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Along the Italian watchtowers

Sailing south from Naples, we found an unspoiled region and a great cruising ground that Italians keep to themselves

by George Day

When we awoke on our first day out, the sun was already high and the sky over the double berth in *Mia Xara's* forward cabin was that unique pale blue we knew so well. We were back in the Mediterranean and on the Italian coast after 10 years and pleased to be there. We pulled on our bathing suits, put the espresso percolator on the stove and climbed to the cockpit to consume the croissants we had bought on the way back to the boat the night before.

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Along the quay where we were moored stern-to, two old men sat on folding stools under a brightly colored umbrella and slowly dipped their long fishing poles up and down as they jigged for fish. Two young women perched on a Vespa roared by toward the end of the quay where others were sunbathing on the blocks of rip-rap that formed the harbor. On the traditional ketch next to us a middle-age couple with allover tans showered under the deck hose blithely unconcerned about their nudity.

There is something indolent and almost sybaritic about the Med, particularly here in southwestern Italy on the coast south of Naples where the June sun blazes intensely and life moves slowly. That suited us fine since we were still jet lagged from the transatlantic flight and frazzled from the rush of trying to get away from home and work for 10 days. Indolence was what we needed.

Local rhythms of life

We had picked up our chartered Bavaria 44 at the Kiriacoulis Charters' base in the medieval cliffside town of Agropoli. The journey that led us there took us from Boston to London and then south to Naples. Agropoli lies 50 miles south of Naples so we had the choice of either hiring a van for \$150 or so or taking the local train for \$9. Rosie and I like using local transportation when in a foreign land so we can hear the language, catch the smells and get into the local rhythms of life. Saving \$141 didn't hurt either.

The train rolled through lowlands and then clung to the coast so we could see the expanses of marsh and beaches that lie along the great curve of the Gulf of Salerno. In the distance we could see the ruins of the ancient Greek city of Paestum and to the west the peninsula that forms the southern boundary of the gulf and the rocky cliffs where we knew we would find Agropoli.

Ten years earlier Rosie, our sons Si and Tim and I had sailed into this gulf and to Agropoli after the over-

night passage from the Aeolian Isles that lie off Sicily. We were in the fourth year of a circumnavigation aboard our Mason 43 *Clover* and on our way home to the States. Italy was destined to be one of the last countries we would cruise for any length of time and had left us with many fond memories. Not exactly a homecoming, the return to Agropoli was a journey back to a place we had enjoyed.

Sleep of the pure

Because we had been up all night we booked a room at the Hotel Carola for our first night and had the cab from the station drop us off there. That night we ate under the grape arbor on the terrace at the back of the hotel. The food was an exotic blend of seafood and fresh vegetables and the wine very white and cold. And then, tired from the trail, we slept the sleep of the pure.

The Kiriacoulis Charters' base in Agropoli is managed by Eduardo Cuoco, who met us at the hotel the next morning and took us straight to a local market so we could provision for the week. With the euro at record highs against the dollar we expected to spend a fortune at the market but came away with plenty of basic supplies, several lunches and dinners and a case of wine for under \$140. We could not do so well at home.

Mia Xara was waiting for us in the Agropoli Marina, which like most of the harbors along this coast is formed by a huge boulder jetty topped with a high concrete wall. The Bavaria 44 was lying stern-to the floating dock



and was ready to go when we arrived. Eduardo and his assistant helped us get our gear and provisions aboard and then gave us a quick tour of the boat and its systems. Rosie and I have chartered with a number of companies in several countries, and we could not remember an easier and quicker pre-charter check out.

The afternoon sea breeze filled in after lunch as we sailed slowly out the Gulf of Salerno and turned southward toward parts unknown. From the Agropoli base most skippers tend to turn northward toward the lovely Amalfi Coast, Capri and the Bay of Naples. These famous cruising destinations have good (but expensive) harbors, lovely scenery, great restaurants and plenty of interesting strolls ashore. The area is also heavily populated with tourists, even in June.

