

Saronic Cruise

6 – 20 August 2013

Athens

Route – Kalamki, Athens – Aegina – Russian Bay – Hydra – Dhokos – Ermioni – Russian Bay – Vathi – Aegina – Kalamaki Athens

On board - Paul, Sandra, Aoife & Roise McSorley & Eva Diver.

Yacht - Dufour 385 Grand Large, 2008. A very tidy boat in good running order. Electric flush toilets are very popular with crew but don't tolerate paper. Check out by man more interested in looking after the body beautiful than details of inventory. Delayed departure due to outboard & jerrycans of spare diesel. Thought I might have got some admiration for new Yachtmaster certificate but they seemed unimpressed.



6 Aug - 21.45 Athens another soft touchdown by Aer Lingus. Remarkable in windy, turbulent conditions. Boat waiting on quay. Pretty sure we got on the



right one.

7 Aug. Kalamki to Aegina. 17nm. NE backing NW. 5.6. A fast breezy downwind passage to Aegina. Arrived 16.30 & tucked into space along quay. Roise, returned from 3 weeks living American dream, cooked fabulous peppered steak pieces with roast veg. Setting a high bar for rest of trip.

8 Aug. Aegina to Russian Bay, Poros. Dep 12MD. NE 3-4. Motoring. Beautiful Med conditions. Swim in morning & bought Dorade at fish market. Aegina still bustling but perhaps a little subdued to former times. Worth visiting for some classic vehicles -Lada riva, 3 wheel vans, Honda 50 scooter, beach buggies, Renault 14 etc- a touch of 70s nostalgia & a hint at proximity to former Soviet Union.



9 Aug. Russian Bay to Hydra. Motoring 7.1 kn. NW 4. Sunny & warm. Generally windy conditions in eastern Med but Olympia Radio says no gales expected in next 12 hrs. 11:08 lifted anchor. A quiet night in west end of Russian Bay swinging at anchor. Later German & French arrivals dropped rather close to us. Maybe they wanted some company. Just about enough room to swing. Delicious fish with potato cakes for supper. Few super motor boats in the bay for the night with passengers who wanted to party. Mod to fresh breeze overnight backing to NE to NW. Spade anchor well dug into mud in 10m - a useful tip for good holding - anchor west of islet.

13:25 NE 4. 1017 bar. Tied up in Hydra beside the Agean Schatz a rather magnificent ketch of around 100 ft. Relatively quiet at the minute here.



10 Aug. 12MD. Remaining in Hydra. Relatively quiet night here. Only a couple of superyachts. So could be recession is biting hard at top end or maybe it will pick up tonight. It's getting rather busy in the harbour now. Coming & going, fouled anchor chains & ferries all at the same time. Just another day in Hydra. It is a unique experience. A rustic island with a harbour nestling at the base of steep surrounding hills. I haven't seen or heard any motorised vehicles yet apart from the boats. Water taxis dash in and out - always in a hurry to drop off and pick up next fare. The bohemian feel persists - a place apart. Restless & at the same time relaxing - a heady combination.

Dufour is nicely appointed boat, which I quite like but she did swing like a geylrod all evening in the bustling harbour. Problem has been somewhat settled after filling the water tanks this morning. Have to report to police later. All part of Hydra experience.

11 Aug. a lazy day in Hydra watching goings on in the harbour. The morning anchor "two step" did not disappoint. Sandra got Internet access to sort out Eims change of flight from Kenya. No success but Eimile unperturbed. Alternated between boat watch & diving in at swim hole. Good display of mega- yachts in evening. A rather polite crew of young French lads tied up in front of us and went ashore. Our English neighbour, Paul, was rather precious about his boat so was too enamoured with hangers on to his bow. Anglo French relations not helped by noisy return at 5 in the morning, along with amorous attempts to bring American girl onto the boat. Still they were polite. Bought a painting on spur of moment- still haven't bought art for some time and I will have a vacant space in toy room when Yacht Club Patsy Dan goes back.



12 Aug. 13:00. N-NW 3-4. Sunny & hot. Dropped anchor in Ormos Skindos Nisos Dhokos. A few yachts in for the day. Picturesque & sheltered bay. Anxious moment on slipping lines in Hydra- steering jammed and we lost steerage. English Paul shouted check auto helm and sure enough it had been accidentally engaged. Blamed Aoife. Steering restored and panic over.

