

Ireland to the Azores, and back,

by John Clementson

In essence our 2009 summer was to take the form of a voyage to the Azores from Northern Ireland, take part in a two-week joint RCC/ICC Meet, another three weeks cruising the Azores alone, and then a voyage home. Nine weeks all told. And so it was.

Ann, my wife and I, own a Bowman 40, *Faustina II*. We've had her for 11 years and she looks after us very well. Every year we have gone cruising for at least two months (and rather more when we did the Atlantic circuit in 2000/02). The Azores Meet gave us the excuse to return to those beautiful islands that we had seen on our return from the Bahamas in 2002. Anyone with a cruising boat who has not been there should make plans to do so. A friend told me that she thought that they were rocks in the middle of the Atlantic. She was wrong. They are lush, fertile islands with somewhat varying climatic conditions on all of the nine islands which are spread across 400 miles of the ocean. It may or may not be an attraction to say that each of the bigger islands now has one or more superb marinas. The bureaucracy which used to be tedious in the extreme is now, whilst still prolonged, much less intense and carried out by the most charming and helpful officials that one could imagine. It was almost a pleasure to book in and out!

The voyage to the Azores

We left Strangford Lough on 27 June 2009. 'We' was Ann and myself, Peter Ronaldson (Commodore of the Irish CC) and two friends, Lawrence and Bruce. Peter crossed the Atlantic with us in 2000 and the other two have accompanied me on several off-shore voyages. With stops at Howth and Kilmore Quay, we reached Kinsale on the south coast of Ireland three fine sailing days later. Kinsale was chosen as our jumping off point as there is fuel, good shopping and well sheltered. It's also a great place!

We departed from there on 1 July and arrived at Ponta Delgada on São Miguel 12 days later – a long period for an 1150 mile voyage. The fact is that the voyage was not a lot of fun – in fact it was what I call 'character forming' (though in my case it's probably too late for that.)

The voyage started easy enough with two days of little or no wind. However by 0300 on 3 Jul we were bashing into a SW5 with lightning and heavy rain. We heaved-to for lunch – and then again overnight from 1500 until 1000 the next day. It was wild and unpleasant. We were not in a hurry and the peace and quiet provided by heaving-to seemed an excellent option. On 4 Jul we bashed on into a strong SW wind, well off course, and at 2000, we heaved-to again. We tried to sail on at midnight but it was so bumpy and noisy, and we were making only 3 kts to SE, that we stopped again. During Sunday 5 July the wind rose to SW8 with rain squalls but later it eased to W6 and we were able to sail our desired course. By midnight the wind was WNW5. All morning on 6 July we were slamming hard into big seas under overcast skies but by midday the wind went to NW5 and then to 3, and all the reefs came out as the seas became less aggressive. On 7 July we made nice progress with a NW2-3. Ann made bread and we spotted a whale spouting a mile away. That evening the wind died away – and we were half-way to the Azores.

The sea was oily calm on 8 July. The 19-year old B&G auto steering had failed and we were being steered by a Raytheon 2000+ linked to the Aries – but later that day the Raytheon failed as well with interesting noises coming from its innards. However a SW2-3 wind came up and we were able to sail on using the trusty Aries. 9 July began well but by 0800 we were again headed by a SW3 and then WSW4. By 1500 the wind was S6 and we were again sailing well off-course. We heaved-to again for a restful supper, but then slogged on, some 20° off our desired course. By next morning that had become a depressing 40° - and we also had thick fog with drizzle. (You had to keep saying, 'we are

doing this for fun'!) That all cleared by midday, we had some sun, and the wind backed a little to improve the course. And then during the afternoon it again became overcast and once again the wind went to S6 and we were heading 270° (against our desired course of 215°). For some reason we tacked to head east rather than west, and then heaved-to for supper. We saw a ship and Peter called her for a forecast. We were promised northerly winds! 'Maybe', I thought, 'and cows might fly'. During the evening the wind went to SW6 and we banged along through it.



Hard on the wind and going well.

At 0200 on 11 July (my birthday) I came on watch, the wind had strengthened, and shortly afterwards Peter appeared in the companionway and suggested that we might heave-to as it was very noisy below. I was happy to oblige! At 0845 when I came on again everything had changed. The wind, though still strong, had backed some 60°, and the sun began to appear. We had a great day's sailing and celebrated my anniversary with TWO bottles of wine for lunch. The weather was now also distinctly warmer. On Sunday 12 July, with the Raytheon fixed to steer us through a nearly windless day, we saw the islands of São Miguel appear some 40 miles off, rounded its west end at 1700 and a couple of hours later we were alongside in Ponta Delgada, the capital of the Azores.