Off the beaten track

Rosie and I had spent many weeks in the area 10 years ago and had a lovely time. This cruise we wanted to explore the region south of Naples that we had missed the first time around, and we wanted to get off the beaten track for a week or so. The dry, rugged coast of Campania would suit us fine.

Riding the gentle sea breeze for several hours we rounded Point Licosa and then headed for the long white beach at Oligastro. On top of Point Licosa we had seen an ancient stone tower standing on the cliffs, and now we saw another on a bluff at the far end of the beach. We anchored near it in 30 feet over sand. The water was so transparent it was possible to see the grassy tufts below as we lowered the anchor.

We swam and sunned away the afternoon and then motored *Mia Xara* the five miles south to Acciarola, which stood on its own little promontory and was marked by another ancient tower.

Since it was still June the transient moorings along the quay were only half used and to our surprise were available at no charge. A dock boy directed us to our spot and then we kicked the Bavaria 44's sail drive into reverse and backed to the quay where neighbors from boats alongside waited to collect our stern lines.

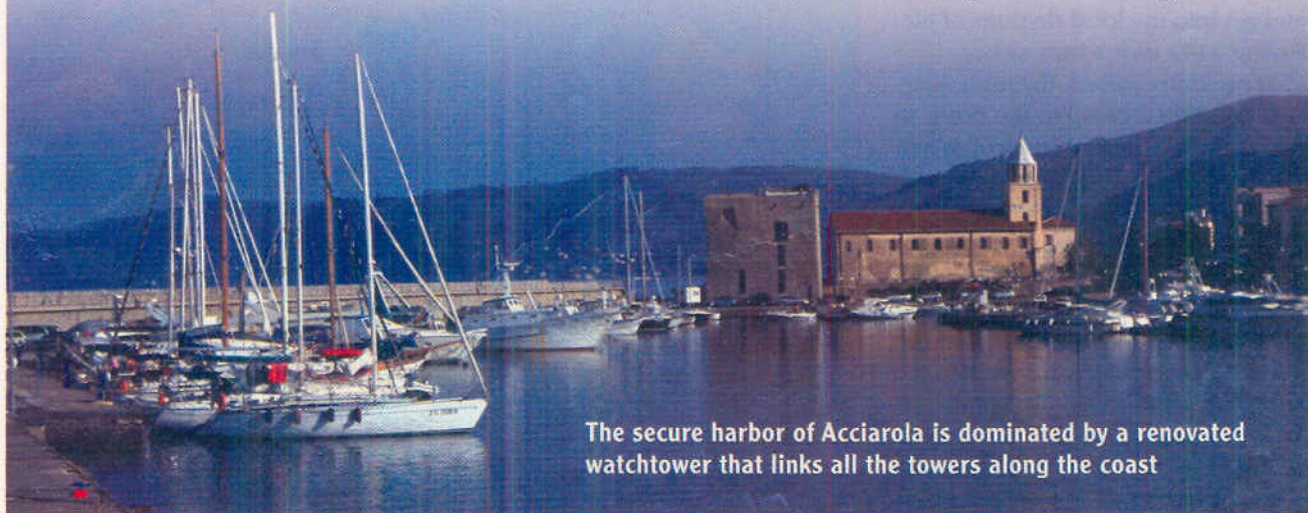
On a June Friday night in Acciarola the streets teemed with families out promenading, with children playing and with teenagers bombing around on motorbikes. Everyone looked sunburned from a day at the beach or out on the water, ourselves included. We found an open-air restaurant where we ate local fish and octopus and sampled the local white wine. With no cars allowed in the narrow streets and piazza, children scampered around while their parents and grandparents reposed on benches under the broadleaf trees.

Italy for the Italians

The coast south of Naples, in the region of Campania, is dominated by the high blue peaks of 10,000-foot mountains, by steep arid cliffs and bold headlands that jut out into the sea. Campania is starkly beautiful but very poor. The beaches are some of the best Italy has to offer yet this area has never attracted the jet-setters who flock to Capri or the spas of Tuscany. Instead, Campania remains Italy for the Italians so you don't find McDonalds or Holiday Inns and you don't rub shoulders with busloads of boisterous Germans. For Rosie and me, that was what we were looking for.

