

CROATIA 2013

A short cruise

The *Calypso* crew are wont to share a few pints in the St. James Terrace clubhouse on Thursday nights when the chat is wide ranging. During the summer some one threw out the idea of doing a charter holiday in the Autumn and it was accepted with alacrity. Finbarr Garland volunteered to do the research and shortly after came up with a proposal to charter a 39 footer in late September from a charter company operating out of Sukošan Marina adjacent to the large Croatian town of Zadar which is served by Ryanair.

We were five in number - Michael McCabe, Finbarr Garland, Anthony Moran, Sean McCabe and your scribe, Roger Greene. Later, Maurice Fagan joined the party and Finbarr changed to a 42 footer. The following is a brief account of a very enjoyable short cruise among some of the one thousand or so islands that run approximately north-west - south-east in three lines parallel to the Croatian coast.

Saturday 21 September

The 09.05 Ryanair flight out of Dublin was uneventful and we touched down in the small but modern airport of Zadar two and a half hours later where there was just one other passenger plane and it was about to leave. However there were about six small float planes painted a garish yellow. We subsequently saw one practising scooping up sea water and later dumping it in a spray for fire fighting purposes. A pre-booked 8-seater minibus took us on the 15 minute journey to the enormous 1,400 berth marina at Sukošan which was buzzing with weekend changeover activity.



Michael checked in at the busy Kroki Charter Company office, collected the papers and was told a representative would join us shortly on the boat to do an acceptance check. This chap came with a very extensive checklist and went through every item showing us where it was, how it worked and agreeing all in good order. He said he would repeat the check on our return and a diver would do an underwater check. Meantime the cook (Finbarr) and his assistants stocked up on provisions and beer (€1.10 a half litre bottle of 5° strength !)

The boat, *Oliva*, was a 2011 Jeanneau 42i in excellent condition and well equipped. Forward was a double cabin with heads and shower and there were large double cabins on either side aft with adjoining heads/shower. The saloon was spacious. The galley had a large fridge (heavy on batteries) and a twin burner cooker with oven and grill. On deck there was a substantial sprayhood and overlapping bimini extending right aft over the twin steering wheels.

The sun was beating down out of a clear blue sky when we cast off about 16.00 hrs and made our way to open water. The jenny and main were quickly rolled out and we set course along the coast for Zadar in a brisk breeze. She handled nicely and we were soon nosing into one of the three marinas in Zadar which is a busy ferry port with an attractive old quarter. However, it was our most expensive marina at €70 for an overnight.

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We crossed a long brightly illuminated footbridge into the old town which was full of character and atmosphere and traffic free but teeming with tourists. There were many interesting very old buildings on narrow streets and alleys with stone paving highly polished by millions of footfalls. Yet there were plenty of small fashion shops and restaurants fitting in unobtrusively. An excellent choir was performing a mix of folk and popular music in a square of elegant old buildings. A pleasant looking restaurant was selected where we dined on steaks and a beer for the equivalent of €12 ! Sean had damaged his back earlier when bringing provisions on board and was now in great discomfort. We toured the old town before heading back to the boat, stopping for a few beers on the way which ensured we all had a good night's rest.

Sunday 22 September

Up at 08.00, breakfasted on board and were under way by 10.15 hrs. As the wind was light but cool we sailed with occasional motor assistance in a north westerly direction. As lunch hour approached we went through a narrow shallow gap between two of the three islands known as the Three Sisters and dropped the hook in the lee of the middle island. As everywhere, the water was unbelievably clear tempting some for a dip off the transom. After lunch I helmed in an up and down breeze, fresh at times, around some islands and then in fairly open water. I thought we were moving nicely but a privately owned similar sized X Boat easily overtook us. Arriving at the village of Molat, population 250, at the head of a small inlet we were greeted by a very friendly harbour master who helped us to tie alongside which was unusual as almost invariably boats moored stern on. The excellent pier and harbour walls were built in 1999.

Oliva was snugged up by 16.00 hrs and it being All Ireland football final day and most of the crew 'Dubs', texts were flying home for the score. Joan kept us



