

September 5, 2006

We departed Siracusa, Sicily, early Sunday morning, July 2, bound for Corfu, the most northern Ionian Island in Greece. We had expected northwest winds, but they never materialized. Instead, we were given predominantly winds from the north to the northeast, close to our intended track. With slight seas and winds, we used the engine when needed to point higher into the wind. As we approached the southern end of Corfu the seas became moderate, and this made it difficult to stay on course since we weren't able to sail as close to the wind as before.

Our original intention had been to sail east around the north end of Corfu. With increased seas and an email Monday evening from our weatherman John, Phil's brother, informing us of a wind change soon to the east we altered course and sailed immediately east trying to make the southern tip of Corfu before the winds changed. We never made it. Five hours later we hit easterlies. At this time we were tired. It had been a hard beat passage with many wind adjustments. We decided to head to Palaiokastrita on Corfu's northwestern coast and travel around to the eastern side of Corfu the following day. We dropped anchor at noon on July 4. The green wooded hills and fragrant pine scent of Palaiokastrita reminded us much of northwest Washington. In 52½ hours we had traveled 272 nautical miles, sailing 30% of the time with the rest motorsailing. With our arrival in Greece we moved our clocks ahead one hour. Although we hadn't arrived at our intended destination of Gouvia Bay on the eastern side of Corfu, it was still a great feeling to be in Greece.



Landfall

In the Mediterranean there is wind one day, the next day none. Such was the case the following day when we motored 32 nautical miles around the north coast of Corfu to Gouvia Bay, just north of the town of Corfu. Refreshed after a good night's sleep, we thoroughly enjoyed this day's route, especially through the North Corfu Channel. During this time we were only a few miles from the coastline of Albania. The hills of Corfu were green; in contrast, the mountains of Albania were barren.



Albania

Corfu



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Thursday, July 6, we took the bus into the town of Corfu to check in with customs, immigration, and port police and to purchase our transit log, good for six months. "It's Greek to me" is a phrase used often to describe something one can't understand. Our first day in Greece we understood its full meaning. Almost no signs made sense as they were written in the Greek alphabet. Going into the local grocery store that first day was an overwhelming experience.

There are a myriad of tourists in Corfu, especially when the cruise ships are in port. Thursday we were overwhelmed by all the tourists. Our first impressions of Corfu were not good, plus the heat during the day didn't help. One of the great things about being in a sailboat is having the ability to change one's location. Late Friday afternoon after taking on fuel, we decided to give Corfu's old town one more chance. We motored from Gouvia Bay past the cruise ships and Corfu's old town wedged between its two fortresses, anchoring just underneath the south side of the Old Fortress. Now, the charm and beauty that was Corfu was finally shared with us.



Corfu's Old Town between two Fortresses



Cruise Ships



Anchorage at Old Fortress

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Dating from the different periods of occupation, Corfu's architecture was a lovely blend of Venetian, French, and British. Late Friday evening local Greek families were out in great numbers socializing in many of the cafe bars along the Liston, and children could be seen playing in the main park square to almost midnight. Everyone was having a good time. Saturday morning before leaving Corfu we ventured into the Greek Orthodox Church of Agios Spyridon, the holiest place on the island as this church contained the silver casket of the mummified body of the island's patron saint Spyridon. While in the church pilgrims came to receive healing powers from this saint, and it was interesting to observe the rituals involved.



The Greek Ionian Islands were known for their great anchorages, and we looked forward during the next few weeks to spending some "down time" just relaxing as we slowly moved down the Ionian island chain. After leaving Corfu we first enjoyed anchorages at Ormos Valtou and Mourtos on the Greek mainland before heading to the Ionian Island of Paxos (Paxoi). From Paxos we headed southeast into the Gulf of Amvrakia on the Greek mainland. Being in this gulf was like being on a large lake. In this protected stretch of water we encountered many fish farms and also very well-fed dolphins.



Ormos Valtou



Gaios, Paxos



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We spent ten days in the Gulf of Amvrakia. In this gulf it was refreshing to visit typical Greek towns and villages rather than those existing mostly for the foreign tourist, and when we encountered tourists they were usually Greek. During our stay we enjoyed the villages of Menidhion and Vonitsa and the town of Preveza.

Menidhion, located in the far northeast corner of the gulf, had water warmer and saltier than elsewhere, and Greeks would come by public bus to swim in its waters for hours at a time. We often felt like we were anchored in the middle of a very large swimming pool. While there we also heard a seventy-five minute Greek Orthodox church service broadcasted over loudspeaker.