In Acciarola we met several cruising couples that were heading south and west for the season, and over the next week we often shared anchorages or berths at the quays with this migrating flock. There was a young Norwegian couple who were heading to Greece for the Olympics aboard their bare-bones 28-footer and a middle-age French couple who had been out cruising for a decade and were heading to Turkey for the third time. And we berthed next to a family from Malta who were on a four-week summer vacation aboard their new Beneteau 47.7. We were surprised and pleased to learn that they were *BWS* subscribers!

From Acciarola we pointed *Mia Xara's* bow southward toward the huge Cabo Palinuro. The breeze was light from the southwest so we were able to glide along at four knots or so while sailing close to the wind. The Bavaria 44 was surprisingly slippery and managed to hold her speed well through tacks. We hugged the coast



The secure harbor of Acciarola is dominated by a renovated watchtower that links all the towers along the coast

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to get a better view of the villages perched on the bluffs above the beaches. The stone buildings were connected to the beaches by steep switchback paths, designed to thwart attacks by marauding Saracens in the old days. And each had its own ancient, stone watchtower.

We sailed close enough to Cabo Palinuro to see the caves that waves have dug into it and stopped for lunch, a swim and a nap at the two-mile beach that lies on the cape's southern side. It had taken a day or two, but we were finally falling into the cruising rhythm and indulging a little needed relaxation.

The best in the region

Back in Agropoli Eduardo mentioned a little bay at the mouth of the Gulf of Policastro that was one of the best in the region. As the sun was setting we found the bay's entrance under the battlements of a huge watchtower. The entrance was narrow but the bay opened up to form a nearly enclosed basin that was protected from all sides.

Eduardo was right. Bai della Infresca had all the elements of a great gunkhole. Good protection, good holding for the anchor, great scenery and a rustic outdoor restaurant under the trees at the bay's head. We anchored in 50 feet over sand and weed under the cliffs and treated ourselves to a long swim. As we stroked around the bay, Rosie noticed something strange about the water. It wasn't as salty, and it didn't support her as saltwater should. Also, as we swam we kept passing through cold upwellings that we realized were freshwater springs, the *infresca* of the bay. After a day of sailing and sun, the cool fresh water soothed our sunburns and washed away the salt of living aboard.

We lingered in the bay for two days so we could enjoy the swimming and explore the barren hills around us. We hiked through brown fields of dry grass and through hills with rocky cliffs—always keeping an eye out for the wily adders that populate this region.

In the twilight of the next day we sailed 10 miles into the Gulf of Policastro to the rustic little town of Scario, where we moored stern-to next to our French cruising friends. The mooring was free, and the quay new and secure in all weathers.

That evening we ate at an outdoor bistro with the French couple. Our French and their English only overlapped slightly, but we managed to converse and enjoyed sharing our cruising tales as best we could. The evening was warm and soft, and the wind barely ruffled the harbor below us.

Scario was to be the end of our cruise south. We spent the next few days revisiting places we liked and scouting out new harbors. The wind remained light so we sailed slowly and often stopped to swim or explore an interesting looking place ashore. For the last few days we sought out anchorages instead of towns so we could swing on the hook and let the evening breeze falling from the hillsides cool us.