13 Aug. Lazy day at anchor in O. Skindos. Yachts coming and going. Technique of anchoring anchoring seems to get as close to neighbour as possible and either drop anchor over theirs or ensure not enough swinging room. We anchored in SW corner off beach & goat farm. F'cast was for NNW but in early afternoon it blew from NE which kept us off the beach. In evening & morning it blew from NNW leaving us close to lee shore. We had 5m 20m from shore and good holding in sand so not too many worries. This pattern repeated for the 2 days that we were there- so worth noting. In future I would anchor further out in 10-15m. Not the most picturesque but relaxing & quiet. Worth a return.

14 Aug. 13:30. Fresh gusts from NW this morning. Wakened by bells from herd of goats coming down to beach. Swim, breakfast, swim & cream up. A familiar pattern before departure. Sandra cut herself lifting dinghy. Blamed me but it was entirely her fault. No point in being gallant. Short passage across sound with fresh breeze on the beam. Decided to have a look at quayed area on South side of Ermioni peninsula. Impressed at first glance so tied up outside taverna with assistance of helpful taverna owner. Rather steep drop off so lots of anchor chain out. Aoife took the helm for tie up and did it. First time. The mooring line were dry & hard so I suggested wetting them. Roise's interpretation of the instruction was to jump in with the rope to wet it. Man overboard recovered without incident. V hot & sunny here.

15 Aug. Lazy day in Ermioni. A nice place - hot peaceful & relaxed with free electricity & Wifi from Cafe Ermioni. We tied up just in front of cafe after being guided in by owner. It's always nice to be welcomed. Quite impressed and worth a return visit. The town and bay are a 2 minute walk away with all needs attended to - fresh fruit & veg, fishmongers & butchers, cash machine.

Ate out both nights. One in waterfront of bay in restaurant with wood burning pizza oven. Excellent calamari & swordfish in tomato & garlic sauce. Roise had very tender Beef in Red sauce. It went down well with the girl who doesn't eat fish. Last night ate on cliff side restaurant to east of quayside. Magnificent setting with moonlight view out to Hydra.

Quayside on south side of Ermioni sits in a bit of a wind hole in the winds we had from NW through to NE. There is plenty of room and, with a deep drop off there is scope to get a lot of chain out. It should be a good tip for a comfortable berth in gales from North. It was busy both nights with flotilla boats, many who chose to have a lazy day in port. A few moderate super yachts in too.

16 Aug. 12:42. Underway & making way. Steering ENE for Russian Bay.

Motoring. 6.7kn. Sunny, light Easterly at present, though expect afternoon NE sea breeze shortly. Exam results this morning so a lot of anxiety yesterday. Girls all up early for a change. Now much relief and happiness. Aoife got 4 A's & Eimile got 2 A's so far. We await Maths result but it is at least an A as she has been accepted for Southampton for Geophysics. Elated at prospect of leaving Derry. Eva got good news too - 2As & a C. News arriving by modern means of all friends & family. Ryan going to Portsmouth for Pharmacy. Sarah Brooks for QUB for Pharmacy too.

12:54 sea breeze has arrived. Motoring into it. Girls retreated from foredeck to cockpit. Greek salad for lunch later. Magnificent foot long langoustines for Starter tonight. Can't wait.

17 Aug. 12:58 0.5nm east of Akra Kavallaris, Methany. Wind N 3-4. Sea moderate chop, motoring. A few clouds for a change. On way to Vathi and the chance to chill.

Departed Russian Bay 10:50 after somewhat disturbed nights sleep. Russian bay is a bit of an enigma. I dream of quiet nights at anchor in Russian Bay during the long winters, but of all the evenings we have spent there few have been restful and undisturbed. It is apart from the busy town of Poros but at the same time part of it. The lights of Poros illuminate the eastern vista. Boats come and go. From the ostentatious mega yachts, more modest super yachts, ferries, fishing boats to the tiny family boat carrying husband and wife. One aspires to a peaceful anchorage but there is also the draw of the continual traffic. One would be disappointed without it. Last night sleep was disturbed by a small fishing boat at close quarters. It must have been chasing the "small fish". I hope he got a good catch. Later in the darkness it got very muggy. And later still again in darkness the wind picked and blew from the Northwest, putting us close to the lee shore of the little islet. Morning revealed a change - an elegant motor yacht of brilliant marine blue had departed to be replaced by a garish motor yacht of light blue hue and a pink stripe.

