another day we gain the top of Jacobs Ladder all 699 steps of it – just had to be done! It's a good test of the heart, the record stands at 5 minutes odd by some demented mountain runner, we took 15 minutes! In the local museum the skipper has dialogue with the curator, part teacher and science master, who confirms that all the schools on the island teach evolution. She relates that in writing a book on the island some of the co-authors refused to continue working on the book unless all references to any times before 6500 years ago were omitted!

16th February. We leave for Brazil, 1802 miles to the northwest. For thirteen days we run before a fair wind and easy seas. Many nights see us being attacked by monster flying fish, the size of a decent mackerel striking with a thud and a very fishy smell, a few flap their way back to sea under their own volition, others are rescued. The cloud clear nights bring a new vision of the plough and its pointers directing our gaze at the northern horizon where, still hidden, lurks Polaris. The international space station hurtles overhead through the ionosphere at 15,400 knots. It's inspiring to know that some of our fellow travellers are plying these vast spaces at a more dynamic pace.

Brazil: A loom of light over João Pessoa is seen, in the morning we pass from the turquoise ocean

into the brown green waters of the Paraíba River and anchor in 4.5 metres off the Jacaré Marina. Next day by dusty roads, taxi and train we make our way to Cabedelo, a small town full of character, and check in. The social scene draws one in for sundowners, delicious Cipriani cocktails prepared by the delightful Lydiana, and to exchange tales with laughing fellow rovers. Ravel's Bolero is played each evening to serenade the sunset by a man with a saxophone standing on a punt in the river.

The city of João Pessoa, surrounded by extensive shanty towns, has traces of auld decency such as Teatro San Rosa and a few architectural gems, but generally it is very run down. Outside the town are shopping centres and malls, all more than adequate for stocking, Jacaré had its own shanty town, where it appears that all teenage girls were either on rocking chairs outside their forty year old mothers doors bouncing babies, or pregnant. The young men play pool on outdoor tables, to the beat of South America. In the shed fishermen mend nets and settle arguments, all exceedingly friendly and good-humoured. The marina had a careening area onto which we run the boat. In this mud bath *Pylades* settles at an extraordinary angle, and despite some amazing single clawed crabs emerging from the mud snapping at us, polish we did our hull for the next run.

10th March. Exit Brazil for St. Lucia 2075 miles northwest. The day turns horrible with 25 knots of wind gusting, rain thick enough for fish to swim in and thunder and lightning. On the SSB we hear that a German couple whom we had befriended had lost their rig in near gale conditions to the north of us. They motored for French Guyana. The large-scale weather patterns on either side of equatorial Atlantic are predictable and consistent. Heading north from the Cape one moves ritually into the southeast trades, through the doldrums or the Inter-Tropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ) and then into the northeast trades. Three distinct weather zones each governed by the laws of physics; air moves from high to low pressure, the earth's west to east rotation imparts a west bound direction to north bound air in the southern hemisphere and south bound air in the northern hemisphere. Where competing southeast and northeast winds meet near the equator, instability reigns. Neither flow willing to cede; without the wind-borne dissipation of the tropical ocean's evaporating moisture, humidity levels rise; clouds form, the skies saturate and rain falls in great striated sheets.

Passing through this area we have a lot of sail alterations and periods of motoring with wind and swell coming from about any direction, as violent lightning storms pass over. The doldrums for sure, one squall catches the mainsail aback, it could have been catastrophic if the preventer had not held, as the runner was set on the opposite side. A result of the battle to get on course was the mesh gear in the Monitor self-steering had jumped out of alignment. The thought of hand steering is a recurring nightmare, but we are able to compel it back into line. What it then required were a few washers to hold the mesh together, not possible to accomplish this in a seaway, so we twisted in four rings of 1mm diameter stainless steel wire in lieu and it worked a treat. Never travel without it.

Midnight comes, and the risen moon backlights a scrim of clouds in the east; fuzzy dots appear overhead as the light from distant stars penetrates the thinning humidity. Emerging from the ITCZ the wind becomes steady from the northeast and with a favourable current we gain fine runs of up to 167 miles per day. The seas again fill with skittering flying fish; floating lines of yellow sargassum weed extend along the direction of the wind like yard markers across our path; we begin to see the bluish transparent air sacs of Portuguese men of war, their ridges limned iridescent purple we are now surrounded by the marine life of the North Atlantic Ocean.

