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16th Sep 2011 - 2nd Oct 2011

Fish and storms in Greece

There may not be many fish in the Med but those we fed in Mortos were positively fussy with their food. We usually feed them left-over stale bread but having run out we gave them a treat of chocolate coco pops and watched bemused as they spat the pops straight back out. Ungrateful little silver things! In Mortos we bought a new fishing lure, a pretty green plastic fish, whose colour I took a fancy to, about the size of a stickleback. We had never actually caught a fish when trolling in our nearly 3000 miles of sailing but had been told THIS was the one to get!

When we left Mortos to sail to Gaios we set up our trailing line. The quiet of the sail was shattered by a loud whirring sound, we both looked around and suddenly realised the noise was the fishing line paying out. Something was on the line. David was convinced it was weed but as he reeled in I could see a silver shape flashing in the water. The fish was hauled to the side of the boat and we could see it's head covered in blood from it's fight with the hooks of the lure. We had no net so a black rubber bucket was used to drop the madly wriggling fish into while it sprayed blood over the side of the boat. David was not amused, does not like blood, not a pretty sight.

Now how to kill it. My job. No way could I bash it's head in so I ran for the gin and poured a good measure into it's gills (David thought the gin was to give me courage, but sadly no). What a way to go, he stopped wriggling almost at once. Then he was double bagged and put in the fridge until we made landfall. Like any major catch he was photographed, weighed and measured, then gutted and grilled. Best tasting fish ever, just 3 hours after leaving the sea. We did check it was edible, by looking at pictures in a book and by asking a Greek on a boat next to us in Gaios what it was just in case. It was a Bonito (sarda sarda) very like Tuna (667gms and 34cms). We've tried since and no more fish, so is it our one and only?



Our Bonito on the grill

I think it is our payment for sailing that we have to endure at least one storm each year. This year's found us off Corfu. We knew a thunderstorm was coming in and we opted to anchor in a large quiet bay Valtou on the mainland opposite Corfu. Very few people go there, so not many boats to worry about hitting you and it has a thick muddy bottom, great anchor holding for our CQR. We ended up in the bay for three nights with one other boat. The storm hit early evening of the 19th September but the thunder and lightning lasted for 30 hours, coming in wave after wave with torrential continuous rain for 20 hours. The amazing thing was the strobe lightning. We had had some in the Elba storm (see Ann's [article](#) in PBO) but this was all around us and for hours. I took loads of video as the black night sky was lit up into varying shades of grey and then for a split second the surrounding hills became backlit as if it was day. The crashing of the thunder claps right over head were scary, especially with 15m of lightening conductor sticking up into the air, you felt they were coming into the boat. We measured gusts up to 50 miles per hour, but we survived. If we had been down south we would have headed for Vlikho bay off Lefkas, always a safe haven in a storm, but this storm developed a small whirlwind (later described as a microburst) which centered on the bay causing boats berthed on land to topple like dominoes pulling up boat anchors, causing general chaos and damage to boats and killing a French man off his catamaran. Wherever we went after this every one asked " where were you when the storm hit" it was that bad over a wide area of the North Ionian.

We did revisit Petriti, at the base of Corfu, where on our first visit in 1999 David had the golden rock awarded to him. He hit the quayside with the boat and the chunk of concrete he removed was painted gold and presented to him. This time the quayside was the preserve of Greek fishing boats only and a small extension to the quay is left for the Yotties, so we could not find the 'spot' of our glory all those years ago. One crew did more than hit the quay as a yacht larger than ours is left on it's side in about half a meter of water 15 meters from the beach. How it got there is a mystery as the whole beach area is not more than two meters deep well out from the shore and you walk in knee depth water for 40 meters

from the beach anyway.

Clouds over Corfu Island



We had a marina fix in Gouvia, on Corfu. They have a great swimming pool and all the amenities and it is fun to treat yourself occasionally, although being at anchor is our favourite.