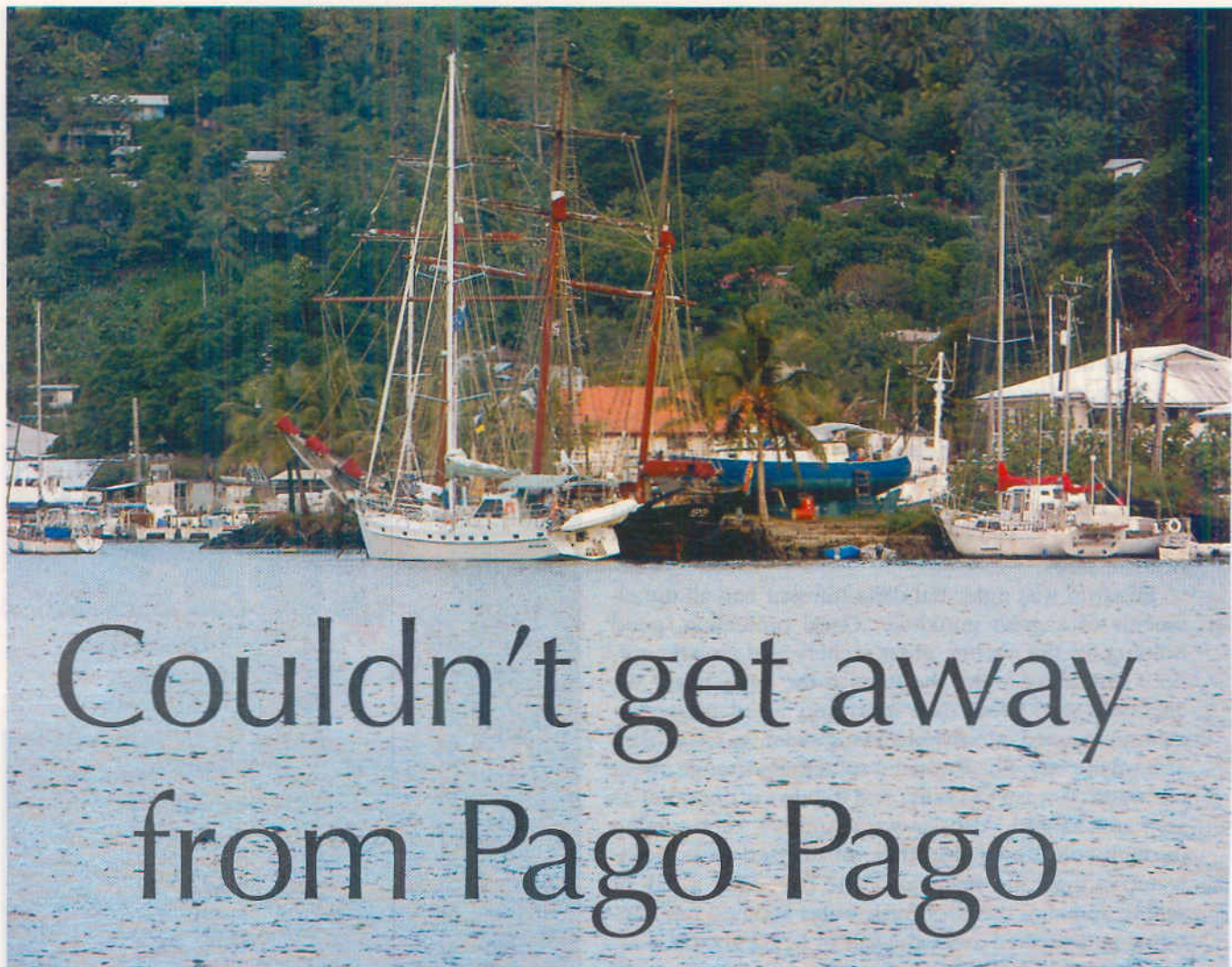


Rosie poses at the Greek ruins at Paestum near Agropoli

Eduardo met us on the dock when we arrived in Agropoli, took our lines as we backed into the slip and greeted us like family. We picked up the boat, packed our sea bags and handed back the keys while Eduardo and his crew got *Mia Xara* ready for another couple.

A week along the coast south of Naples had taken us to a new and interesting cruising ground and had allowed us to really venture away from our normal lives. At the end of 10 days we were able to make ourselves known in Italian and had discovered all sorts of new ways to cook octopus and squid. We had walked among tall and rugged mountains and swum in the clearest water. And we had been entirely indolent. Which is exactly what we needed.

For more information on chartering in Italy contact Mark Wakman at Kiriacoulis Charters in Newport Beach, CA, at 800-714-3411 or go online at www.kiriacoulis.com.