Beautiful Sao Miguel – the western volcano

It had been a hard trip and not always enjoyable. The beating to windward had added about 200nm to our track. However the ploy of heaving-to, to give us some relief and rest, had made it manageable and had enabled us to get through the rougher periods in good order. The boat had held up well though the old B&G was definitely showing its age. The fault in the Raytheon was that the motor had become loose – something easily enough fixed but unforgivable that it should have happened in a year-old machine. Later one of the belts broke.

The RCC/ICC Meet

We had a few days before the combined RCC/ICC Meet began on 17 Jul, and we used this time to catch up on our sleep, replenish the boat, meet old friends from both the RCC and the ICC and to make new ones as boats from both clubs began to arrive. Ann and I hired a car and spent an amazing day exploring the beautiful volcanic western end of the island. These islands are simply stunning in their diversity of terrain, the colours, the views, the villages – and the very friendly Portuguese speaking population. Lawrence and Bruce flew home and Evie, Peter's wife, joined ship.



Flowers everywhere – especially hydrangias



Hot springs provide the means to cook meals in the ground

I various activities are probably of little interest for this log. Suffice to say that it was all fun and interesting. There was local music and dancing and we ate well. The speciality is to have incredibly

hot lava rock put on your table place so that you can cook your own steak or prawns. Marvellous! For us, and for many others, I believe that the stay in the small southern island of Santa Maria was a highlight. We hadn't expected to go there but they were keen to see us and their hospitality was fantastic. The drummers will long be remembered...! Mostly comprising long haired girls with long legs (at least, they were the ones we looked at!), they played their drums with skill and dramatic movements that had us all longing for them to keep on playing.



The 'Scout' band on Santa Maria watched by an appreciative audience from the balcony of the very friendly Clube Navale

From Santa Maria we took *Faustina II* to Horta as there were a few days 'at leisure' before the closing events on the island of Terceira. Horta, well known to so many trans-Atlantic sailors, has lost little of its special 'feel' – it is still full of experienced sailors, swapping stories, getting equipment fixed and making an obligatory visit to Peter's Cafe, a venue now heavily commercialised and not so special as of old. We touched up *Faustina II*'s wall painting from 2002, and added '2009'. The views of Pico across the water still thrill.



This was painted and photographed in 2002



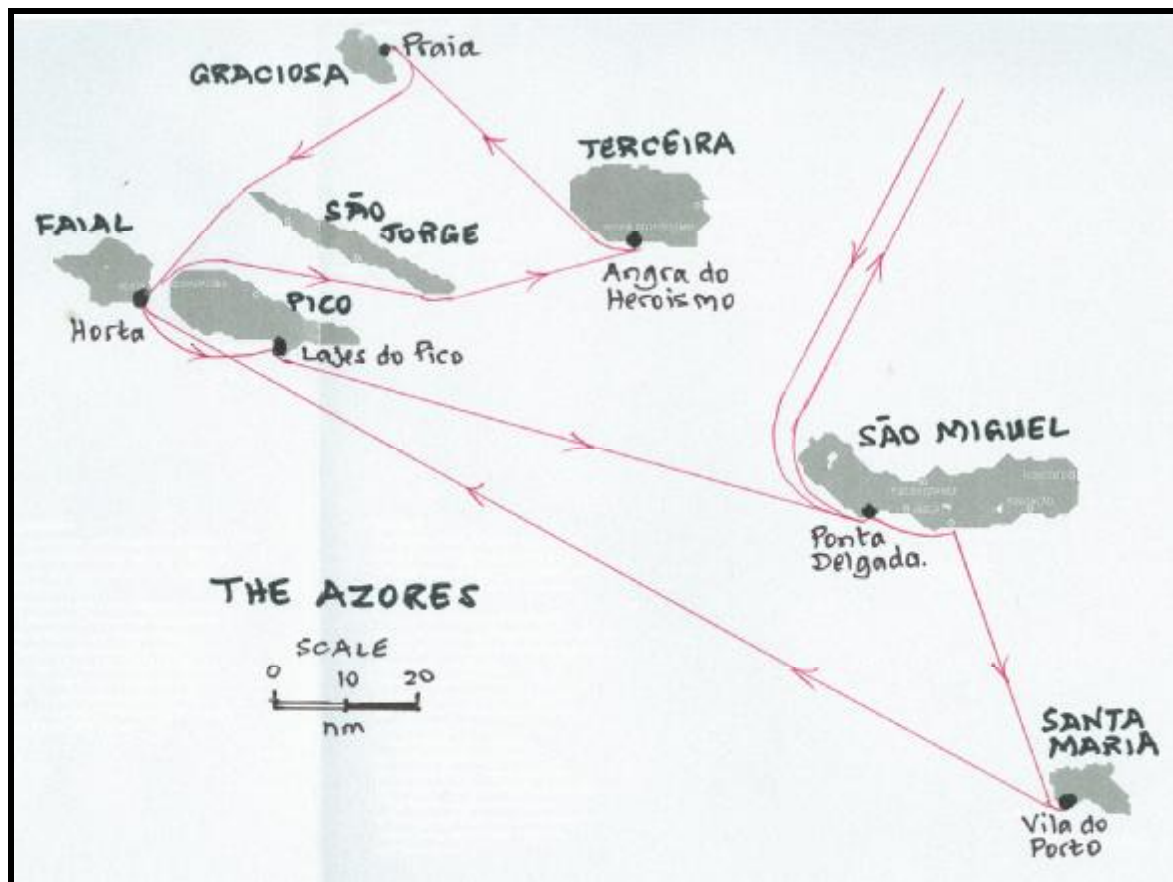
and the same one refreshed and updated in 2009

