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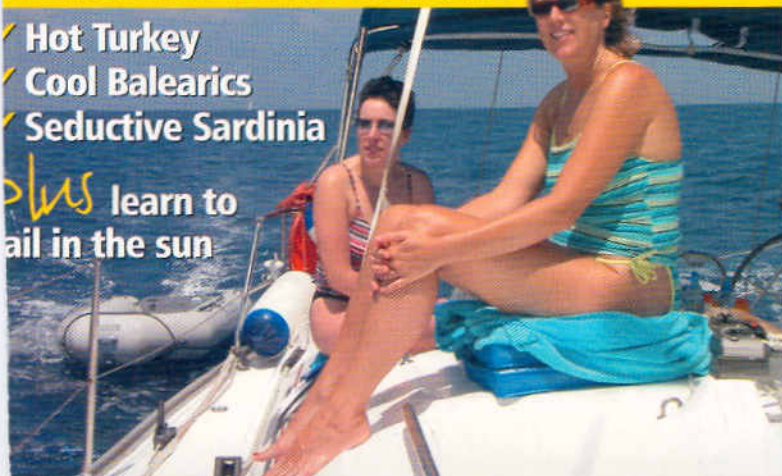
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AOL Keyword: FBO

FAMILY CONQUERS THE NORTH WEST
PASSAGE – Read how they did it inside

Low sun in SARDINIA

Andrew Simpson enjoys the cool water and sheltered bays of a late-season cruise along the 'Emerald Coast'

THE COMPANY

■ Kiriacoulis is a Greek company with many types of boats and locations in the Caribbean and the Med. As well as bareboats, crewed charters are available. Their UK agent is Tenrag Yacht Charters, who are based in Kent.

The Costa Smeralda curls a lazy arm around Sardinia's north-eastern shoulder. It consists of 100km or so of mountainous, fretted coastline with a gaggle of nearby islands – the Maddalena Archipelago – all itching to be explored by boat. Its northern stretch forms the southern shore of the Strait of Bonifacio, with Corsica on the other side. I had never been there before so was eager to discover what it had to offer.

Day one

It was Saturday 27 Sept when Chele and I flew into Alghero, some 120km to the west. The mid-morning arrival had been gained at the cost of an indecently early departure from Stansted, but at least it left plenty of time to locate the boat and complete the check-in procedures. But first there had to be a detour for our taxi, swinging by the ferry terminal at Porto Torres, just north of the airport, to scoop up fellow reprobates, Greg and Juliet, who were to join us for the week. After a couple of months sailing, they had recently laid up their boat *Spook* in Marseille for the winter.

An hour-and-a-half later saw us delivered to the offices of Kiriacoulis Mediterranean, our charter company, based in the Marina di Portisco. There, we met Monica, friendly and obliging, who introduced



The Travel Library (TTL)

us to *Daydream*, our almost new Bavaria 41.

It wasn't to be an entirely auspicious start. Having been briefed – briefly – on where everything was, we went ashore in search of provisions. As we approached the quite sizeable marina shop we could see stock on the shelves but no sign of activity. Siesta, we concluded. Luckily, there was a bar a few doors along. Beers and pizzas were mentioned; the motion carried unanimously. Let's face it, travelling builds up a thirst. Several beers later the shop was still dark so I thought I had better investigate. A small sign was stuck in the window, thanking their customers for the season's patronage. They had apparently closed the day before and wouldn't be returning until April.

Luckily, Monica came to our rescue. For just €25 she would drive us to the local supermarket, wait an hour while we shopped, and bring us back. Deal done. No alternative. Greg and Juliet departed while Chele and I unpacked.