Our anchorage in Vonitsa was idyllic. We were situated off an island park with a lovely pedestrian bridge connecting it to the mainland. The village of Vonitsa with its Venetian fort above (built on the site of an earlier Byzantine fort) could be seen in the background, and beautiful views of the countryside and the gulf were enjoyed from the fort.



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Preveza was located just inside the entrance to the Gulf of Amvrakia. At one time it had been the old provincial market town, and its clock tower represented the center of the original town. Now it was the capital of this province.



Wednesday afternoon, July 26, we departed the Gulf of Amvrakia and headed south. In 31 BC, just outside the entrance to this gulf, the naval battle of Actium between Octavian (later known as Emperor Augustus) and the combined fleets of Mark Anthony and Cleopatra occurred. This naval victory by Octavian determined the future direction of the Roman empire and the official end of the republic. After leaving this area and traveling 6 nautical miles south we passed through the Levkas Canal. This canal was first dug by the Corinthians around the 7th century BC. Now, once an hour, the floating bridge connecting the mainland to the island of Levkas (Lefkada) rotated so boats could pass through.



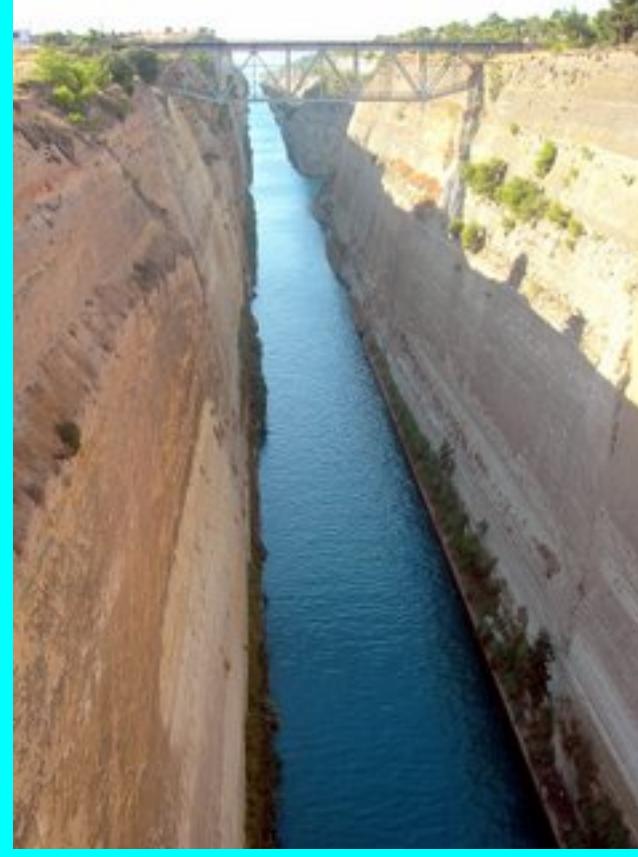
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Once back at Ancient Corinth, the ruins of the 5th century BC Temple of Apollo were the best preserved. During Roman times the Corinthians paid homage to the goddess of love, Aphrodite, and Apostle Paul spent 18 months preaching here in Corinth trying to change their wicked ways, as mentioned in his letters in 1st and 2nd Corinthians.



Before driving back to Porto Heli, we made a quick stop at the Corinth Canal to view the canal from above. On our drive back we saw some fish pens along the coast. In Greece fish farming was a large industry, and often we encountered these pens on our boat travels. During the day's drive we also saw many shrines along the roadside. Unfortunately, each shrine represented a driving fatality. Greece is known to have the poorest driving record of any country in Europe.



For almost two weeks in the Aegean Sea, especially in the northern Cyclades, the winds had been gale force almost continuously. Now the winds and seas were finally subsiding, and we felt we could start heading east toward the northern Cyclades group of islands. In hindsight we should have waited one more day. Sunday, September 17, we departed Porto Heli but only made it as far as Dhoko Island, just 13 nautical miles away. Monday we continued on east to Kythnos Island, a distance of 51 nautical miles. Although the winds had subsided, beating into three foot seas made for a very long day. By Tuesday all was calm in the Aegean; no wind and flat seas. What a difference a day made. We motored the 31 nautical miles east to Syros Island and tied alongside a pier at the unfinished marina in the town of Ermoupolis, the capital of the Cyclades and until the 20th century the shipbuilding and maritime center of Greece.