Coming back for the month of September has been great. We have had exceptionally hot weather for the time of year, 30C+ generally and 40.4C one day, until the storm, and even after that it was back in the 30C+ a few days later. The winds have not been that strong so less sailing than we would have liked and returning to the North had its own charm and flavour but you can see the winding down of the holiday season. One thing we didn't appreciate is the growing number of fishfarms and how they seem to have taken over every available bay and inlet, particularly around Sayiada, making it impossible to anchor in them. But now there are less people around, tavernas closed which were open only a couple of weeks before, bread shops and mini markets closed up and vacancy signs on apartments.

We were ready for haul out and the boatyard life, joining the rest getting their boats stripped off, cleaned and winterised.

One thing we will be glad to leave behind are the mosquitoes, which are in plague mode at present. I have lost count of my bite total and David wanders around in a haze of DEET. When we come back it will be the spiders and frogs in the showers. Nature is wonderful.

28th Aug - 15th Oct 2011

Back in the North Ionian

It felt so strange to leave Preveza and turn to Starboard away from the Lefkas canal, after our launch on 1st September. We were going back to the North Ionian to revisit places which we had first visited 13 years previously on our very first flotilla holiday.



Emerald Bay - Paxos- Aderyn Glas at anchor

Our route planned in pencil, two nights here, two nights there, was shot out of the water when we spent three nights in each of our first three stops. Monganissi, a small bay at the bottom of Paxos Island, below Corfu, was our first port after leaving Preveza town. In this bay we had had our first ever flotilla punch party on a small shingle beach and the area around inland was abandoned. The area - all terraced, in rough faced white and pale sandy stones - had a number of tavernas and a water sports village, but everything had just been left; including sauce bottles on the counters, tables, chairs, canoes, rather like the Marie Celeste. So it was the flotilla that had provided the life in the bay. This time the terraced area had been re-whitewashed, the single Taverna was laying out all its tables in blue and white, putting lights in the olive trees and draping swathes of white voile around the poles of the central dancing area ready for a wedding party that evening. Behind the complex was a camping area with a shower block, all working and functioning. What a change. Even the single beach had become a small jetty but too shallow for yachts. However the bay was still untouched by hotels or terraces of apartments; none had been built and the dense tree cover surrounded the bay in mottled green, remained unspoilt, even partially hiding the terraces and taverna from the water. We lay at anchor, jumping into the water to cool off or snorkel along the rocky sides of the bay. We even found a wreck of a modern wooden fishing

boat, crawling with Toredos, in a few metres of water. Fascinating looking at the ropes still attached, rollocks in place and plastic sheeting still within the broken rotting ribs of the hull. All in all we did not want to move on even after three nights. If you go there take care to anchor well the holding is not too good.

On leaving Monganissi we slipped down to Anti Paxos and Emerald Bay. The crystal clear turquoise water above white sand was exactly as before. What a place to swim! It reminded us now of Northern Sardinia where the water is this colour in many bays and the Fornelli passage is a vast expanse of turquoise. We had a short time of relative peace until the first tripper boat arrived and then we forced ourselves to leave and sail back to Paxos; up to Gaios.

Gaios had doubled in size since we were last here. It runs in a semicircle behind two small islands with a shallow entrance to the South and a deeper one to the North. The new quay at the North which was where we stayed had not existed 13 years ago. There is no beach but now a vast length of quay side, mainly filled with small fishing boats local motor boats, specific areas for the tripper boats and yachts scattered in between. It is the capital of Paxos. The contrast here is hustle and bustle, loads of tavernas on the quay and even more in the back streets. Our prolonged stay here was due to a threatened thunder storm and high winds which never came. So eventually we peeled ourselves off the quay and headed for Mortos (aka Sivota) on the mainland. We did stop here on our way down from Corfu when we first arrived in Aderyn Glas in Greece at the end of 2009. It was and still is one of our favorite anchorages. The bay, one of four around Sivota, is only a short dingy ride from the town and harbour, but very quite with lovely clear water for swimming and many boats don't come in as you need to take a line ashore here. I say quiet, but this time we did have a hairy moment.