Couldn't get away from Pago Pago

The 75-mile passage to Apia, Samoa, would have to wait

story by Ann Hoffner

photography by Thomas T. Bailey

Between Pago Pago, capital of the group of islands known as American Samoa, and Apia, capital of the western islands of Samoa, lies a 75-mile passage. Apia was next on our cruising schedule, and we decided to sail overnight to give ourselves plenty of daylight for unforeseen complications on the other end. At three in the afternoon on a late August day we turned on the engine to winch in the anchor chain, which was coated first with a tough hide of sea algae, then mud and black, flat limpets that soon covered *Oddly Enough's* foredeck and crunched underfoot. We managed to retrieve 60 feet of chain before the bow began to drag down a few more feet with the windlass making laborious, groaning sounds then the bow jerked down hard and the windlass stopped. We were in 55 feet of water with 150 feet of chain still out. Something had snagged the chain.

It had rained recently so Pago Pago Harbor was full of silt and plastic debris. There was no way I

was going down with air tanks to the minefield of abandoned refrigerators, barges, old wood sailboats and huge chains left on the muddy bottom from the days when this was a U.S. Navy port. We tried the tricks we had learned in coral-infested anchorages across the Pacific, including dropping a bunch of chain all at once before winching it in and making slow circles around the snag, but we were hooked good. Frank, whose tender is called *Easy Diver*, was drifting nearby. He told us he couldn't see anything below 20 feet that late in the day and to try to pull up more chain bit by bit, and he would be by in the morning with his dive gear.

A friend buzzed over to see what was up and brought a bag of ice; Pago Pago has washing machines, hot showers and cold ice near the dock. Another iced happy hour? Some compensation. So we put the boat in order and grumbled about all the people who didn't rush to help get the anchor up.

VAIO is currently leading the race, the second- and third-place boats, *Samsung* and *Barclays Adventurer*, are within 10 miles, the first seven boats are within 100 miles of each other, and only one boat, *Team Save the Children*, which has experienced a string of bad luck, is more than 300 miles behind the leader. For details about the boats' positions as well as coverage of the successes and dramas aboard each of the boats the website includes an archive of the stories from even before the race began as well as video clips of the live action.

Following the approximately five-week first leg, the race will proceed on from Buenos Aires to Wellington, Sydney, Cape Town, Boston and La Rochelle before returning to England in 10 months.

If you get inspired enough to consider experiencing an extreme sailing adventure of your own it is still possible to join the current race. At the moment there is very limited availability on three of the upcoming legs (contact Sara Stanton and Adrienne Maidment of Challenge Business' Crew Support Team at 44-23-8071-5300 for more information). To learn more about the tamer and shorter-in-duration sailing opportunities offered by Challenge Business visit the company's website at www.challengebusiness.com.

20 skippers line up for the 5th Vendée Globe

Another exciting offshore racing event that is fun to follow from the comfort and safety of your home or office is the latest edition of the nonstop Vendée Globe (www.vendeeglobe.fr). The classic singlehanded race around the world aboard Open 60s, which began November 7, is expected to take about three months (the current race record holder is Michel

Desjoeaux who finished in 93 days, three hours). Among the 18 men and two women competing are eight skippers who have taken part in previous editions, including one, Raphaël Dinelli, who was famously rescued from his sinking boat in the Southern Ocean by fellow competitor Pete Goss. As many as 12 skippers are considered to have a chance of winning, and four skippers will be racing highly-perfected new boats.

For the rest of the fleet the challenge seems to be enough.

For more information about each of the participants the website includes biographies and Q&A interviews, which provide their answers to questions about motivations, apprehensions, fears, superstitions and goals. The Vendée, which begins and ends in Les Sables d'Olonne, France, is sure to generate a lot of interesting stories.

Paul Cayard, six-time world sailing champion and Olympic sailor. And you think you're hard to impress?



"The trip was a total success and I can't wait to do it again... it was a vacation none of us will forget soon but more importantly one of those memories that will stick with our children forever..."

—PAUL CAYARD



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