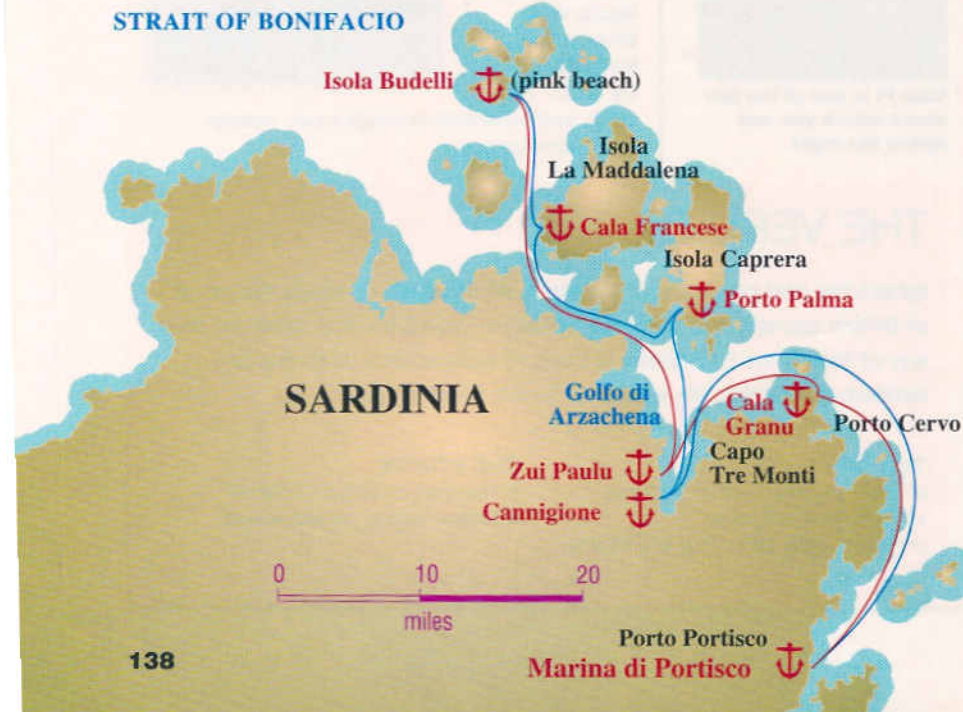
Our second problem emerged in late afternoon. It was now raining hard. A bunch of Germans on another boat had started telling dirty jokes, loudly and in English. I can only imagine they sound funnier that way. For us, any thoughts of leaving the marina that day had been abandoned.

'Has anyone got any matches?' enquired Juliet, kettle in hand.

To say we searched the Bavaria would be an understatement. We almost ripped it apart looking for a means of lighting the stove. Matchless and



STRAIT OF BONIFACIO





Golfo di Arzachena, Costa Smeralda

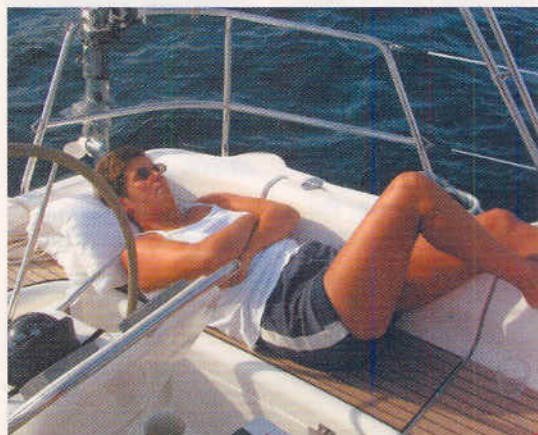
weather-bound in a marina sliding rapidly towards hibernation, a crew can get frantic when deprived of a cuppa. Braving the rain, Greg and I went back to the bar. They couldn't sell us matches, but the waitress lent us a lighter between cigarettes. Later that evening, we managed to scrounge a handful of complimentary book matches from a restaurant, sufficient to tide us over.

Many charter companies put 'welcome boxes' on board. These contain essential supplies like milk, coffee, bread, toilet paper – and matches. The cost is small, the appreciation huge. I strongly commend the practice to Kiriacoulis.

Day two

But it's amazing what sunshine will do to dispel frustration. The following morning came as bright as a smile, and we slipped out of the marina after breakfast. At last there was the opportunity to evaluate the boat. The Bavaria 41 might have been designed for charter. There's a large double cabin forward and two slightly smaller ones aft, with a single berth on the settee to starboard. By my calculations that means plenty of space for three couples or four individuals, though who knows what degrees of chumminess might be achieved by the more ambitious.