Having sighted no ships for over a week, the skipper picks up the light of a vessel well off to port. It will pass close, he concludes, but no problem, nevertheless he adjusts course to starboard to open the gap, goes below to run radar, plotter and AIS, comes back on deck a few minutes later, horror! The oncoming vessel smaller and faster than expected is now dead ahead closing by the second, throwing on the deck lights and with a pounding heart we go hard to port. The vessel now identified as a trawler on passage, guns its engines and almost leaping out of the water turns hard to its port, through an odoriferous cloud of fish and burning diesel we pass. The skipper thinks hard about going back on the fags.

On 23rd March off Barbados we cross our outward track and complete our circumnavigation. We celebrate with a dram.

St. Lucia: 24th March. On a fine morning under full sail *Pylades* sweeps around the southern tip anchoring off Rodney Bay. We are in a different world; we count over sixty boats on anchor, under

sail, and engine, visible in every direction. Two days are spent swimming and sleeping before entering the lagoon and checking in. Days are spent scrubbing after the long haul up from the Cape and catching up on domestic chores. The ambience is suburban rather than Caribbean and the marina staff, as is everyone, are welcoming and pleasant to deal with. We enjoy our time there meeting with many interesting cruising folk.

2nd April. Bound for Martinique, forecast is an easterly wind of 12 knots gusting 14, (kid you not) a light swell under a clear blue sky and that was the way of it, sailing as depicted in brochures. Rounding the north point of St. Lucia we could already see our destination. At 16.00 down went our anchor in Marin in the midst of over 1000 boats. Entering the customs office to check in, the uniformed Monsieur motions us to a computer, we type in our details, press print, it is stamped, all done in minutes.

Fort de France is as remembered from 12 years ago, but the facilities for landing dinghies much improved and no charges. Charming narrow streets, excellent little bars, restaurants and coffee houses. We fall in with a couple from the UK on their Rival 34, many drinks and chat over two nights. An easy sail to the town of St. Pierre, anchoring under the shadow of Mt. Pelee volcano which had in 1902 given warning for many weeks that it was going to erupt... the warnings were ignored and 30,000 people died in a blinding flash at two minutes past eight of a fine May morning. Nature has no conscience, it had released more energy than an atomic bomb. The town is slowly recovering in a delightful fashion. The volcano which has enhanced the town's history in such a brutal fashion appears to be deep-sleeping. We cross the short passage to Les Saintes where we have a few wonderful days, pushing on to Guadeloupe calling at charmless Basse Terre and charming Deshaies, clean water, no rolling, very reminiscent of Les Saintes. Here we stay for a few days and chill.

Montserrat: On approach one can see the huge tracts of land swept by fire and brimstone. From ominous cracks high in the side of the mountain white smoke billows forth. Anchoring at Little Bay we take a guided tour of the island. It was well worth doing for the social history, genocide of the Caribs, plantations, slaves, Irish catholic slave masters, slave revolts and their execution. All are skipped over lightly; the dominant player is the movement of the bowels of the earth, the Volcano. The population of the island was 15,000 before it became active about 1997, through emigration has now reduced it to 5,000. As you approach the south end of the island one becomes aware of the devastation. The volcano had been giving cause for alarm, scientists monitoring the situation predicted accurately when it would blow. The town of Plymouth was evacuated just in time, when it did finally blow the only people who died were a small number who returned to their homes against advice.

Driving across the golf course the roofs of three-storey houses peeped out of the debris field. Closer to the source, every burnable item had caught fire in the scorching heat flows. Lower down all was inundated with fast flowing ash. No access is allowed into the town itself but from an overlooking position the full impact of the devastation is apparent. Economics aside, we appreciate far more the stable nature of our own green land. A permanent volcano-monitoring station which we tour shows the astonishing power unleashed when a tiny bit of the earth's internal energy is released, if only we could harness it. On the way back our guide Samuel decides to raid the mango tree of an abandoned Pentecostal church, they are delicious. We part with hugs, having enjoyed our tour. In the afternoon, snorkelling the shore line in the company of many reef fish, Kay encounters her first turtle and octopus underwater.

Antigua: Beating across from Montserrat in fresh conditions, the wind gusts to 30 knots and shreds our fully set head sail. It takes a drenching hour to get it back on board and secured. After check-in we deliver our sail to the repair shop; the sail maker, Franklin, says there is only thread damage, no actual material has ripped. As it is race week it will take two weeks to repair and US\$404, not as bad as envisaged. The place is buzzing; boom bands every night, all males have faultless five o' clock shadows, ruffled hair, branded shades and the girls are cool and perfect. We meet with the crew and skipper of *Starry Night*, have some beers and tour the large Oyster 82. Ian Heffernan from Cork on *Kadoona* swings by, attracted by the flag, it transpires that we both had been in Auckland NZ at the same time last year. Ian decided to come home across the Pacific via Panama with his girlfriend Laani while we went the other way round. We are now both on our way home via Bermuda. For stocking up we move to Jolly Harbour, a much better bet than Falmouth for that sort of thing.