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Most Greek Cyclades Islands were rocky, barren islands with white hilltop towns and villages. Ermoupolis was a perfect example of the Cyclades white hilltop town. As Ermoupolis' economy did not depend solely on tourism, this town had a refreshing atmosphere. We spent the late afternoon and evening enjoying this likeable town. In the Middle Ages, Syros was the only Greek island with an entirely Roman Catholic population due to conversion by the Catholic Franks in 1207. During the War of Independence, thousands of Greeks fleeing the Turks came to Syros from other islands. They brought the Greek Orthodox religion with them. Now each had its own hill. Looking up from the harbor, the Catholic settlement of Ano Syros was on the left (highest of the two hills) with the Greek Orthodox settlement of Vrodado on the right. Each denomination's main church was on the top of their respective hill. While in Ermoupolis we took a taxi up to the top of Ano Syros and walked the entire way down to the harbor. This medieval settlement with its labyrinthine alleyways was a delightful place to explore.



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Wednesday, September 20, we motored across to Mykonos, a distance of 20 nautical miles. We anchored in Ornos Bay on the south side of Mykonos Island. Our main reason for visiting Mykonos was that our cruising friends John and Sharon were staying in Mykonos this coming winter. Last winter they had stayed in Sabaudia, Italy, in John's Italian business associate's summer apartment. This year his Greek business associate offered him his summer home on Mykonos, plus a car. We spent two days visiting with them.

Mykonos was considered the glitziest island in Greece, home to the "pretty people." Mykonos Town and Ano Mera were the two main settlements on this rocky, barren island. Before the tourist boom, Mykonos Town was a charming fishing village dotted with traditional whitewashed Cycladic "cubic" buildings and hilltop windmills used in grinding grain. Now Mykonos Town was quite glitzy; fortunately Ano Mera, being inland, remained low key.



Mykonos Town



Ano Mera



Marble Tower 16th century church Ano Mera



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Everywhere we drove on Mykonos we saw the traditional “cubic” architecture as it had continued to be the building code for all new developments. Also we saw lots of churches. Supposedly, there were over 365 churches on the island. Nearly all were people’s own private chapels built in thanksgiving to God for a special prayer answered. The most famous church on the island was the Church of Panagia Paraportiani, a collection of four white-washed chapels, sitting on a promontory in Mykonos Town.



John & Sharon's Home Away from Home



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Church of Panagia Paraportiani

In the peak of summer Mykonos was crowded with tourists, both Greeks and those from other countries. During the day people regularly headed to one of the many beaches where they partied all day long, soaking up the sun and dancing to the music. In the evening everyone generally headed into Mykonos Town, usually enjoying their evening meal around 10 pm and partying into the night. Luckily when we were there, the huge summer crowds had departed.



Mykonos Landscape

During our stay we took the excursion boat over to the sacred island of Delos, just a few miles away. Although this island was only three miles long by one mile wide, it was full of history. In Greek mythology Delos was where the twins Apollo and Artemis were born, and the Cyclades group of islands (where the word Cyclades [Kuklo] means rings) actually radiated out from this sacred island. In ancient Greece, Delos was second only to Delphi in religious importance. Now some of the best ruins in the island's sanctuary were the marble lion carvings presented to Delos by the Naxians in the 7th century BC to guard the sacred lake. Originally there were nine lions. Now only five lions remained with the originals in the island's museum.



Delos



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Our visit to the sacred islet of Delos also gave us an amazing glimpse into life dating around the 3rd to the 2nd century BC. In Hellenistic times, Delos was not only one of the most important religious centers in Greece but also a flourishing center of commerce. Rich merchants, bankers, and ship owners from as far away as Syria and Egypt established homes on Delos, and Delos became quite a cosmopolitan town. At its peak, there were about 20,000 residents living on this small island, and Delos' wealthiest residents built lavish houses. Interestingly, the theater on Delos had a dual purpose. Not only did it provide entertainment, but it also acted as a collection system for rainwater. The theater's waterways and the huge vaulted cistern at the bottom of the stage for collecting the water could still be seen.



Theater Ruins



Three Burner Cooker (300 BC)



Multi Wick Lamp (200 BC)

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Saturday morning, September 23, we continued our island hop across the Aegean making stops at the Greek Cyclades islands of Paros, Naxos, Amorgos, and Levitha before arriving a week later at the Greek Dodecanese islands. The northern bay in Paros had one of the best protected anchorages in the Cyclades, and it was great not to have to constantly worry about the wind direction. On Paros the fishing village of Naoussa, even with the growth of tourism, had not lost its charm. It was a delightful place to visit.