A Swiss charter boat, already moored when we arrived was joined by another charter boat, a German, both were a few boat widths away from us. We were the furthest into the bay near a few small moored local motor boats. After about two hours we noticed the Swiss boat seemed to be leaving, an odd time to go as the sun was starting to sink behind the surrounding hills. Suddenly there was a lot of shouting from the Swiss boat and the people on the German boat were all up on deck. The two boats seemed to line up one behind the other and then they started to turn towards us as a pair. We could now see that the Swiss boat on the far side of the German boat had their anchor up but in the anchor was the chain of the German boat. They seemed joined to each other and drifting towards the shore when the Swiss boat revved their engine trying to drive forward but only succeeded in twisting in front of the German boat and pointing in our direction. I dived below to put our engine on after throwing David a fender which he attached to our stern line and dropped the line from the boat, allowing our boat to drift away from the shore into the middle of the bay, held by our anchor. As we moved from our space the other two boats swung across the space we had been occupying and both went side on into the rocks. Our buoy, with our stern line attached to it now bobbed between the two boats as they straddled the shore line, we, thankfully, were floating clear of the melee. It turned out that the German chain was wrapped five times around the prop shaft of the Swiss boat. The German men dived again and again trying to free the wrap. David had taken our dingy into the water and got the German chain off the Swiss anchor but in the end they could not untangle themselves and had to call out the hire company boat to free them from each other and pull the boats off the rocks. Amazingly neither of the boats were damaged as the wind had been very light. We attached ourselves to the other side of the bay when David retrieved our stern line. The Swiss shot off, don't know where, and the Germans anchored off the bay and left next morning. We repositioned ourselves back in the original spot next day, hoping it would be a peaceful day ahead. It was.

23 June - 12 July 2011

Velcro bay and the Gulf

With just a couple of weeks left before we haul out, we ventured down to Vlikho bay below Nidri on Lefkas Island. This huge bay is at the end of the waterway just past Tranquil bay which is a favorite of ours. Vlikho had never seemed attractive to us, when we had motored down to have a look as many of the small boat yards lining the shore give a forgotten air to the place. Some boats have not moved in years and look forlorn, others are derelict, half in, half under the water while some do look cared for and loved. A real miss-match to the eye. The bay is very safe and relatively shallow with a thick muddy bottom. Our anchor loved it and didn't want to come out when we finally decided to give it a go! It is also safe from almost all wind directions and many people leave their boats on the water here all year round. It has the nickname 'Velcro Bay' due to the large number of boats and their crew, which never move from it.

As we passed Tranquil bay we were hailed from a small dingy to see if we could tow a boat down to Vlikho, his engine would not start. We went to him and although he was bigger than us we took on his line and at two knots gently towed him down to Vlikho. The idea was to see if we could tow him past a small jetty at Vlikho and alongside a larger boat we could see through the binoculars. If we got it all right we could glide past it and he could throw a line aboard the boat and hang off her until he could get help out to him. It worked perfectly and we left our tow attached and we continued into the bay to anchor. First time we had been involved in a rescue and glad we could help.

We had been told about 'The Yacht Club' a must for any Brit in the area when we were in Paleros, so we went to see for ourselves. It's an English run taverna just a dingy ride from the anchorage. Both the atmosphere and food were marvelous, British staples such as bangers and mash, chilli, steak and chips and all the favorites of home. Although we love the Greek Cuisine after two months it was a great change. There was also a huge book swap library, Wifi, TV in English if you wanted it and you could even get your post delivered here. We have had to put it on our returns list when we feel the need of some home comforts and English humour.

After two nights we headed for Lefkas and a night in the marina to meet up with friends for a meal. Good company, great meal and back to Greek cuisine. Leaving the marina for the swing bridge we were a little worried as we knew of a number of boats this season who had hit under water rocks in the channel out of the canal. The channel buoys needed re-sighting due to silting here. We breathed a sigh of relief as we passed the bridge as we could see that the buoys had been moved since we were here last May, so we hoisted the sails and blew all the way to the Gulf

This was our last long sail of this holiday. It was lovely to feel the boat slide quietly over the water with only the noise of the wind not the engine for company.