16th May. Clearing the north point of Antigua we are in a fresh easterly wind and 2 metre beam sea;

with three reefs in the main and much reduced headsail we cover 150 miles per day. These conditions hold for the six and a half uncomfortable days to Bermuda. Only one ship was encountered passing close by our stern, so close in fact that a discussion ensued with its bridge. Listening to 'Herb' the Canadian-based weather guru we hear of tropical storm 'Alberta' forming to the northeast of us. That news fairly grabs our attention and we decide to register with him. This consists of an e-mail giving destinations and ship details. From then on, every evening at 21.00 UTC Herb gives us a detailed weather forecast and route changes if required. The weather is consistently grey with rain and poor visibility. Through the US coastguard we hear that two yachts *Petra* and *Outer limits* have gone down in the vicinity, the keel worked loose in one and the other hit a whale, all crew were rescued.

Bermuda: 22nd May. 04.00 the lights and outline of Bermuda emerge through driving drizzle. Checking on the VHF the operator engages in a tirade concerning the number of digits we have in our EPIRB but as we are in close-quarter manoeuvres with two passenger liners at the entrance, we hang up. Clearing in at 06.00 with a charming customs officer we pay our landing fee of \$70 and anchor just off St George's in delightful clear turquoise water, sleep a bit, have breakfast, walk the pretty town, have a bottle of bubbly, a fine dinner and then sleep for 10 hours. Jumping over the side next morning the sea feels fresher than the Caribbean but perfect for waking. Later the dreadful news arrives that the skipper of yacht *Starry Night*, Philip Scully from Cork, has died en route to Azores and they have put back to Bermuda. We visit to sympathise with the all Irish crew and members of Philip's family. A few nights later we dine on *Starry Night*, where poems are recited and a lament and other tunes are played in memory of Philip

Our 'watering hole' in St. George is the 'East End Mini Yacht Club'. This bar overlooking the anchorage was the scene for a few nights of gathering of the crew of *Pylades*, *Kadoona* and on one occasion the crew of *Starry Night*, great sea stories were exchanged and became even greater. The club members, made up mostly of the local black population, were very welcoming and joined our company, definitely the place to drink in St. George. On our last night Kay is enveloped in big hugs from the local ladies and please "you must come back to Bermuda". Over the next few days we take the bus to Hamilton and walk sections of the island. Except for the *Starry Night* tragedy, the period in Bermuda exceeded our expectations.

31st May. Exit for the Azores 1,830 miles to the east and for the first time in over two years the sun rises at our bow. The night sky grows more familiar with Polaris high to the north and Cassiopeia becoming more dominant. Kay checks in with Herb daily, he advises to stay on an east heading to avoid, as he puts it, "the storm fields" to the north. Another tropical storm 'Beryl' develops. We heed his advice. That night a squall arrives unannounced and we are laid over in forty knots. In hose-piping rain, we scramble to reef; together we cannot haul the drum, and resort to winching. At dawn the damage is assessed, two slugs of the mainsail have sheared and the leach line of the genoa has pulled out about a third the way down from the top. We stitch in new slugs and put the genoa repairs on the shore list. Many 'by the wind sailors' are evident, amazing little 150mm diameter jelly fish with jelly fish sails, all heading our way even if a little slower. How did they evolve their sails? Where are they going, do they write logs? A pod of dolphins and a few wheeling shearwaters briefly join our evening before they melt into their watery gloom.

12th June. The barometer has been rising as we approach the Azores high and the winds finally fail. Kay, battling with atmospheric static generated by distant storms and man's million transmissions, continues to tune in to the fast-moving 'Herb' show every evening. He confirms lightening winds and predicts motoring. We are hailed by a French yacht on the VHF, it transpires they are three weeks out from St. Martin and we are their first sighting. They are short of fuel, we offer some. Manoeuvring close, a line is thrown and two 20 litre containers of diesel are attached and with a few metres between are ditched overboard, they haul. It's all accomplished in a few minutes and we steam off into the failing light.

Azores: Entering Horta we are assigned a berth inside the main wall where we lay 12 years ago. We are euphoric to have arrived with such easy conditions due to 'Herb's directions. Over the next week we meet ICC members Dan and Jill Cross on *Yoshi* and with the crew of *Kadoona* have many social sessions. This side of the Atlantic is proving to be very social indeed. Walking the town of Horta is a joy so also is hiring a car with Ian and Laani and touring the island.