Naoussa

Naxos, the largest island in the Cyclades, was known in mythology as the island of Dionysus, the god of wine, and also as the place where Theseus abandoned Ariadne, daughter of King Minos of Crete, after she helped him slay the Minotaur. In ancient Greece Naxos reached its peak in the 7th and 6th centuries BC when it dominated much of the Cyclades. Having an abundance of marble, the Naxians left their artistic imprint, particularly in regards to sculpture, at both Delphi and Delos. Today Naxos' most famous landmark was the marble Portara gateway from the Temple of Apollo started at the end of the 6th century BC on Palatia Islet but never finished due to war. Now, Palatia Islet was joined to the mainland by a causeway, and from this islet we had a spectacular view of Naxos and its hilltop old town. This old town was divided into the Venetian Kastro on top, where inside its castle walls the Catholic nobility lived, and the medieval Bourg below, where the Greeks lived. Still above each of the doors of the Venetian houses were the family's coat of arms; today many of their descendants continue to live there.



Kuhela



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As we left the more touristy Cyclades islands of Paros and Naxos, the islands became more remote. Traveling through these islands, we often would see just a lone Greek Orthodox chapel, so much a part of the Greek landscape. On Amorgos, the high mountains caused gusty winds at times. On Levitha, there were just two families living on the island, and one had a small taverna at its farmhouse which served evening meals to sailboat cruisers, its only visitors.



Amorgos



Levitha

Saturday afternoon, September 30, we arrived in Lakki on Leros Island in the Greek Dodecanese Islands. We had traveled 127 miles since Mykonos and had spent the majority of our time motorsailing. Most of our transit we had had little wind, and it often came from just off our nose. These islands, the Dodecanese, were located off the coastline of Turkey, and they derived their name from the time of the Ottoman Empire when 12 of the 18 islands (dodeka means 12 in Greek) were granted special privileges for having willingly submitted to the Ottomans. In 1912, the Italians ousted the Turks, and in 1948 these islands were finally united with Greece.

We spent two weeks in the Dodecanese Islands before arriving in Marmaris, Turkey. We spent our first week enjoying the islands of Leros, Lipsi, and Arki. These islands had been recommended to us as “off the beaten tourist islands” where we could enjoy traditional Greek life; they definitely met our criteria, especially Leros and Lipsi. Leros was a medium-sized island with many bays and coves. We anchored in Lakki Bay, a huge protected natural harbor. This harbor had been the principal naval base for the Italians in the eastern Mediterranean and therefore the scene of much fighting and bombing during World War II. Mussolini had built the town of Lakki into a Fascist showpiece with wide boulevards and Art Deco architecture. The islands of Lipsi and Arki, just north of Leros, were much smaller in size than Leros. Lipsi was charming with a fair amount of cultivation. Arki was rocky consisting of only a very small settlement with a couple of tavernas.