We spent the last week in the Gulf, Vonitsa revisited and even stayed overnight anchored off the Vouvalos with only turtles and the sea birds for company. Hauled out back on land we left the boat prepared for winter but we are returning at the end of August for the month of September. The sea should have warmed up by then, it's been quite cold this time and we are going North back towards Corfu and Paxos.



Deserted Vouvalos island

13th June - 21st June 2011

Ouzo and Sea urchins.

Astakos brought us yet more new acquaintances with whom we shared drinks, experiences and the thoughts of voyages yet to come for some. A visit to a local Ouzary was also a first for us with our new friends. First off which type of Ouzo to drink as various bottles appeared, followed by try this other Greek spirit and tell me what you think, as the owner Nicos plied us with additional bottles. This was accompanied by Mesa, many little dishes containing nibbles from Anchovies, octopus, olives and small whole fried fish to tomatoes, cucumber and various cheeses. The dishes just kept coming and all this for eight of us worked out at 4 Euros per head. This reminded us of the first few years we came to Greece in the late 90's, the great evenings, something different to normal, experiencing a different culture and great hospitality from the local people. An evening to remember.

Leaving the mainland and Astakos we sailed over to the two smaller islands in the Ionian Inland Sea of Kastos and Kalamos. These islands are still very unspoilt with only one or two villages and with a very small permanent populations, only 80 on Kastos. Most people come for the season to work. Gerry and his wife who run a tiny mini market on Kastos (the only one) live in New Zealand, one of the three taverna owners lives in Athens. We find it difficult to understand how people will move such distances for seasonal work, but thankful that they do.



Kastos harbour - Aderyn Glas -at anchor

On Kastos we found a lovely swimming bay only 10 minutes walk from the harbour. Sand and fine gravel beach steeply shelving into clear green water, cliffs on the one side. Only one other couple on the beach. Heaven. I watched the man scouring the cliff edge and collecting something which he then brought back to his wife, who was in the water near me. The man found a big stone on the waters edge and began to hit his collection against the stone. His wife came to join him and he seemed to be feeding her then himself with a small spoon. I was intrigued so walked over to have a look. He had collected sea urchins, smashed them open and was spooning out the eggs inside. They were small, about half the size of a baked bean and bright orange. My curiosity got me an offer of a spoonful of eggs but I declined, I could not

bring myself to taste the slimy mix, but I did regret it later.

Leaving Kastos we headed for Kalamos and an anchorage we love, Port Leone. However this time instead of being one of two or three boats we were invaded by a flotilla. Never mind we still had our own bit of water, floating free from any quayside at anchor for the night. The sound of goat bells woke us all as normal in this anchorage, the sun coming up over the hills and the water so still you could see the bottom, our ideal wake-up call and start to the day.

31st May - 12th June 2011

How plans change like the wind and anchors get stuck

After three great days in Kioni, meeting up with old friends and making a few new ones, David pulled in the stern anchor and his back went *ping!*

Sami had always been a favourite spot of our but this visit saw us being the talk of the port. Pulling up the stern anchor was now an issue for David and he did not want me to do it so he devised a mechanical pulley out of the old winch, also incorporating the use of the bow winch to get our anchor up when we left. Things seemed to be going to plan when we started to haul in the anchor and then we got stuck. The new system was much slower than hauling in by hand and not realising this we had drifted down the line of boats remaining in the port. We had hooked an anchor chain of a boat three down from us. How we missed those in between goodness knows. Help came rowing out to us. Steve in his dinghy used our glass bottom bucket to see which chain we had snagged and, Roy, pulled our bow around with his dingy to keep us into the wind. It took an hour to free us and did we have red faces. Still this is the first time this has happened, we can only be grateful for other's help and no damage to anybody's boat.

We continued down the coast to Poros and by the time we got there I had to take over all the hauling and lifting as for David it was now enforced rest, lying or standing and full of Ibuprofen.

Poros, near the bottom of Cephalonia, had been a port we had avoided because the pilots and people we had met kept telling us about the horrendous ferry wash which would play havoc with your boat as the large inter-island ferries zoomed in and out during the day and evening. We only needed one night for a hop off point but now it might have to be more. The gods and the European union had been at work recently because a new additional mole had been built and the ferry terminal was now outside the small yacht harbour, no wash to worry about and we were safe. In fact we enjoyed Poros, not that David saw much of it except the harbour and the inside of the boat. I walked over the hill to the town and beaches, taking lots of photos for him to see.

