

#### DIVIDED SKY – ITALY & MALTA WITH THE REES'

The four ancient mariners: Colin, Jeanne, Roger and Trish, said goodbye to Croatia and headed south down the Adriatic Sea towards Brindisi, Italy on an overnight passage. Most of the journey was a motor-sail with light southerlies. Night watches were busy as the traffic, whilst not heavy, was constant. Trish proved to have the best ship-spotting eyes and quickly learned to identify green starboard and red port lights of passing ships, and to monitor their bearings. Night cap-lamps which the Rees' brought from Goolwa proved helpful.



We thought that we had arrived in Brindisi with plenty of time to handle customs clearance that afternoon, but we did not plan on the officious customs officer who had other plans. He insisted that our insurance for "Mediterranean Waters" was inadequate, as the policy must clearly state "Italian Waters." No amount of discussion could sway him, even when Col had him admit that Italy was itself within Med waters. This hassle lasted the entire time we were in Italy and was not resolved until the day on which we cleared both in and out of the country with the aid of an email from our insurance company refusing to alter the wording of our policy. Meanwhile arrival day turned to night as we tried to follow the flimsy directions to our resort stay near Otranto. Relief was felt by all, when we arrived at a guard gate with a human being still on duty at 11pm. Terra firma felt exceptionally good that night. We had a great time touring Brindisi and Otranto during our week stay in Italy, especially the Old Town sections of both cities. Normal chores had to be completed as well. We were able to use the backyard of our villa as a laundrette – giving a new meaning to "clothes tree."





Reprovisioning was a delight at a roadside veggie stall where Roger even tried some homemade Italian wine.



It seemed all too soon that we passed the “Arrivederci” sign at the marina exit as our course was plotted towards Malta. Cape Rizzuto had been a lovely anchorage for us previously on our way east, so we thought that a stop for a swim, dinner and a sleep would be appreciated after a 30 hour lumpy sail from Brindisi passing the Golfo di Squillace



(Squalls). As soon as we anchored, Col and Roger worked on solar panel connections whilst Trish and Jeanne had a lovely swim. However, just as the solar panel was reassembled and as jerry cans were about to be emptied into the diesel tanks, the wind piped up from a direction unpredicted, leaving us on a lee shore. Quick action saw diesel emptied and anchor hoisted.

After beating our way offshore, we decided to heave-to and wait for the lumpy seas to subside. This meant a very rolly night until a wind shift made it possible for us to restart our journey. As the sun winked goodnight the next day we sailed within sight of Mt. Etna on Sicily.

Another night of ship spotting and collision avoidance across the Malta Channel was required before the fairy lights of Valletta could be seen. Approaching the harbour at first light, the ancient fortresses and walled town made this a spectacular backdrop unlike anything in Australia's few hundred years of architectural development.





A surprise to all was the anchored fuel barge/petrol station just off of the Royal Malta Yacht Club, where we were heading for a marina berth. So refuelling before we berthed was easy. The Malta courtesy flag was hoisted. Col strolled off to a somewhat easier, and much friendlier, customs and immigration ordeal.

With only a week to see Malta, we were kept active. One of our favourite adventures was a boat trip and 4-wheel drive excursion to neighbouring Gozo Island with history back to early Roman days, including ancient salt pans. An evening live theatre show was also enjoyed, with the history of Malta played out in song and dance.

As Roger's birthday approached, there were six activities which he listed as "things I'd like to do least on the day:" (1) Go on a coach tour; (2) Visit grave sites; (3) Follow a tour guide with an umbrella; (4) Have a guided tour thru gardens; (5) Visit a church; (6) Go to a craft shop. We managed to accomplish all of the above on his 73rd birthday.





The coach tour was to the ancient Maltese capital city of Mdina.



The grave sites were catacombs nearby. The umbrella was red. The gardens had a dead Australian eucalyptus. The church was one which Colin had told about with an unexploded WWII bomb in the vestry. The craft shop produced Mdina glass and pottery. Surprisingly at the end of the day, Roger still had a smile (or a smirk?) on his face, perhaps aided by the two bottles of wine during lunch at the appropriately named, Antico Roma restaurant.



After a terrific week in Malta, the Rees' flew back to England for visits with family and friends before heading home. We set off on the 1100 mile ordeal to Gibraltar through fickle winds and confused seas of the Med. Weathering autumn gale force winds, alternating with flat calms we managed the journey with only 2 anchorage stops. First we escaped the huge confused seas off of the south coast of Sardinia by taking refuge for two nights next to the "Den Store Bjorn," a Danish tall ship training school whose chef made us the best brownies we've ever eaten. At the second stop, Cape Cope along the east Spanish coast, we recovered from bashing into a SW gale before the last 220 nm stretch along the Costa del Sol. We knew something excessive was brewing when we watched in trepidation as the barometer rose from 1000 to 1017 in 12 hours. This last sail started as a bash into the SW swell, followed by 12 hours of cold and clammy 30+ knot NE wind (15k forecasted) with white water everywhere and foul weather gear, thermals and wool caps retrieved from storage, then finished with gusts over 40 knots as we sheltered under the lee of "The Rock." At least we enjoyed our last night at sea in the Med with a lovely full moon. More than 7,200 nautical miles have passed under the keel since first launching "Divided Sky" in the USA in June. We are looking forward to a quick trip home by air to see family and friends, before the really long haul sails west across the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans back towards Australia.