

**AGROUND!** Stranded off Calais – a reader's tale

T H E O R I G I N A L A N D T H E B E S T

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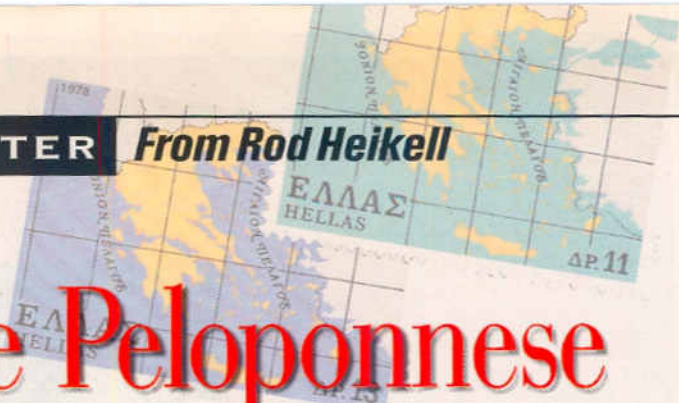
A life-and-death struggle



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# Around the Peloponnese

Rod Heikell writes with news of the rejuvenation of Kalamata Marina and reminds us not to be too reliant on GPS systems in the Med

**G**reece is slowly building a marina here and there, though often the basic structure gets built and then nothing much else happens for a few years. Kalamata Marina in the Peloponnese was built more than 10 years ago and although I knew it was under new management (the IKG group), I still expected to see it as it was on my last visit, full of local fishing boats with a rubbish tip ashore.

The run up to Kalamata was a matter of reefing quickly as squalls from thunderstorms spilt 25-35 knots onto the sea, only to disappear and leave me wallowing in a calm until the next squall. Arriving in the marina was a surprise. The VHF was answered promptly and a *marinero*, who knew how to tie bowlines, helped me in and handed me a welcome package to a marina that bore no resemblance to the place I had visited last time. Rubbish had been cleared up, trees planted and everything was freshly painted. There was a new bar, and the showers and toilets were spotless.

### Atlantic tow job

The answer to the question: 'what had happened to Kalamata Marina?' was Nikitas Kiriakoulis. Nik is a sailor with several Atlantic deliveries under his belt and a passion for boats rarely seen in marina managers. He used to deliver yachts from the Med to the Caribbean for the Kiriakoulis charter operation. What is exceptional, even a little scary, is that he delivered them two at a time, towing one yacht behind the one he and the crew were aboard.

I was flabbergasted at this revelation. Then Nik showed me some photographs and described how it was done. On a trip from the Caribbean back to Gibraltar the towing yacht was a Gibsea 53 towing a Gibsea 45. The larger yacht had a rope bridle made up across the stern between the two aft cleats. The towing rope (25m of 18mm line) was tied in a bowline around the bridle so it could slide from side to side, depending on the towing angle. The tow rope was led to 2m of 10mm chain and then another 25m of line to the towed boat. In anything above Force 6-7, the total length of line was increased to 100m, but still with only 2m of chain in the middle. Nik did three Atlantic crossings towing yachts and more than 20 towed deliveries from Marseille to Greece. I've delivered a few yachts in my time, and towed a fair number on charter, but the thought of towing yachts across the



Left and above: Kalamata Marina bore no resemblance to the place I had visited previously. Below: Nikitas Kiriakoulis, the man behind the rejuvenated marina



Atlantic is a risk I wouldn't entertain.

### This GPS thing

Recently I saw a GPS advertised with a stated accuracy of 3m. My reaction is, so what? It still amazes me that yachtsmen upgrade to new, 'more accurate', systems when there are few charts to match this sort of accuracy. While

we can find our position on the surface of the globe to an accuracy of at least 20m, and to 3m with SDGPS (satellite differential receiver), most of the charts for the Med are based on Admiralty surveys carried out in the 19th century, using standard triangulation and celestial observations for position. Given the methods used, accuracy is outstanding and a tribute to these early surveyors. The charts we use today are basically the 19th century charts patched up with a few modern surveys here and there, and many of the new surveys were made before the advent of DGPS.

The Admiralty will only guarantee an accuracy of one mile in the Northern Hemisphere and two miles in the Southern Hemisphere. Likewise SHOM (the French Hydrographic Department) will only guarantee 1,000m in the Northern Hemisphere and 2,000m in the Southern Hemisphere. The



**Above: a quiet motor up to Monemvasia. Right: on Cape Malea, there is a lonely hermitage inhabited by a couple of monks**



hydrographic departments are understandably covering their own backs. What we might infer from this is that errors of probably half a mile, maybe more, exist on some Northern Hemisphere charts (the Red Sea springs to mind) and there are possibly greater errors in parts of the Southern Hemisphere.