The small town was 20 meters back from a large gently curving shingle beach, which had a man-made walkway dotted with pineapple palms, a few meters from the water's edge. A number of Tavernas with their tables, coloured umbrellas and free Wifi for any customer, fronted the two or three streets of houses and shops which formed the town. Partially built apartment blocks, or they could have been houses, were scattered between the existing buildings. The beach views were nice and the town was trying to appeal to the tourist but there were very few people around, it felt empty.

Over the next three days David's back improved but not sufficiently for any long sea passages to travel to the Peloponese or train rides to Olympia and walking up hills, so we changed our plans.

We crossed to Petalas bay on the mainland 20 miles across the Ionian from Cephalonia. We decide to anchor here giving David's back more healing time. This was a huge anchorage surrounded by small tree covered hills on the North and East sides, marshland to the head of the bay and to the South lowland along which shacks had been built to house the workers for the many fish farms in and around the very indented coastline. Many small rocky outcrops and barren Islands run up the side of the mainland here forming Dragoneres and fish farms are everywhere. The bay was so big and shallow that any boats could spread out and be nowhere near the others, very private.

David felt a swim would be good and jumped into the water off the sugar scoop, when he came back up to the there was a very surprised look was on his face, he had landed feet first in the mud at the bottom of the bay. Yuck, we were only in 2.5 meters of water. Oops, that did not help his back either.

We spent four days here while David's back improved but had some very very strong winds in the evening and into the early hours two out of the four nights. The anchor held fine but we did set GPS alarms at night in case we dragged. Where was the settled Greek weather we had been used to? Gentle breezes in the afternoons that die as the sun goes down?

Next stop to Kalamos Island but when we left Petalas bay the wind had got up and the direction of sail was North towards Astakos, a port on the mainland which was not part of our plan. The sail was amazing, we actually reefed the head sail and still had 7.1 knots, our greatest speed under sail to date, we were flying. To turn towards Kalamos now was into rough seas so Astakos became our next port of call.



Astakos harbour, open to the South.

What a pleasant place, the Greeks come here for their holidays it is not a normal tourist spot.

A town quay, where passing yachts berth and two other local fishing boat harbours. Two small shingle beaches dotted with coloured wooden umbrellas and showers in the breakwater walls to the West of the town and the obligatory line of tavernas along the quayside. No tourist English, it's sign language or David's basic Greek in the town shops.

We ate out the first night and the old waiter seemed to speak all languages, quiet a find, we met him in the town the next day while shopping, he greeted us shaking hands, I mentioned we needed water for the boat and by the time we got back a man and a hose appeared at the bottom of our boat and plugged us into the water supply in the flower bed of a taverna over the quay from the boat. That's how it works here.

Wonder where we will end up next.

18th May - 30th May 2011

Launch day came accompanied by blue skies and little wind, perfect.

Worry about the boat being dropped, bumped and the engine not starting once we were in the water, all evaporated as soon as the engine roared into life at the first turn over. Free at last as the warps were release and we slipped out backwards from the hoist we followed the channel out from the shallows and soon had the sails up. The wind gently blew us towards Lefkas and its lifting bridge. At last we were back sailing on the beautiful blue Ionian water.

We spent a night in Lefkas marina, only to check that everything was working again after the winter layup and all the seacocks were keeping us watertight. Reassured we set off to one of our favourite anchorages, Tranquil bay opposite Nidri. We had only been motoring about 20 minutes down the channel to the sea when the engine alarm and the electronic management system alarms all erupted into full ear piercing screeches. The engine water temperature was at 88C and still rising.(70C is normal) David went rushing below to look at the engine and could see we had water spurting out of the engine and now steam as well. We turned around to limp back to the marina hoping the engine would not seize up before we got there.