Molat



Our sailing area

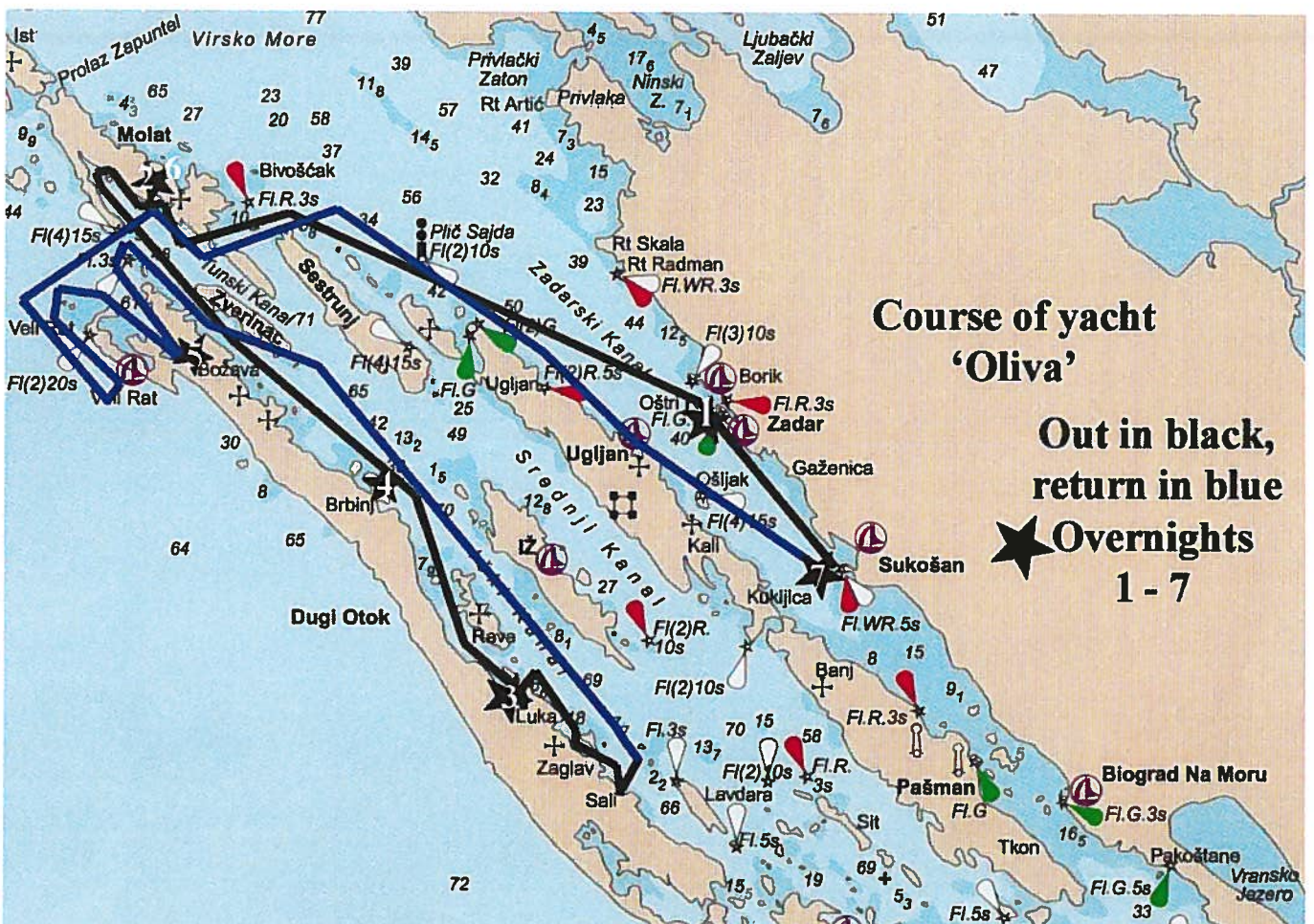
informed almost score by score and great was the rejoicing at the final whistle. All jumped into the deep crystal clear warm water, modestly attired in our bathers unlike our German neighbours (wizened auld fellas - regrettably). A few beers at the quay side cafe/bar watching the ferry come and go and other yachts come in to overnight and we were ready for food. At the only restaurant we were just in time to get the second last table. The menu was rather limited but several ordered mixed grill which comprised a long sausage (yukki), two short sausages, a veal kebab, a pork cutlet and a tasty beef burger all washed down with numerous beers. The crew of a

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Slovenian yacht had a reasonably good guitar player who rendered many numbers, mostly of the folk and patriotic variety but obviously well appreciated as 'Mama' came out from the kitchen to join their table. Maurice joined them briefly and strummed/sang one song. We wobbled back to the 'ship' and deep was the sleep of one and all despite the cacophony of snoring.