When I run the latest charts on my chart plotter, I often find that at anchor I am shown perched ashore, when rounding a cape I am slicing my way across it and when pottering close to a reef I can be shown to be actually on it.

But charts are getting better and in those countries with the resources to carry out surveys (northern Europe, for example), charts close to 20m accuracy exist. Move not too far away, however, and all that position-finding accuracy means nothing because, in the end, we have nothing accurate enough on which to plot a position.

Just remember, when close to land or dangers to navigation, 'eyeball navigation rules, OK!'

### Formidatum Maleae caput

Cape Malea, the southernmost point of the Peloponnese, has a formidable reputation. It can blow a hooley around the cape giving rise to disturbed and vicious seas. The Roman poet Statius called it *Formidatum Maleae caput* and ancient mariners coined the saying: 'Round Malea and forget your native country.' It has battered me on a number of occasions and I treat it with respect. Yet often it breathes heavily on the approaches without any real puff once you get around it.

Coming from the west, you will often encounter stiff breezes around Elafonisos Island and the bay between Elafonisos and the cape. So it was this time, and I reefed right down. While bashing along towards the cape, I saw a catamaran turning back from the struggle to seek shelter in the bay on the south side of Elafonisos. In the summer this bay will often fill up with boats waiting for a lull in the wind. Once around Cape Malea, after a bit of bouncing and bashing along, it's often flat calm going up towards Monemvasia and that's exactly what happened this time.

Five miles north of the cape the wind ran out of puff and I motored to Monemvasia, thinking wistfully of the blue catamaran huddled in windy Elafonisos. I saw them several days later, heading north, so I knew they had got around Malea safely.

### Romantic setting

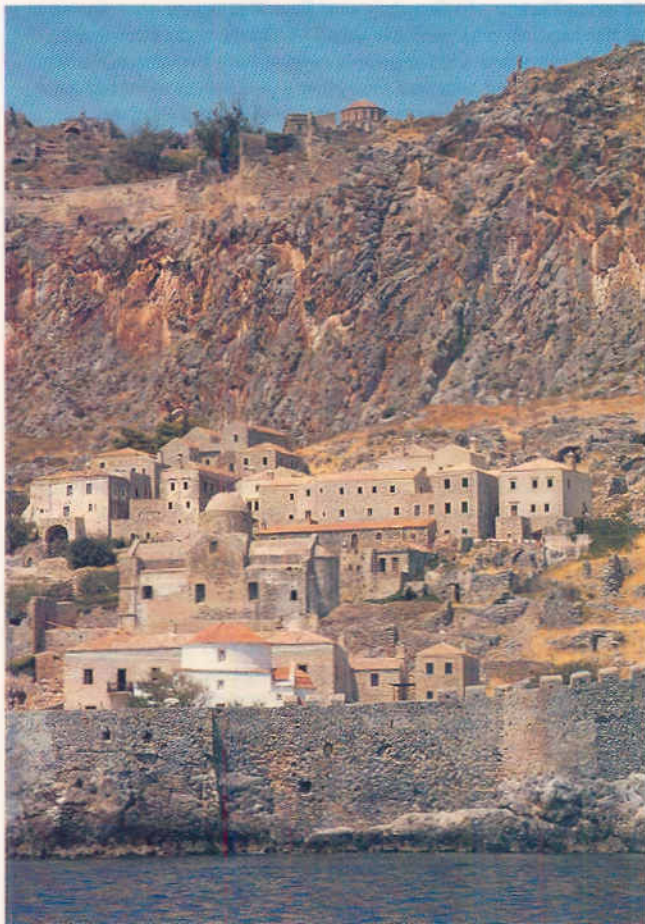
Monemvasia Marina is partially funded by EU money to bring yachts to this lonely outpost on the eastern Peloponnese. Looking rather neglected, most of the useful berths are occupied by local boats. The marina can accommodate perhaps 10 visiting yachts at a pinch, if they moor on unsafe pontoons or alongside each other on the breakwater. Mis-spending of EU money aside, Monemvasia



is one of my favourite places on the eastern Peloponnese. The island with the old fortified town is unmistakable once seen: a slab-sided island not dissimilar to Gibraltar, but without the population and high-rise buildings.

The old fortified town, originally Byzantine and then rebuilt by the Venetians, is the subject of an historical preservation order and some of the old houses have been sympathetically converted to bars and restaurants.

If you want to have a meal in the most romantic of settings, wander along the causeway to the Kastro and have a candlelit supper with views out over the Aegean and a few gentle ghosts of the departed Venetians to keep you company. ▲



**Monemvasia's Byzantine fortified town**

**Blue Water Postscript: see page 76**