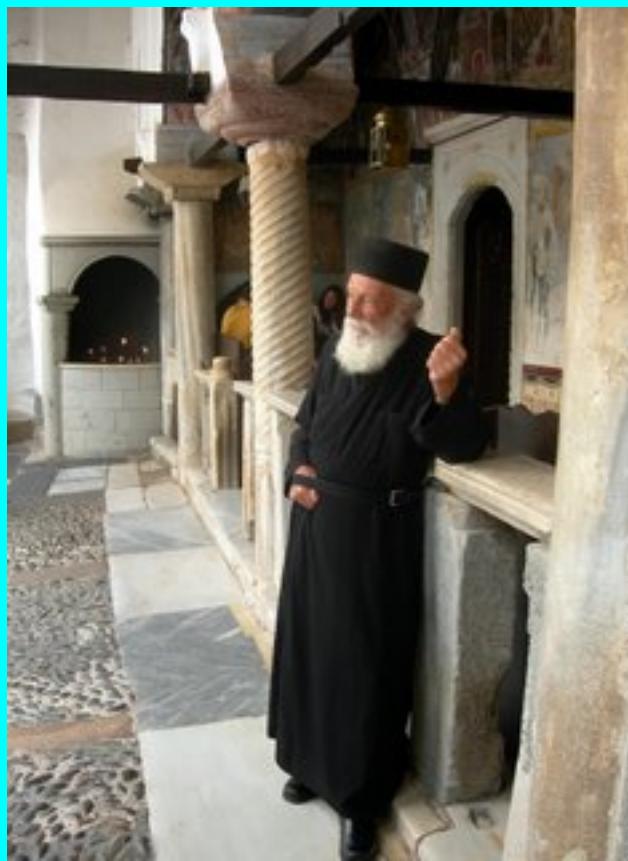


Leros

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*Lakki**Lipsi**Arki*

We started our second week in the Dodecanese by visiting the island of Patmos, 11 nautical miles southwest of Arki. In 95 AD Apostle John had been banished to Patmos from Ephesus, and while on the island he wrote the Book of Revelations. Because of this book's religious significance, many people made pilgrimages to Patmos. So after a week of little tourism, we were once again greeted by cruise ships and hydrofoils as we entered the harbor. Sunday, October 8, we took a taxi up to the 12th century Monastery of St. John towering over the port and island. It had been built like a fortress for protection against pirates. Here remarkable 12th century frescoes were revealed in the Chapel of the Pangaea after a 1952 earthquake. They had been painted over centuries earlier. Afterwards we took the Byzantine path back down to the harbor, stopping halfway along to visit the Holy Cave of the Apocalypse where St. John received his divine revelation and where he wrote the Book of Revelations.



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Monday, October 9, we started the 135 nautical mile trip south to Marmaris, Turkey, anchoring enroute off the islands of Kalymnos, Gyali, and Symi. In Kalymnos, we spent a delightful evening on Telendhos, an islet just off the coast of Kalymnos. In Symi, we anchored off the fishing village in Pedi Bay. Both Kalymnos and Symi had had a long tradition of sponge-fishing, but during Ottoman times Symi was granted special privileges and flourished both in sponge-fishing and shipbuilding. At the beginning of the 20th century Symi had a population of 22,500, and its main town Gialos was the capital of the Dodecanese. Regrettably with the Italian occupation and the arrival of the steamship, Symi's prosperity declined. Now only about 2500 people live on the island. Before leaving we visited the town of Gialos. Many of the 19th century mansions still flanked Gialos harbor, but sadly quite a few were abandoned.



Telendhos



Pedi Bay



Gialos



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With our departure from Symi, our visit to Greece had come to an end. It had been an incredible summer of exploration, especially with Greece being the foundation of Western Civilization and Grecian waters made for cruising. In all, we had spent a total of 14½ weeks in Greece, 8½ weeks on the Ionian side and 6 weeks on the Aegean side. We felt safe wherever we went, and the Greek people were most hospitable. We will miss the Greek meals and wine, the fresh taste of Greek feta cheese purchased straight from the barrel, the melodious sound of the Greek church bells, and the jingle of goat bells from the rocky hills surrounding our anchorages.

Saturday afternoon, October 14, we arrived in Marmaris, Turkey. After the brown rocky terrain of Symi, Greece, the green mountainous scenery surrounding Marmaris Bay was beautiful to see. This winter we will leave our boat at Marmaris Yacht Marina while we travel home, and with our arrival our thoughts turned toward getting Kuhela ready for our five month absence.



Marmaris Yacht Marina is a large well-run, first-class marina situated 5 miles south of Marmaris. It has two restaurants, a pool, plus haul-out facilities which include 3 travel lifts, 2 travel lift slips, and a huge boatyard with room for 1000+ boats. Traveling to and from town is done either by dolmus (minibus) or boat.



Upon our arrival many cruisers were already starting to take their boats out of the water for the winter, and as our boat was moored directly across from the haul-out facilities we enjoyed watching the entire operation from the boats lining up to be hauled out to the continual working of the travel lifts. Usually 10 to 15 boats were hauled out each day. On Saturday, November 4, Kuhela came out of the water. We were called to line up at 4 p.m., but it was almost 3 hours later before she was taken out of the water, making for a very long day. Sunday evening we took the night bus from Marmaris to Istanbul, arriving in Istanbul 14 hours later.



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We spent four days in Istanbul before flying home. Istanbul, the largest city in Turkey, was an amazing major city to visit, uniquely located on the two continents of Europe and Asia. For 1000 years this city, then called Constantinople, had been the capital of the Byzantine Empire and one of the richest cities in Christendom. For the next 500 years this city became the capital of the Ottoman Empire. During our stay we visited the three main historical sites still standing from these two empires: Hagia Sophia (Ayasofya), the Blue Mosque (Sultanahmet Mosque), and Topkapi Palace. Hagia Sophia, built in the 6th century, had reigned as the greatest church in Christendom until the fall of Constantinople in 1453. Afterwards it was converted into a mosque, and in 1935 into a museum. The Blue Mosque, named for the blue Iznik tiles decorating its interior, was commissioned in the 17th century by Sultan Ahmet I and is the only mosque in Istanbul with six minarets. For 400 years, from the 15th to the 19th centuries, the Ottoman sultans ruled their empire from the Topkapi Palace.



