

A Passage to Iceland

The next venture was a passage to Iceland. A friend up here in Scotland kindly employed me as sailing master aboard his Moody 42 for this his first ocean passage. We had already had a warm up out to St. Kilda: noteworthy because the Minch chose to give Force 7 on the nose all the way across with that nasty choppy sea which is an all too frequent feature of it. As one who is fortunate enough never to suffer from mal de mere, it was a surprise on this occasion to feel decidedly queasy! In mast furling is a particular bete noir of mine and another reason for this also became all too apparent. All the mainsail rolled away in the mast obviously increases the weight of the mast overall considerably which in turn increases the rolling momentum – especially in a place like Village Bay! But St. Kilda with its partially restored village street and its history was as interesting as ever, even if one did have to endure the excruciating nomenclature of the Puffin in the modern complex!

But now we went through the Sound of Barra, nowadays my favourite offing for the Atlantic, for the real thing. But where were those predominant southerlies? We were on the wind against strong northerlies nearly all the way across. I have to say I do not find a Moody 42 of that vintage an easy boat to sail with its exposed centre cockpit, winches at an awkward angle on the coaming, mainsheet awkwardly behind the wheel and a big wheel which forces you to climb up onto the seats in an exposed position to get past either way. Fortunately the wind moderated on the last day just in time to allow the owner to take down the ‘For Sale’ notices, and we put into the Vestmannaeyjaer. These were extremely interesting with their volcanic hills and islands and with the main island increased by a third by the eruption of 1976. I enjoyed climbing the ‘most modern mountain in the world’, though I could hardly claim it as a first ascent! There was still no vegetation on it or its neighbour and only a slightly green sheen on the huge lava field below with the Norwegian chapel donated and dedicated to the islanders lost at the edge by the shore.

The owner’s family came out and we enjoyed a week sailing a little way round the west coast, and discovered some updates and useful ‘new’ anchorages to keep the editor of the Pilot on his toes. One calm evening a school of Orcas gambolled slowly around in the vicinity of the boat – a rare show and much appreciated by the family. And sitting comfortably outside in the rain in a thermally heated natural pool was quite an experience. We had aimed to return via the Faroes but in the event there was too much east in the wind. Indeed on the second day out it steadily increased: Force 7, Force 8, steady 9 into 10. Now this boat was not really rigged for heavy weather sailing: all I could do was to roll the mainsail right into the mast to trysail size, even if that did mean going to the mast in stormy conditions, and beam reach across the seas which fortunately did not get too large. The ‘For Sale’ notices went up again but the wind remained in the north and east and eventually we broad reached past St. Kilda five miles to port and tacked downwind for the Sound of Barra. As we motored over the shoals to the south I thought I had better confess ‘By the way, folks, I suspect I am the only Reverend to have hit rocks

in both the Arctic and Antarctica', so having inspired such great confidence we made our way over the rocks and round the south cardinal buoy to anchor for a night's sleep some distance out from the airstrip, which of course is on the beach on Barra. And so across the Minch next day being able for once to lay the course to Tobermory, and then down the Sound of Mull with a fair breeze home.

There was a pause in activity now, punctuated by a circumnavigation of Mull skippering a Westerly Oceanranger for WestwardQuest, a christian charity sailing out of Kilmelford, where I discovered that skippering a group of thirteen year olds, mainly girls, was not really my scene! Then the intention was to fly out to Svalbard to join the Lomaxes on *Cloud Walker* to help sail her back to Norway but poor David was ill on the way to and from Murmansk and had to be rushed to hospital at Kirkenes. This meant the boat was stranded in Vardö and I went out to help Judy sail her back to Tromso where they intended to winter her. An American friend of theirs, Scott Fraser, dropped everything and also came out so now we were three.

Poor Judy, I must have driven her mad with technical questions about the boat. You had to admire how tough these veterans were. Here was a well known, well travelled, well sailed boat and still all the mainsail hoisting and reefing were done at the mast however boisterous conditions might be. And there was no anchor winch. Here was I back home in the process of leading all lines back to the cockpit on the new *Dodo's Delight* as I had in the past on the original so all reefing could be done from there, and I was certainly glad I had an anchor winch even if it was manual. Obviously I was a wimp, or getting old after all. On the other hand there was a slight divergence of opinion regarding anchoring between what I would call the Norwegian-European attitude 'it's best to anchor in places that are marked with an anchor symbol because we know they will be safe', and the Scottish-Greenlandic style of 'that looks reasonably well protected and it has sufficient depth let's try that'. After a couple of Scottish anchorages were rejected by the skipper, the Reverend had to learn perhaps to rely less on faith and more on care, and maybe the lady became a little less cautious. Diplomatic relations continued!

In the event we had an easy passage with little wind and had to motor for much of the way. 'Don't worry, Judy, remember it's only a delivery trip'. Initially the skipper, having done it probably hundreds of times before, was not too keen on going round Nordkap as it was further, but fortunately the wind blew that day and from the north east so novices like myself had the pleasure of sailing round the headland with a fair breeze. But which really was the most northerly point? Chancellor seems to have got it wrong. There was one crisis: there are comparatively few towns in Norway that have a Vinmonopol the only places where booze can be bought. We had now run out, and had to get up at 0330 next morning in order to make the next town that had one. On the last evening having caught still more fish by simply putting the lines over the stern we anchored between some islands sheltered in a small bay from the prevailing breeze. In the night the wind went round 180° and I was forced to eat my thoughts about American-Norwegian

anchoring methods: a comparatively short, but heavy, length of chain by the anchor and then spliced to a long rope rode. It all held with no problems. And what a boon it had been hauling up a light anchor on the end, though Scott being the young man of the party at 53 did most of that!

We delivered the boat safely to Tromso, and I was then able to join their son-in-law Rikki on a delivery of a Bavaria 38 from Oslo to Trondheim. Of course I have imbibed all the usual prejudices against Bavarias, so it was good to find it sailed well both off and on the wind, that it was functional and roomy down below, perhaps almost too roomy, and that full vertical battens in the in-mast mainsail had at least improved its performance! For a family getting on the water or for folks mainly sailing coastal and offshore it would be difficult to find anything better for the price. But with that flat dish hull shape I still would not like one for serious cruising! And what a beautiful coastline that south coast of Norway is. Having bashed hard on engine in short seas against Force 5/6 on the nose we took the inner passages: passing through a fishing village with houses either side where the fjord was the village street was an unforgettable experience. Having passed the South Cape - it was nice to have rounded both the North and South Capes of Norway in one summer - we had Force 8 into 9 southerly so we sped up the west coast for a day, before taking the picturesque inner passages once again. And it was great to sail with such a professional and competent skipper - hopefully soon to become a member of the club.

Unfortunately the lucrative grand finale to the season - a trip in a 180ft yacht as technical advisor from Iceland to Greenland to Nova Scotia - was cancelled as the skipper became worried by forecasts of depressions spinning up towards Iceland. 'But you always get a couple of gales on that crossing' - he remained unimpressed. Pity, because I needed the fee for fitting out the new *Dodo's Delight!* But, terrible thought, after such a summer, sailing in several different places, with delightful people, in a variety of boats, should I have got another boat at all?