The cockpit is spacious but curiously awkward, with nowhere comfortable to lean against with your feet up. A drop-leaf table forms part of the steering console. It's large enough for four, but a



There's plenty of room on deck for Juliet to enjoy a siesta

real squeeze for six. However, there's lots of room on deck to lounge in pursuit of a tan.

The standard rig sports an in-mast mainsail and roller reefing genoa. I thought the sails were poorly cut and of rather too light a cloth – the latter somewhat surprising considering the abuse many charter boats received. Yet, they performed creditably enough, and the ease with which they could

be operated from the cockpit has undeniable merit in that context. The rig on a boat of that size can be quite a handful for the inexperienced.

In a fitful wind, the engine served us well that day. By evening we were anchored in Cala Granu, a small cove a couple of miles north of Porto Cervo, once summer home to the Aga Khan and still a favourite watering hole for the superyacht brigade. As *Daydream's* crew council convened around a bottle of wine, those facts influenced our planning.

Greg and Juliet had been scrambling in and out of marinas all summer. Ditto Chele and myself. We had collectively had our fill of crowds and clamour. By common accord we agreed to anchor out ▶

- ▶ whenever we could, relying on the dinghy to take us ashore for whatever delights took our fancy. Tomorrow, we would settle for a 6NM hop round the corner to Cannigione, deep in the Golfo di Arzachena. There we would comprehensively victual the boat, replenish our meagre supply of matches and generally chill out.

Day three

And that we did. Chilling out often meant diving over the side. With a negligible tide and a bottom that shelves very gradually, it's usually possible to anchor in reasonable privacy. The pilot book warned of poor holding immediately off Cannigione, so we found a spot just to the north, a couple of cables off Zui Paulu, a tiny island guarded by a bronze, stick-figure statue. In anything less than 15m or so, it's easy to see where you're dropping the hook. Among the numerous clumps of weed, we found a sandy patch in about 5m and payed out five times that depth in chain.

Swimming at this time of year is pure delight. The temperature is cool enough to be refreshing yet warm enough to wallow in for as long as you like. The absence of any current makes it ideal for mediocre swimmers like myself, or families with aquatic sprogs. If nothing else draws me back, this will.

Although we didn't know it at the time, Cannigione was to be the only town we visited. We sallied ashore, forgot about the siesta – a genuine one this time – and had to spend yet more time in a bar before we could buy what we needed. The rest of the day passed in a convivial haze as we read in the cockpit, splashed about and made inroads into local comestibles.

Day four

So inspirational was the location that, first thing, Greg had to go ashore for a 10-mile run – so he said. In the meantime, the ladies slept and I drank many cups of tea. Strenuous stuff, but it didn't stop us setting sail by noon, tacking northwards through the archipelago. From the sailing aspect, this was more like it. *Daydream* stretched herself out towards one of the smaller islands, Isola Budelli, famous for its enchanting *spiaggia rossa* (pink beach). The sand is the product of pulverised red coral that once grew in profusion thereabouts. Coincidentally, the granite of the region is also a shade of pink, and



ABOVE: youth at the helm

BELOW: sailing in the September sunshine



you can find wonderfully sculpted shapes, fashioned by the sea over the millennia. Lit by the sun low in the sky, the effects are literally fantastic.

The pink beach has been declared a prohibited anchorage for environmental reasons, but just 100m or so to the north are a number of visitors' moorings, only two others of which were occupied that late in the season. Another breathtaking spot.

Day five

The night started calmly, but the wind slowly picked up. By morning, we had a stiff onshore breeze, which had the boat snatching at the buoy. Our original plan had been to cross the strait to Bonifacio itself – a passage of less than 14NM and no problem in an easterly. But returning could be tough if the wind stayed in that quarter. One of the disadvantages of a seven-day charter is that there's very little slack in your schedule. You can easily get trapped far from base, with painful penalties arising.