The architecture and exhibition at the 'buried' lighthouse at the western tip of the island is most impressive. It tells of the islands tumultuous birth from the sea bed heralded by fire and brimstone. The foundations of the islands sit on unstable grinding plates there may well be more islands to come. The oldest of the Azores is 35 million years while Faial emerged from the sea a mere 2 million years

ago, Darwin would have loved it. On the quay at Horta the *Pylades* pier-art, first painted in 2000, is refurbished and updated, the display of boat graffiti provides delight as known names are discovered and memories flow back of fellow rovers, adventures and many merry yarns.



Us – and Pico

7th June; all sail is set for the short passage to Velas on the island of São Jorge. the reception by Jose the manager could wonderful days are spent there, and then on to Angra on Terceira. This is a world heritage town founded in 1474 and built on the fabulous wealth looted from the 'New World', of which we now are the beneficiaries. Our arrival coincides with the Fiesta and the Running of the Bulls. As the bull is let loose on the streets, we make for cover behind the barricades and observe how a raging herbivore can make even the least agile of folk nimble. After observing this test of machismo we retire to one of the many wonderful pavement cafes and enjoy wine and cheese. The Azores just get better and better.

Passage Home: 5th July the call of the family, friends and the Burren hills is acknowledged, our lines are cast for the final ocean leg. Our way is under a leaden sky and sea with contrary winds on the nose for the first five days. The wind has an Arctic feel to it and layers of long forgotten clothes are piled on as we beat slowly north. The warm showers of the marina ill prepared us for cockpit ablutions, but we persuade ourselves that the after-glow of returning circulation makes it worthwhile.

10th July. A fine dawn and clearing sky bring a lighter veering wind allowing us sail the rhumb line. The next morning the promised southwest winds arrive, the genoa is poled out and we take off. Kay has a close encounter with a whale alongside but by the time the camera is organised the leviathan

has slid back to its fathomless abode. We converse with sailing yacht *Drum* en route to Falmouth who had steering problems and requested us to e-mail his wife and parents in Denmark regarding their expected land fall delay. We stayed close for 48 hours while the problem was overcome and were pleased to be of assistance.

The wind backs and we are back, close-hauled into a cold northerly, the phosphorescence is brilliant throwing sheets of light over the sea and boat. At 04.00 on the morning of the 15th the Inishtearaght light is raised. A few hours later in a beautiful sunny morning with a smell of fresh grass washing off the land and a greeting from the Dingle Dolphin we tie at a very quiet Marina. That evening the first pints of Guinness in over three years are sampled and we mull over our travels. Over the next few days friends and relatives visit and there is much socialising as we delight in our arrival. Eventually fleeing Dingle we anchor for a few quiet nights in Ventry



Kay boarding at Velas

Kinvara: The light in the sky is just enough to spot potmarkers as, under engine, we push through the Blasket Sound before the ebb. Clearing Sybil Head a fair breeze fills and with no sea running we have a fine sail to Inish Mor. The skipper is delighted when his son Eoin and grandchildren Séan and Ciarán join for the final 22 mile run. We arrive in Kinvara at 08.30 on the 25th to the welcoming faces of family and friends. We secure to the pier from which we left on the morning of the 6th June 2009, the timber leg is attached, the tide ebbs, we are high and dry.

One of the objectives of the 'Origins Cruise' was an attempt to determine, one hundred and fifty years after Darwin's *'Origin of Species'* what, if any impact this might have made to the cognition of our species. Our unscientific conclusions are that where the French have an influence or first world conditions prevail such as New Zealand and Australia, Darwinism gains ground. Otherwise it would appear that in struggling countries where such rational thinking could make a difference, education has been thrown to the pious evangelicals and the legends of creationism still hold sway. Another salient point related to our species is that the instinct for profligate replication may well be our greatest threat. In our short time away 251 million additional members of humanity have come to live with

us on our small blue dot. Much indeed remains to be done.

We thank all family, friends and fellow sailors who rendered us support and assistance along the way and reflect on our magnificent sailing vessel *Pylades*, which served us well. The voyage has been a gratifying and inspirational three years, how lucky we have been to achieve such a dream project. A key element throughout has been the companionship and love between Kay and myself, for adventures and pleasures shared are indeed much enriched. We put *Pylades* on the mooring with a touch of sadness, our eyes turn to the land and dreams of projects new.

Miles sailed since Bellharbour: 40,486

