



MANCHESTER CRUISING ASSOCIATION

Cruising to Madeira

9 October 2003 Bruce Burman

Bruce had a full house at the Lancashire County Cricket Club for his account of the voyage that took him from his home port of Exmouth in Devon to Madeira and back in the summer of 2001. He is plainly in love with *Marelanja*, his 1975 Contessa 32. She looked beautifully finished (Bruce is after all a cabinet maker) but Bruce



scorns roller furling and keeps a full wardrobe of sails. He planned the trip in a day at the Cruising Association. He had already accepted that the return leg would probably be hard work with unfavourable winds and currents and the CA visit confirmed this. But it also convinced him that, rather than heading for Madeira, he should aim for the small nearby island of Porto Santo. It was decision he would not regret. The excitement started on leaving Exmouth with his son Daniel as crew on 25 May 2001 with easterlies giving a rough farewell at the mouth of the estuary. They then had varied winds across to Bayona for the 6 day 746M passage with a NE 7 right at the end. One of the advantages of the Contessa 32 was clear a couple of days out when, while motoring in calm seas and eating lunch, a loud bang announced something round the prop. No problem with a Contessa: the low freeboard means you can just dangle your son over the side so he can clear it.

After a couple of days in Bayona they pressed on, first the 38M leg to Viana do Castelo, then 136M to Nazare and then, on 5 June, 32M to Peniche, the sardine capital of the world. Before heading into Peniche, they did look at the Berlenga Islands for an anchorage but it was too steep to. The next day was the final day-sail for a while and it took them past the fierce Cape Roca, the western-most point in mainland Europe. This was boisterous (some N7) but uneventful (but see later for the return) and they made for the marina at Caiscais. This choice was one of the fruits of the CA planning trip: all the other marinas around Lisbon are built next to motorways. Caiscais is relatively quiet and well-placed: 30 min and £1 by train from Lisbon.

There was a crew change during the week spent at Caiscais and Bruce was joined by Clare for the passage to Porto Santo, her first

open sea passage. Setting off on 14 June they covered the 499M in 4 days in NWesterlies (2 at the beginning but 4-6 by day 4). As they rounded into Porto Santo they realised this was a good stop. The marina was owned by the local representative of the CA - who took good care of them.

In the 10 days there, they had a trip on the ferry to Madeira. Bruce gave us a photographic tour of the island with its intriguing irrigation system and amazing landscape. When he saw the marina, he realised he had been right not to go there. You usually have to wait for a marina berth - sometimes for several days - in the outer harbour and this is subject to swell and wash. A 50-footer was rolling its heart out as he watched, in spite of buckets poled out over both sides. A useful non-sailing tip here. If you take a bus make sure its not driven by the James Bond lookalike. His glance made Clare's heart beat faster but Bruce was terrified by his driving on the narrow vertiginous roads. Clare went back to England and Bruce was joined by his other son, Jonathan for the leg back to the mainland.

They started the trip back with a reasonable forecast but soon they were slogging into a strong (4,5 and 6) northeasterly through a big swell and, for a long time, they were unable to do better than point to Casablanca. The waves were so big that the Haslar self-steering was confused in the troughs and they switched to the electronic autohelm. They took 5 1/2 days to claw up to Caiscais and found they had covered 805M (rather than the 499M going). As Bruce said, the Azores would have been more sensible but he couldn't face telling his wife Mary - who was flying out to Lisbon to meet him - so he plugged on and arrived on 2 July.

Cape Roca lived up to its reputation when he and Mary left Caiscais on 12 July. Although a N5 when they left the marina, it was gusting 9 off the Cape. Along with all the other boats that had left Caiscais, they turned back. The next day conditions were better and they did manage the 181M passage to Leixoes, arriving on 14 July. After a break of a few days they made the 79M leg to Vigo in lightish northerlies.

Mary left him at Vigo. Realising he would be bereft of crew, Bruce had previously contacted Crewfinders and was impressed that they could provide several at short notice. He choose the first applicants and they turned out to be a young couple with no cruising experience. Bruce used the leg to La Coruna to train them up in

light winds. This was as well because the trip across Biscay was uncomfortable in strong winds up to F7 and he found himself, unexpectedly, engaged in serious crew management of the "pull yourself together" kind. They stopped at Concarneau and Cameret before getting back to Exmouth on 9 August 2001.

There were many entertaining side tales. The J-class yacht looking for diesel in Portugal. Sea stacks. The best firework display ever celebrating ...Was it the collapse of a bridge? Nice meals. Meeting old friends from the RAF. The spectacular tiled pavements in Lisbon and the monument to the explorers. It is difficult to do justice to the excellent slides and Bruce's dry presentation. The trip took 2 1/2 months and Bruce logged 3300 miles and we enjoyed every moment of it.

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