Hagia Sophia



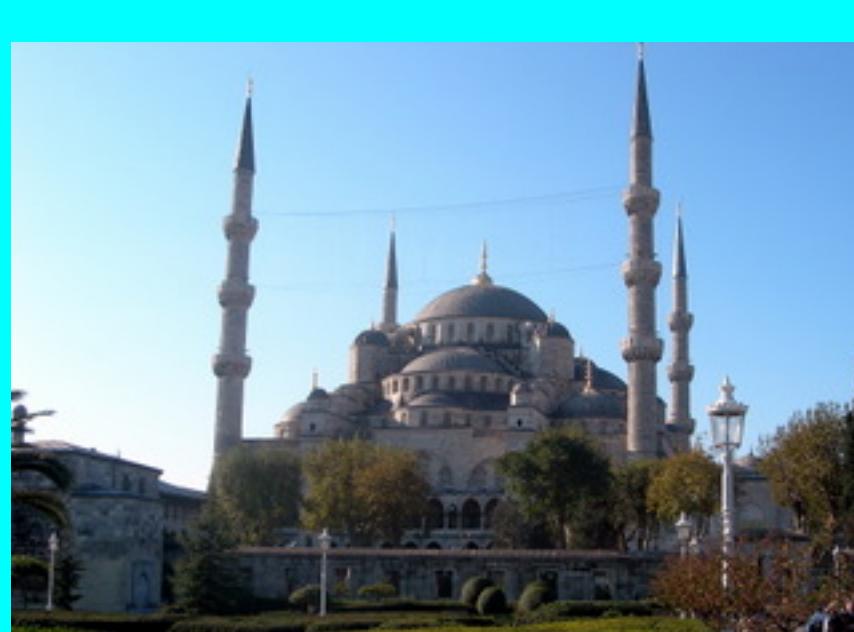
Mihrab facing Mecca



Entrance Topkapi Palace



Uncovered Mosaic in Hagia Sophia



Blue Mosque



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While in Istanbul, we also visited Yerebatan Cistern (Basilica Cistern), a 6th century underground cistern, supported by 336 columns, used to supply the city with water; Dolmabahce Palace, built in the 19th century as the new main residence of the sultans; the Grand Bazaar with its 4000 shops; the magnificent Spice Bazaar; and the 13th century Galata Tower, known for having spectacular views of Istanbul and the Bosphorus Strait, Golden Horn, and Sea of Marmara. Seeing the Bosphorus Strait for the first time was a thrill as this strait, just 21 miles in length, was the strait that separated Europe and Asia and connected the Black Sea with the Sea of Marmara. Before leaving Istanbul we enjoyed a boat trip on the Bosphorus Strait plus an evening dinner show of Turkish folk dancing.



