

## Gibraltar to Canary Islands

Gibraltar was cold and wet when we returned from Australia (by air) on 12 December 2012. Everything on the boat seemed damp. We were anxious to get underway towards the warmth of the Canaries about 750 miles away, but we had many trip planning considerations before the departure date was decided: 1) The wind speed and direction; 2) The tides and currents ( two different flows) in the Gibraltar Strait; 3) The general weather – temperature and precipitation possibilities; 4) Traffic (where and how to cross the ship separation lanes in the Strait); 5) Where to avoid the overfalls and rough sea state off of the Moroccan coast; 6) Limited daylight hours as the shortest day of the year was approaching; 7) Landfall destination.

We set our departure date, but of course there was no way to get everything perfectly right.

The talons of the Pillars of Hercules seemed to hold tight to our little vessel as we tried desperately to free ourselves from Mediterranean waters. Motor-sailing **west** thru the Strait of Gibraltar along the Spanish coast at 5 knots on the gauge, we found ourselves moving 145 degrees (**SE**) at 1 knot on the GPS – sailing backwards! A tactical rethinking was required. When we saw an opening between the shipping traffic, we contravened conventional wisdom and crossed to the African side of the Strait. There we picked up a more favourable current, but then endured turbulent seas off of the shallow Moroccan capes where wind, current and tide seem always to conflict, especially at mealtime.

By dusk we had rounded Cabo Espartel, the NW corner of Africa, and were on our way southwest towards the Canaries, but at a cost of nearly half of our available diesel.



Previously on this passage (1994) we had experienced rough and uncomfortable seas. The conditions down the African coast this time were as good as ocean sailing can be. There was a bit of traffic: huge tankers, cruise ships, container ships and very erratic fishing vessels – one of which motored alongside as we sailed, with rugged-up, turban headed Muslims trying to sell us “take-away” fish! We wondered what they might have thought of the pork chop odours wafting from the cabin.

As we approached within 150 miles of the Canary Islands the wind dropped considerably and rounded to the SE. Whilst this and the accompanying flat seas were delightful during the day, at dusk the fog rolled off of the Moroccan coast and enveloped us. At one stage, four ships were within 6nm of us, approaching from various directions. Using radar, we zigzagged thru the thick fog as they each passed us within one mile, yet we never even had a glimpse of any of them; we only heard the bull elephant roar of their fog horns. Our text to our daughter on the Sat Phone read, “Pea Soup Fog. Lite Wind. Heavy Traffic. Radar. Fog Horns. Nightmare!” Fortunately the fog was short-lived.



We are now at the lovely Puerto Calero Marina 28 55'N; 13 42'W (a comparable latitude to Ballina, NSW) on Lanzarote, the north-eastern most of the Canary Islands, only 70 miles off of the Moroccan coast. As the wind dropped out on our approach, we gently coasted into the marina under power between the volcanic shoreline and the rocky breakwater, heading directly to the fuel dock. Our hearts were in our throats, with our fuel gauge registering at the low end of the red zone. Amongst the many facilities here at the marina/resort complex we've had no trouble finding a nice venue for a buffet Christmas dinner. Additionally, good fortune placed a Hobart born sailor across from us on the marina. He and his family are also bound for Australia, and have generously taken us for provisioning at the big Spar supermarket.



Our next landfall in the Caribbean is yet to be determined, but will be at least 3 weeks of sailing. Barbados lies 2700 miles away, and is the eastern most island of the chain. There is a party at Hog Island, Grenada on 27 January which is very tempting. And then there is Antigua, where we had our first romantic dinner together at the old "Copper and Lumber" Restaurant where barrels were built at the time of Horatio Nelson. Whichever choice we make, it will be nice to warm up. From Gibraltar Latitude 36N to Canaries Latitude 28N to Caribbean Latitude 16N north we hope for a temperature difference from about 14c to 20c to 28c. We'll just have to see which way the (warm) wind blows!