We made it, back into the space we had left less than an hour before. What a start! There was no water left it the engine, it had all gone. In the engine bildge reddy brown coloured rusty water looked back at us and the engine was making hissing noises. Not a happy sight or sound. The manuals came out and while the engine cooled down, we read them and then went through checks of all the tubes and parts, including filling it back up with water and cleaning out all red mess from underneath. We started the engine again and in even less time we had alarms ringing.

We trundled off to talk to different engineering works both at the marina and in the town. We had many suggestions given to us including new head gasket, and even booked an engineer to come to the boat later that day. David determined to try and fix it bought new hose and a new thermostat as this had been a consistent possible cause and back we went to put our purchases in place. We then refilled and tested the engine again. This time and hour went by and no overheating, we cancelled the engineer. Later in the day we had another time trial another hour and no overheating we were hoping this was the problem solved.

We left the next morning fingers and everything else crossed and the engine has been fine since although we are still constantly watching the water temperature when the engine is on.

We have had a lovely ten days revisiting some of last year's ports. We were the only boat at anchor in Port Athene on Meganisi, last year in early June we had to wriggle into a space. In tranquil bay we also has lots of room, far fewer boats than last year, but still plenty of flotilla boats in the tourist ports such as Sivota and Kioni on Ithaca.

As I write we now have Sami on Cephalonia to revisit before we drop down to Poros at the tip of Cephalonia and then away from the islands for a bit and to the top of the Peleponese, the three fingers that stretch down South to form the end of the Greek mainland. This area will be new for us with longer hops between ports, maybe a little more wind and from Katakolon we hope to travel inland by train or bus to visit the ruins at Olympia.

1st May - 12th May 2011

Our first two weeks back in Greece 2011 Season

At last we're back in Greece. The boat has beckoned and we have returned. Stepping off the plane the caress of warmth and that dryness in the air meant a different feel to the atmosphere. Aderyn Glas was covered in sand and dust, really dirty, but apart from that was dry and no smells were evident. Within a few hours we felt we had never been away and soon became part of the ups, downs and curves of the boat.

We had hired a car so we could victual up as well as seeing some of the attractions Greece had to offer. We drove around Lefkas island and walked to the waterfalls above Nidri, an unexpected treasure in the hills. Winding paths through the trees and across rocky outcrops led us higher and higher into the gorge. We had to get our feet wet to arrive at the highest waterfall as the water cascaded over the route along the rocky path. A 10m cascade onto the rocks below formed a huge pool of clear water which was so inviting that if we had brought costumes we would have been in.

A few days later we returned to look for Caves and springs at the South end of the Island, all on the tourist map. This was not so good: we never found the springs and ended up on potholed single tracked farm roads which ended at a possible cave - a dead end but a wall of stone with small openings above the path. We did not venture too far as with no long trousers and only sandals we felt the snakes might get us! But we took photos detoured to Vassaliki, only 6 kms away and had a leisurely lunch!

The highlight was our drive to Delphi. Only 287 kms but it ended up a four hour drive each way. Phew! Potholed roads, single track, maniac drivers who push you into the side of the road to overtake on blind bends and double white lines, an experience never to be repeated... when we got there, it lived up to all expectations.



Delphi

A huge site set beneath mount Parnassos. Hairpin bends had to be negotiated to get up to the site, climbing up and up all the time. Poplar trees, olive groves and colourful wild flowers on the roads sides, this time of year, so no wonder it survived all these years as only the really dedicated would have spent the time to follow the hill paths ever upwards.

The temple to Apollo and the huge stadium at the top of the site with the amphitheatre at the center all bear witness to the great importance of the area, amazing what they could build and maintain so many hundreds of years ago. Ruins were everywhere at all levels of the site, which way to turn was the problem. The ancients could not tear down a site but only build in front of it and thus the mismatch of the various shrines makes for an unstructured site but one wreathed in history and legend. This extended both sides of the gorge.

Our road return along the gulf of Corinth allowed us to reconoiture the possible route that Aderyn Glas will take if we head down to the Corinth canal. Anchorage bays, the waterway, marinas and the bridge spanning the gulf were all viewed with some interest. We have since spoken to people who have traveled these paths and will let you know our final routes.