Basilica Cistern



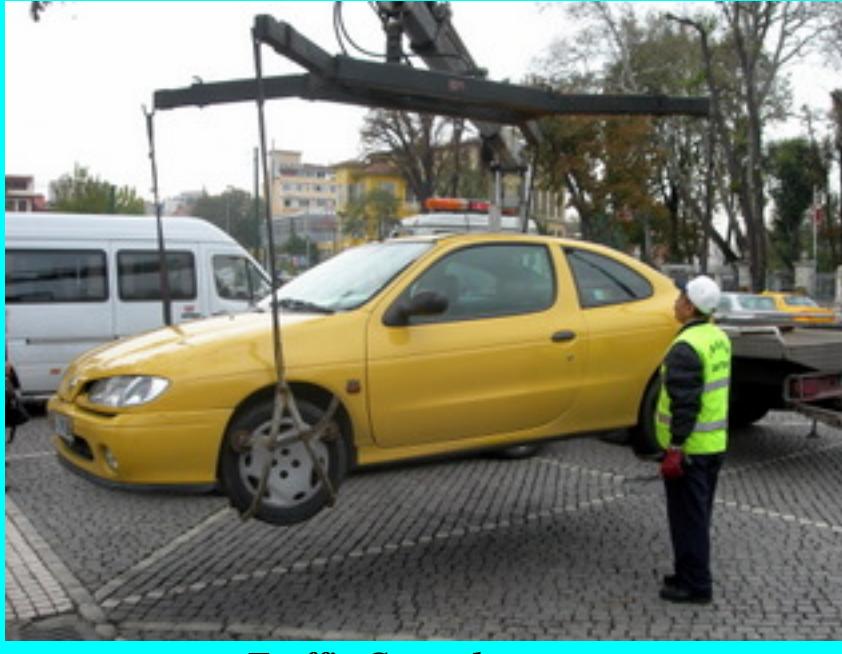
Dolmabahce



Grand Bazaar



Spice Bazaar



Traffic Control



Galata Tower



Bosphorus Strait



Golden Horn .. Istanbul's Natural Harbor

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Friday, November 10, we departed Istanbul for home. We had been in Turkey just shy of four weeks but during that short period we had come to respect Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the founder and first president of the Turkish Republic. His reforms, strictly enacted, and carried out in such a short amount of time, set Turkey on the path of becoming a modern westernized secular nation. He replaced the Arabic and Persian alphabets with a Latin-based one, and personally went into the countryside to help teach the people. He died at Dolmabahce Palace on November 10, 1938, at 9:05 a.m. Even now he is highly revered, and every year on November 10th at 9:05 a.m., for one minute, all Turks stand for a moment of silence in respect of this man. Looking out our plane's window just before take-off at 9:08, we witnessed this special moment.



Our plan is to return to Turkey on April 15. This coming cruising season we look forward to exploring Turkey and enjoying more of eastern Greece before returning yet again to Marmaris next fall.

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The cruising was wonderful in the area south of the canal enclosed by Levkas Island. We spent twelve days in these protected waters enjoying some of its beautiful anchorages: Tranquil Bay by Nidri, two of the enclosed bays off Meganisi Island, Skorpio Island (private island of the Onassis family), and the landlocked bay of Vlikho. Of all, our most favorite anchorage was in Vlikho Bay with its three waterfront tavernas on one side, each with its own dinghy dock, and the quaint village of Vlikho on the other side. Here everything was quiet and laid-back; a few miles away the busy tourist resort town of Nidri was hustling and bustling.



Tranquil Bay



Meganisi



Scorpio



Vlikho



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Tuesday, August 8, we left these beautiful protected waters and headed south to the islands of Cephalonia (Kefallonia) and Ithaca (Ithaki) through the channel between Levkas and Meganisi. We anchored for the night in the bay of Sivota in southern Levkas before heading across Wednesday to Fiskardho in northeastern Cephalonia.



The village of Fiskardho, with its pretty 18th century Venetian houses and lovely wooded surroundings, was the only place on Cephalonia and in much of the Ionian Islands to escape damage in the 1953 earthquake. Now it was a “chichi” tourist resort, full of pretty people, and its narrow bay was extremely crowded with boat traffic. We saw more mega-yachts here than elsewhere. As the bay was deep all boats had to take a line ashore, and we were entertained for hours just watching everyone, especially the charter boats, vie for spaces in the mid to late afternoon, drop anchors, re-anchor, and sometimes drag. It was better than watching a soap opera or movie. Where we thought there was room for just one more boat, three or four would anchor. While in Fiskardho, Mary’s dream of Greek dancing came true when we enjoyed a truly memorable evening at Nicholas Taverna. Nicholas, the owner, could have passed for Zorba the Greek, and he and his waiters entertained everyone with their dancing after serving the food. Even a visiting Greek family, from young adult to grandmother, joined in the dancing.



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Saturday morning we traveled across the channel to the island of Ithaca, the home of Odysseus, the hero and legendary king of Ithaca in Homer's *Odyssey*. Having read the book, it was exciting to finally be here. We first stopped in Kioni, a small picturesque village along its eastern coastline before heading the short distance down to Vathi, Ithaca's capital and only town.



Channel between Ithaca & Cephalonia



Kioni



Chapel at entrance to Kioni



Although we spent ten days in Vathi, it was definitely not one of our favorite anchorages as strong winds at times swept down the channel between Cephalonia and Ithaca and across Ithaca's isthmus into the bay. Three days were so bad we didn't even venture off the boat. Even so, we couldn't leave the anchorage as we were rendezvousing with two other cruising boats, and we were the first boat to arrive. However, when the wind wasn't blowing Vathi was a delightful small town to visit. Colorful pastel buildings with doors and windows of a deeper hue or contrasting color dotted the waterfront, and the town had an interesting archeological museum containing bronze statues of horses from the geometric period and bronze coins featuring the head of Odysseus wearing a pilos (traveler's hat).



Anchorage

Vathi

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When our friends John and Sharon did arrive, we spent a day exploring the island by car, being especially interested in the sites speculated by archeologists as those mentioned in Homer's *Odyssey*. Although both Lefkas and Cephalonia were also mentioned with equally convincing evidence as the possible island home of Odysseus, Ithaca still remained the favorite with archeologists. After our day of exploring, we totally agreed.