So, it was back to the chart for an alternative destination. Our first choice was Cala Francese on the western side of the Isola la Maddalena, from whence the whole group gets its name. But when we got there, we found the holding was awful. We tried four or five times but the anchor wouldn't hold. Clearly this was no place to stay. So we scooted round to Porto Palma, at the head of a sheltered bay at the southern end of Isola Caprera. There we picked up another visitor's buoy.

Day six

One morning, wind; the next, fog! I could hardly believe it. When I stumbled on deck the foreshore had all but disappeared. It was half a mile, no more. From the channels between the islands, came the doleful sounds of foghorns.

Of course, our planned itinerary would have had us in Bonifacio, where there are shops aplenty to



ABOVE: Chele found the pulpit seat most comfortable

LEFT: we often stopped for lunch and relaxation. Note the pink granite outcrop behind the bow

boost our now depleted provisions. We debated going to La Maddalena town itself but, with only 36 hours in hand, that was a move in the wrong direction. Although it seemed somewhat defeatist, we opted for Cannigione once more.

The sun didn't take long to burn the fog away, and we were soon motoring south through the last tendrils of murk. There we dropped anchor immediately off the town and I stayed on board while Greg, Juliet and Chele rowed ashore. The rest of the day was spent exploring the Golfo Arzachena, anchoring for lunch, and a swim before finding a spot for the night in the shelter of Capo Tre Monti at the north-east corner of the gulf.

Last day

Our last day of sailing. *Daydream* had to be back in her berth that afternoon. As if to taunt us, this was the best morning by far. Bright and crystal clear, with the sun asserting its authority from the first. With Porto Portisco less than 15NM distant, we could afford to leave our departure until after lunch.

Following a familiar theme, we swam and lounged around. I paddled out in the dinghy to take a few photos. There was almost no wind and, with a feeling of disappointment, I was anticipating powering the boat home. Then, suddenly, a stirring in the air, ripples on the water. Within minutes our calm had become a north-westerly Force 4-5 and we were on a lee shore. The sea breeze had kicked in. Not desperate stuff, but certainly uncomfortable.

But, it had its compensations. Far from being a tedious trip, *Daydream* tore down the coast under just a reefed headsail, threading through the off-lying islands as if they were racing marks. We radioed ahead to the marina and were met in the approaches by a RIB that helped spin us round so we could slide sternwards into her berth.

Our Sardinian cruise was over.



CONTACT

UK booking agents: Tenrag Yacht Charters, Tenrag House, Freeport CU986, Preston, Canterbury, Kent CT3 1EB. Tel: 01227 721874; email: info@tenrag.com; website: www.tenrag.com.

LEFT: We decided to anchor whenever we got the chance

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE

■ We flew from London Stansted to Alghero and made the mistake of booking our flights late, due to misleading advice from Tenrag. Although there is a bus from Alghero to Olbia (120km by road) it's quite slow and you have to change at Sassari. In our view, a shared taxi was the better option.

COST PER PERSON

For us in late September:	
Boat: (four people sharing)	£400
Flights:	£143
Taxis from and to Alghero:	£ 55
TOTAL	£598

■ The lowest achievable cost would be for seven people sharing before 24 April and after 25 September: £167 per person, plus travel.

WEATHER

■ This was typically Mediterranean – warm and generally benign from April to November.

THE VERDICT

If the measure of how much you're enjoying yourself is the speed with which time passes, then our week went by in a flash.

Cruising among islands is always rewarding, and the Maddalena Archipelago is no exception. The navigation is straightforward (charts and cruising guides supplied) and the lack of tides makes for easy timing and anchoring. You can sail for a whole day or just an hour, which is very useful when children are on board. And, regardless of wind direction, there's always a sheltered anchorage to be found.

We found the Kiriacoulis operation to be both friendly and helpful. The boat was virtually new so was in good condition and clean when we boarded. The inventory was adequate, though could have been more generous in some respects – towels too few, sheets too small.

But the big question is, would we go again?

No, we wouldn't, but that's only because we have other plans. Recommend it to our friends? Absolutely.

THE UPS

- ✓ Versatile cruising area with wide choice of routes
- ✓ Tideless waters
- ✓ Good mix of marinas and anchorages

THE DOWNS

- ✗ Travel is either awkward or costly