Monday 23 September

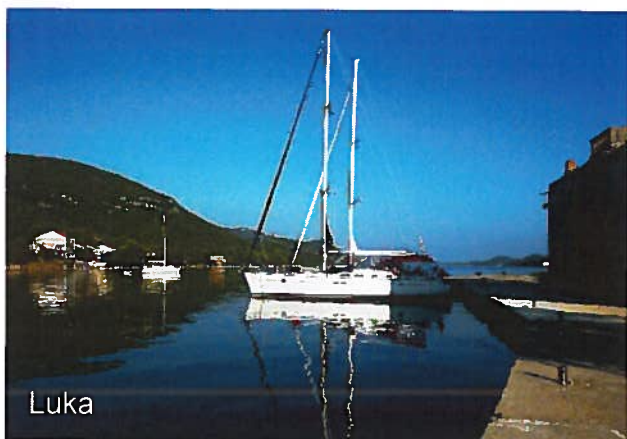
Under a clear azure sky we set out on foot to get a taste of Croatia by exploring this island village, dominated as in most villages, by the bell tower of the Roman Catholic church. The streets were narrow, paved with concrete and the houses were mostly quite modern and of good size and quality. There was an air of relative prosperity but no indication as to the source of income. We suspected it came by way of remittances sent home by younger people working abroad as we noticed few youths. As with many of the islands there is no local source of groundwater as the rain drains down through the karst rock. Individual houses collect rainwater in underground concrete tanks and many villages have a large sloping area concreted and draining again into large underground concrete storage tanks. When we revisited Molat later in the week a coastal tanker came to the quay and discharged 1,000 tonnes of water. Despite this lack of a ready water supply there was little evidence of tight restrictions on consumption.



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As it was calm this morning we motored out and around the corner into a small bay where two other yachts had over nighted on anchors. From there we continued on about 1500 revs at 4 kts. to the head of a deep bay where there was a small village with a tiny island around 300 metres off. Several restaurants were offering moorings and mooring buoy were visible in large numbers off the village and around the island in around 4 metres of water. It all looked idyllic in the calm early morning sunshine.

After rounding the island all sail was rolled out and we headed south, making about 3 kts. In a light breeze. The tiny village of Mala Rava looked enticing on the charts but as we reversed gingerly up to the quay wall the bottom suddenly shoaled and we grounded on stones. We beat a hasty retreat and



proceeded to Luka where our German neighbours from Molat were tied up stern-to to the quay wall. At this stage there was a strong cross wind making the approach in reverse rather hairy but we got all lines taught, making the boat secure. We retired to the nearby cafe/bar for some liquid refreshment to calm our nerves and in half an hour the wind had dropped away to near calm. Luka has obviously been bypassed by the prosperity evident elsewhere but the reason was not clear. A derelict building on the quay was probably once an important public building but now provided shelter and shade for weather beaten old locals who sat around on long benches from early

morning till late in the evening chatting and watching the rather limited world go by. That evening we walked around the shore to a waterside restaurant which had visitor moorings though it was doubtful if the depth would have been sufficient for *Oliva*. After an unremarkable meal the friendly owner, something of a local character, showed us how his wine making was progressing. He was also producing a clear spirit - probably the Coatian version of potin.

Tuesday 24 September

Dead calm this morning as we enjoyed an early breakfast of scrambled eggs but when a breeze suddenly appeared we departed smartly in case it freshened up the bay making clearing our German neighbours tricky. In fact the wind died and so we motored gently in flat calm to our chosen next stop at Sali near the southern end of the large island of Dugi Otok. The extensive quay walls of the large outer harbour can accommodate a large number of yachts and the town is very much geared to the tourist trade with restaurants, bars, modern hotels and supermarkets. The smaller inner harbour is

Sali at midday



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suitable for small and shallow draft craft and local water festivals take place in this area. Sali is also a ferry port. After morning coffee we explored this pleasant town and replenished our food supplies.

The breeze was very light as we departed about 13.00 but this suited as we dropped anchor behind a small island and swam off the back of the boat in fantastic clear water without a ripple. After lunch in the cockpit we moved off again but soon realised there was insufficient wind to get us to our target destination in time so we once again called on the 'iron horse'. However, some wind filled in and we enjoyed a fantastic sail up the long inlet that was Lucina. There was just one yacht in as we dropped anchor and swam once again. There were no shore side facilities for yachts but there was a commercial pier for ferries and the large rather unattractive multi-deck motor yachts that ferried trekking and cycling parties from island to island. We dined well on board thanks to Finbarr's culinary skills and sat up late stargazing with the help of mobile phone app's. The sky was also criss crossed with con trails of high flying aircraft. A nearly full moon rising from behind a nearby hill added to the charms of Lucina.

Wednesday 25 September

We started off under engine in a light breeze as the batteries tended to get run down by the rather large fridge. Engine revs were generally kept around 1500 which brought us along at around 4 kts which was fine as a decision had been made at the start of the cruise to avoid rushing and ambitious sailing distances.