13:58 tied up Vathi. Sea breeze NW 3. Packed harbour as usual. Space found with local assistance.

18:28 Kostos the harbourmaster returned. Good to see him again. €1.57 for nite incl water & electricity. Not a bad deal. No wonder country is in trouble. 2 large bottles of Hella in my favourite taverna €4. Hard too beat. Grandmother still in charge but on her feet this time. Probably one of the best locations in the universe with the Sun shimmering over Sea in tranquil bay. Hard to beta x 3.



18 Aug. 11:20. A lazy day in Vathi. No finer place to relax in the universe than this charming little fishing village. The harbour is crowded with modest motor yachts, outnumbering sailing vessels by at least 3 to 1. At least they are well behaved. Nothing much happens apart from the arrival of food vans and the occasion spurt of activity in the harbour and the anchor dance. (I have had my swim in harbour assisting with neighbours anchor after his departing neighbour lifted his and dragged it across our boat & our neighbours.

Good basic Greek fare in Fish Tavern To Ba@u which we are tied up outside. Fish B turned out to be a delicious whole mackerel.

I checked my own anchor which as last time was lying on it's side partially dug in on hard rubble bottom. Again I am not so reassured by the holding here unlike the French artist from our last trip who was quite taken with the holding. I didnt have either the French or the heart to tell him that his anchor, like mine was also lying on it's side. Blissful ignorance. I have nearly 30m of chain out in 3-4m so relying on weighty to hold bow in freshening wind. So far so good.



Mon 19 Aug. last day on the Saronic. All a bit subdued after poor nights sleep. A combination of a choppy anchorage and noisy night club. We had anchored just south of Aegina harbour yesterday afternoon. Holding was good and in Northerly wind the bay was calm. However during the night the wind backed a little West bringing swell down over the shallow reef patches around Aegina. If that wasn't bad enough a night club opposite opened up the amplifiers after we had retired and played through to day light. I am not sure if there was anyone but ourselves to listen to it but it didn't help an already uncomfortable night. To add to our worries the anchorage was getting crowded with yachts who were unable to force a slot in the harbour. An Italian pulled up bait to close for comfort. I suggested he was bait to close should the wind change as it usually does in the evening. He assured me we would swing together and he would take responsibility. Sure enough the wind backed and he ended up no more than 10m astern off us. More than too close for comfort. He did offer an apology in the morning.

We ate out in a basic taverna one street back from the waterfront and next to fish market. Food was basic but excellently prepared-Greece at its best. 3 spaghetti s, one small fish, one meatball with cumin dish , fried zucchini, fired cheese and tzakazi with drinks all for €42. Always worth taking a step back from the tourist drag. May have got it cheaper if we had gone another street back.

Re supplied first thing and headed south from Aegina to seek a comfortable anchorage for breakfast. Tried a few possibilities before settling in Ak. ay. Sozon just south of Perdika. Calm and deep. Dropped anchor in 10m but have 18m under boat with visibility to the bottom. Managed 10m on dive. Annoying touched bottom on shoal patch just south of anchorage in Aegina. We were going slow and touch was only brief. But worth looking out for in future. I think it was patch east of point at Southern end of anchorage. Depths of 1m on chart. In future would recommend heading due east from southern marina entrance, passing south of yellow mark and then not turning south until depths of 7-8m obtained.

12:37 at anchor Ak. Ay. Sozon wind NNW 3. Calm & sunny. Nice spot for stopover. Sheltered from North. Steep close to shore so dropped in 10m about 25m from shore. Stay west of electric cable.

3pm. Prepared for long beat to windward for trip back to marina. All secured and weighed anchor. Wind NNW 3-4. Raised mainsail with 2 reefs for first time.

18:45 tied up pier 2 Kalamaki Marina. Uneventful passage back against wind as usual. Passage along East coast of N. Aegina and the NE to NW corner of TSS. Very quiet on the gulf. Few super yachts.

20 Aug. Checked out all well. No damages & deposit returned. Price of diesel almost doubled since last visit. Paid €180 for a fill compared to less than €100 on last trip. Angela Merkel certainly wants her euros back.

The Saronic is a delightful cruising ground. One of our favourites and one we will certainly return to.

Paul McSorley