The Meet ended at Angra do Heroismo on Terceira with yet another well attended boat party and the final dinner. Thereafter boats began to disperse to UK, Ireland and to Portugal. Peter and Evie left *Faustina* to go on another yacht to Ponta Delgada and to fly home. Ann and I were now on our own on board. We hired a car to look at the harbour at Praia da Vitória on the east coast of Terceira but it was a fiercely wet day and our long lunch was the highlight of the visit. We also climbed the great Spanish built fortress of Monte do Brasil that is the dominant feature of Angra. With friends from another boat we went to watch, and nearly participated in, some bull running in the town nearby. It's an interesting spectacle but not, we assessed, very dangerous. The bull stays attached to a long rope.

Cruising the islands alone

Soon *Faustina* was nearly on her own in Angra and on Sunday 2 August we motor-sailed north west to Vila da Praia on the island of Graciosa. We met up with Roddy Innes (RCC) and his latest crew on

Jessamy. We had already had some good evenings with them and they again didn't disappoint. Ann and I spent two days on the island of Graciosa exploring its delights – these are the nice little town of Santa Cruz and a large extinct volcano crater into which one can descend quite a long way. The appalling bus service seems designed to force visitors to use taxis to travel anywhere. The marina is now just about finished and is a safe refuge.



Our track through the Azores in 2009

From Graciosa we headed south past the west end of the island of São Jorge back to Horta on Faial. Ponta Delgada may be the biggest and most sophisticated place in the Azores and São Miguel may arguably be the most attractive island, but we love Horta with its yachting 'buzz'. I wanted to get the B&G fixed but not surprisingly that wasn't possible. A friendly yachtsman came aboard and spent many hours making our SSB work better and setting it up to receive GRIBs. Ashore a big festa (Festival of the Sea) was in progress and the front was lined with tents with food outlets and stages. That all came to life in the evening and the noise level stayed high until the early hours. There were some wonderful shows to be seen, particularly the local singing and dancing groups that performed before the rock bands took over! One day we went for a long walk which was designated as 'easy' but which gave our legs and lungs a good workout.

On Sunday 9 August we moved to Lajes on the south coast of the island of Pico. Until recently this harbour was small and approached through a maze of rocks. Now a mole has been built to cleverly outflank the rocks to allow a safe passage inside it to the new marina. There are only four or five moorings available for visiting yachts but it is now easy to approach and safe. Here again we took notes and photos for Anne Hammick's 'Atlantic Pilot'. Lajes is the centre of the best whale watching in the Azores – so from here we went out with the professionals and during a three hour trip saw over 20 whales of various types. From here too we hired a taxi to do a partial circuit of the island, including Madalena which faces Faial on the west coast under the 2351m high slopes of Pico. There are some amazing lava formations on the north coast and in a couple of places these have been sympathetically adapted to provide superb bathing facilities.



Peter Ronaldson on the sea wall at Horta with the 2351m high Pico mountain on the island of Pico across the Strait

We returned to Ponta Delgada on São Miguel on 12 August for a few days before Ann flew home. I had a few days on my own and used part of one of them to take a taxi to Vila Franca check on the progress of the new marina there. Again I took notes and photos for Anne Hammick and later sent those off to her on a CD. Incidentally the marina is now completed and provides good berthing for several visiting yachts in its expanded facilities.