Our first port of call for morning coffee was the small village of Bozava near the northern tip of Dugi Otok which had an outer quay wall and a small inner harbour sheltered behind a relatively new breakwater. We decided to pick up a mooring line on the outer quay wall and made an approach in reverse. Two local came to take our twin stern lines. One chap made his fast but the other indicated the berth was too shallow just as we grounded. Acting on his suggestion we nudged into the inner



harbour to find plenty of depth and room. After coffee we explored the town which was quite attractive and rose steeply up from the water. As in nearly every village we berthed in, an ascent was made to the local Catholic church. We found the churches small and well tended and not as elaborately decorated internally as in many other southern European countries. They were all open and had life size statues of Christ and the Virgin Mary and also a large crucifix to one side. Fresh flowers were usually in evidence. The bell in the large clock towers rang out regularly throughout the day but not always on the hour or half hour.

We witnessed some interesting boat handling in this harbour. A Jeanneau 32i was skippered by an elderly frail looking gent with severe curvature of the spine and crewed by a very small and slight but sprightly lady of similar age. They first made an attempt to moor outside where we had grounded but failed to secure the boat and looked almost certain to be blown on to the rocky breakwater. They somehow got away and came in beside us but did not have their lines ready to throw ashore. With our help they eventually tied up and thanked us for our assistance. However, neither of them seemed in

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the least phased by their poor boat handling. And the parrot tied to the aft rail certainly did not complain !. They were from the Isle of Man and had apparently cruised extensively.

It was very hot as we lunched in the cockpit so it was nice to get sea again for a pleasant sail to the top of Dugi Otok and into the deep inlet and small village of Soline. There was no quay or laid moorings so we anchored. There was a very large modern marina in the next inlet and we could see a great many boats making their way in there. Chef Finbarr did the honours again with a tasty pasta evening meal. We also celebrated Maurice's birthday.



Thursday 26 September

Up at 8 am on a beautiful flat calm morning under a cloudless sky. Following a swim and breakfast we set off motor sailing to visit the nearby marina for morning coffee - the reader will have gathered by now that we had some coffee addicts among the crew. The Veli Rat marina is very large and quite new. As well as the passing trade it seems to be a popular, if somewhat remote, place to keep a boat as there were a large variety of privately owned craft, some already winterised. On departure in mid morning we rounded several small islands and the large lighthouse at the top of Dugi Otok where we felt the water was too shallow to pass inside them although we saw other yachts do so. The spectre of the mast and bow of an Italian merchant ship wreck sticking up out of the water was a reminder to avoid unnecessary risk taking. We were now out in the open Adriatic and with the wind blowing over a long fetch we encountered a quite a large swell for the first time. Our intended destination was about the only sandy beach in the whole area which looked fabulous in photographs. However, we realised we would not have sufficient time to anchor and go ashore and still get back to our chosen night berth in Molat before sunset so we did an about turn and moored in a quiet bay for a swim and lunch before continuing under full sail in a 6 kts breeze. On approaching Molat we were surprised to see four large trawlers and a ferry tied up and no yachts. Having tied to the inner end of the quay we adjourned to the cafe/bar on the quay side to watch the action as we quaffed a few beers in the late afternoon sunshine. A coaster came in to discharge 1,000 tonnes of water and four yachts arrived and tied alongside us. Later we adjourned to the same restaurant we had dined in on our previous visit. We



Keeping a watch from the pub

got a warm welcome and for the first time a local who was overtly friendly and chatty. He told us his grandfather had been in an Italian concentration camp on the other side of the island. We sensed under currants of political strife and war memories. 'Mama' gave us a plastic 33cl. bottle of a clear spirit - probably the local version of potin. Maurice later used it on his mosquito bites and swore it numbed all pain! Later there was a party on the Slovenian yacht moored next to us. Some of *Oliva's* crew were tempted aboard and were somewhat subdued next morning.

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Friday 27 September

Following a warm night it was overcast and cool this morning but it soon cleared and warmed into another lovely day. We motored out in a light breeze about 9.30 am. As we had a longish journey to the yacht base at Sukošan and the wind continuing light we motored all day dropping the anchor outside a new marina on the island of Ujijan for lunch. We arrived in Sukošan about 4 PM and found many boats queuing at the six pumps for diesel. We were somewhat surprised at how little fuel we had used.

When the boat was parked up in it's slot a charter company employee came aboard to check that all was in order and a diver checked underwater. That evening we dined in the marina restaurant and retired early to our bunks in anticipation of a 4 am pick-up by a pre-booked taxi. It did not materialise but several phone calls to the emergency number in the UK assured us it was on its way. He duly arrived about 30 minutes late but got us to the airport in plenty of time to board our Ryanair flight home. Early morning fog had disrupted Dublin Airport and our touch down was delayed somewhat.

All in all a most enjoyable week of good sailing, nice scenery, great company and no hitches.



Oliva safely back in it's berth at Marina Dalmacija in Sukošan