In southern Ithaca the Bay of Dexia near Vathi was considered to be the ancient Phorkys where sleeping Odysseus was laid by the Phaeacians. Nearby, the archeological site "Cave of the Nymphs" (presently closed to the public) was where Odysseus supposedly hid his gifts that the Phaeacians gave him. South of Vathi on the plateau of Marathias Odysseus presumably met his swineherd Eumaios, and an hour's walk further south led to the Fountain of Arethousa and the Raven's Rock, both mentioned in *The Odyssey*.



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In northern Ithaca most archeological interest was on Pilikata Hill near the village of Stavros where ruins of a Bronze Age settlement had been found. Just outside Stavros we visited a small archeological museum containing artifacts such as tripods and a piece of terracotta mask bearing the inscription “Dedicated to Odysseus.” Afterwards we visited the archeological site “School of Homer” on Pilikata Hill, the highlight of our day. Excavations were presently taking place, and one of the main archeologists was convinced that they had found the “real” palace of Homer. Her eyes were alive with excitement. Only time will tell if their findings come true. They allowed us to walk around the site but we were asked not to take any pictures.



View from Pilikata Hill

Besides exploring some of the sites mentioned in Homer's *Odyssey*, we also visited the 17th century monastery of Katharon with its spectacular views of southern Ithaca, the sleepy village of Anogi (old capital of Ithaca), the village of Stavros, and the monastery on top Mt. Exogis with its dramatic view of northern Ithaca and the surrounding islands. Driving along the edge of the cliff up to the monastery on Mt. Exogis, though, was nerve-racking.



Anogi



Odysseus in Stravos



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Stravos



Road to Monastery



Thursday, August 24, we finally departed Vathi, Ithaca. Our departure marked the official end to our cruising in the Ionian Islands. We headed east toward the Corinth Canal through the two gulfs separating the Peloponnese from central Greece. When we passed under the suspension bridge, we left the Gulf of Petras and entered the Gulf of Corinth. While in these waters we made five stops: Petalas Island, Missalonghi, Trizonia Island, Galaxidi, and Zoodhokhos Island. The village of Galaxidi made a pleasant base from which to visit Delphi by local bus.



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For centuries Delphi was the religious and spiritual center of the ancient Greek world. According to mythology, Zeus dispatched two eagles at opposite ends of the world and they met at Delphi, making it the center of the world. Delphi's setting on the slopes of Mt. Parnassus was spectacular, adding to its allure. In ancient times, especially during its peak in the 5th and 4th centuries BC, pilgrims came to the Sanctuary of Apollo from all over Greece seeking advice of the Delphic oracle, thought to be speaking for Apollo. The Sacred Way was lined with treasures filled with rich gifts given by city-states in gratitude of Apollo's decisions, especially when it helped them win battles. The sanctuary's theater and stadium held dramatic contests and games every four years during the Pythian Festival in honor of Apollo. Below the Sanctuary of Apollo was the Sanctuary of Athena with its striking 4th century BC tholos.



Athenian Treasury



Sacred Way



Sanctuary of Apollo



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Sanctuary's Theater



Stadium



Sprinters Starting Blocks

While at the site we visited the Delphi museum exhibiting artifacts from the Sanctuary of Delphi. This excellent museum brought the archeological site to life.



Sanctuary of Athena



Bronze Charioteer Delphi (474 BC)



Tripod (7th Century BC)



Kouroi (600 BC)



Sphynx



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After visiting Delphi we waited an extra day due to weather before sailing on toward the Corinth Canal. Saturday, September 2, we passed through the Corinth Canal connecting the Ionian Sea to the Aegean Sea. This canal, being narrow, was run just like a road construction site, allowing only one way traffic to pass through at a time. We had to wait almost an hour for our turn. Once given the signal, it was a "real high" to pass through this 3.2 mile long canal, just 81 feet wide, with limestone sides rising vertically 230 feet at the highest point. In ancient times small ships were dragged across the isthmus on rollers. Although there had always been a desire to link these two seas, it wasn't until 1893 that the canal became a reality. Now every Tuesday the canal was closed for dredging and repairs to its crumbling limestone sides.



Entering the Canal



Exiting the Canal

With our passage through the Corinth Canal we officially passed from the Ionian side of Greece into the Aegean side. In all, we had spent 8½ weeks on the Ionian side and had enjoyed many special moments. As each Ionian island and region produced its own wine and olives, a special memory will always be the fun we had sampling the different local wines and olives.

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