Angra da Heroísmo on Terceira

The voyage home

My crew home, Alan Bell (ICC/RNIYC), an experienced sailor and former boat owner, flew in on 18 August and after a quick visit to a supermarket to buy the things he wanted to eat, we went to book

out. Sadly as we approached the dock the prop shaft came loose in its fitting and the prop didn't go into reverse. We went head to head against an American boat causing us both slight but annoying pulpit damage. Several hours passed as we completed the insurance paperwork but by the evening I had secured the shaft and, parting from our victim on friendly terms, we set off for Ireland.

The first day out was uncomfortable – the sort of day which removes your appetite. We gave supper a miss that night. The wind was westerly and fresh enough to require three reefs in the main overnight. However the next day the wind reduced to NW3 and we had a fine sail. Alan specialises in stews and he made a good one that evening. We had no wind on 20 August and we motored all day under clear skies. Food and a leaking gearbox became the centre of our interests. We enjoyed our food but the gearbox seemed to be blowing ATF from the filler vent rather than through a seal. I kept topping it up and it got us home without breaking. Next day the wind got behind us, rather too much so to be ideal. That evening Alan woke me as he thought we might be on a collision course with a steamer but it passed clear well ahead. On 22 August we were on a dead run and I poled out the Yankee which took us along in fine form. The wind rose a little, I reefed the Main a bit and we had a great day's sailing with the Aries performing well, even though we were going downwind.

A cold front went through at 0300 on Sunday 23 August and the wind veered 90°, settling during the morning to NW3-4 and later NW5-6. There was a thin crescent moon; it was a bit bouncy; we were going well. Next day the wind became more fluky and there was a lot of sail changing, most of which I did while Alan kept me well fed. I got very tired that day especially when I found a battery box full of water with a corroded terminal which had to be cleaned and repaired. Alan kindly gave me a couple of extra hours off watch which, together with a hot shower, restored my old bones, which was just as well as we were making up to 8kts with a NW6-7 with the Aries in charge. The wind backed at midnight and reduced so that at 0600 I was able to pole out the Yankee and let two reefs out of the Main. It was a fine day and our noon-to-noon run was 155nm. By 2100 we had a full gale from the SE. We were both tired so we decided to heave-to for the night. I was seasick!

I awoke at dawn feeling much improved. I set the Yankee to pull us along in a confused sea and kept it up as the wind increased to NW5. Later I added a three-reefed Main. At around midnight, with the wind dropping again, we passed the Cork oilfield under a clear starry night. The wind and seas became confused and it was difficult to set sails for the conditions. There was not enough wind for the Aries and the Raytheon was again playing up. However it was not unpleasant to steer for the last few hours before we entered Kilmore Quay on Ireland's SE corner. We were glad to be in as a gale was forecast and indeed raged while we had a pub meal up the road.

The wind was still fresh next morning. I delayed our planned 0530 departure as Alan had a painful knee. However that improved and the wind lessened so we slipped at 0900 and carried the tide swiftly around Carnsore Point and on up the east coast of Ireland. We stayed inshore until just north of Dublin when we cut across to St John's Point and entered Strangford Lough at 1030 on 29 August, just 25½ hours after leaving Kilmore Quay.

Nine weeks away was a long haul, but it had been varied and interesting. Ann and I had met many new people at the Meet and lots of old friends too. We had enjoyed nearly all of it. However let me record here that it was probably my last ocean passage. The waters of the Scottish west coast and perhaps the south of England are calling loudly.....

Yacht:

Faustina II – Bowman 40

Voyage from:

- a. Portaferry (Strangford Lough) in Northern Ireland
- b. Howth, Kilmore Quay, Kinsale
- c. 1150 nm to Ponta Delgada, Sao Miguel, Azores
- d. RCC/ICC Meet in Ponta Delgada, Vilo do Porto, Santa Maria, and Angra do Heroismo, Terceira
- e. Visits to Horta, Faial; Praia, Graciosa; Horta, Faial; Lajes, Pico.
- f. Voyage back from Ponta Delgada to Ireland (Kilmore Quay)
- g. Kilmore to Portaferry

Dates:

27 June until 29 August 2009

No of Words:

2900

Table of Distances and times

Date	From	To	Nm	Duration	Engine
27 – 29 Jun	Portaferry	Kinsale	177	3 days	n/k
1-12 Jul	Kinsale	Ponta Delgada	1339	11.5 days	n/k
8 Jul-17 Aug	Within the Azores	Incl. RCC/ICC Meet	574	40 days	n/k
18-27 Aug	Ponta Delgada	Kilmore Quay	1249	10 days	n/k
28-29 Aug	Kilmore Quay	Portaferry	152	1 day	n/k