

October 3, 2005

We spent six days in Sardinian waters before heading to Corsica. Originally we had planned to be in Sardinia longer, but instead we decided to cruise Corsica with our sailing friends, John and Sharon, on “Seraphim”, and return to Sardinia next spring. Even with our short stay, we enjoyed meeting the Sardinian people. They considered themselves Sardinians first, Italians second.

While anchored in Porto Conte Bay, we took the bus twice into the nearby town of Alghero to explore its historic center and also to obtain our Italian cruising permit, good for one year. In 1353 AD this Genovese town became part of the Kingdom of Aragon and for four centuries Alghero remained under Catalan-Spanish domination. Even today, the Catalan influence could still be seen in Alghero. As for ourselves, we were captivated by this charming coastal medieval town, complete with sea walls, and easily could have spent more time here.



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Before leaving our anchorage in Porto Conte, we walked to the prehistoric archeological site of Nuraghe Palmavera, a 3500 year old Bronze Age settlement. It was abandoned in the 5th century BC due to a fire. This was an interesting settlement consisting of a complex “nuraghi” with a staircase and adjoining chambers. (“Nuraghi” was the Sardinian name for a large prehistoric conical shaped stone tower, and in Sardinia there were about 7000 of these monuments.) Surrounding this nuraghi were about 50 circular village huts, positioned according to hierarchical rules, and also a large clan meeting hut. Sheep rearing had been one of the activities of this settlement.



Tuesday morning, August 30, we departed Porto Conte Bay with our sailing friends on “Seraphim” and headed around the northern end of Sardinia, anchoring our first night in Stintino, 34 nautical miles north of Porto Conte, and the second night in the lee of Capo Testa, 47 nautical miles northeast of Stintino.



*"Kuhela"*



*"Searaphim"*

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Thursday morning, cruising in the company of “Seraphim”, we crossed Bonifacio Strait to Bonifacio Harbor in Corsica, a distance of about 10 nautical miles. White limestone cliffs surrounded this narrow harbor. During the peak of the summer season, this natural harbor was quite congested with boat traffic. To enter Bonifacio from sea, though, was an experience we were told not to miss as this inlet was said to be quite stunning and unique. It had been known to mariners since ancient times; Homer wrote about this harbor in the Odyssey. Since it was now September 1st and the crowded August days were pass, we decided to venture into Bonifacio and if not crowded, stay; otherwise we were going to leave and come back via bus or rental car from Porto-Vecchio.

What we encountered “blew us away”. This narrow harbor was a “beehive of activity” with about thirty boats all moving in and out at the same time. Off on a side dock a harbor official was blowing a whistle trying to maintain some type of order. As we all liked our solitude, a decision was made to leave. But, to have experienced this “crazy madness” was something we will always remember.



The southern white limestone plateau of Bonifacio was geologically different from the rest of the mostly granite island of Corsica. As we traveled along the southern coastline of Corsica and up its eastern side, it was interesting to see this geological change from limestone to granite. We spent the night in the beautiful shell-shaped bay of Port de Rondinara, 18 nautical miles from Bonifacio, and the next day headed to Porto-Vecchio, 15 nautical miles further up the coast.

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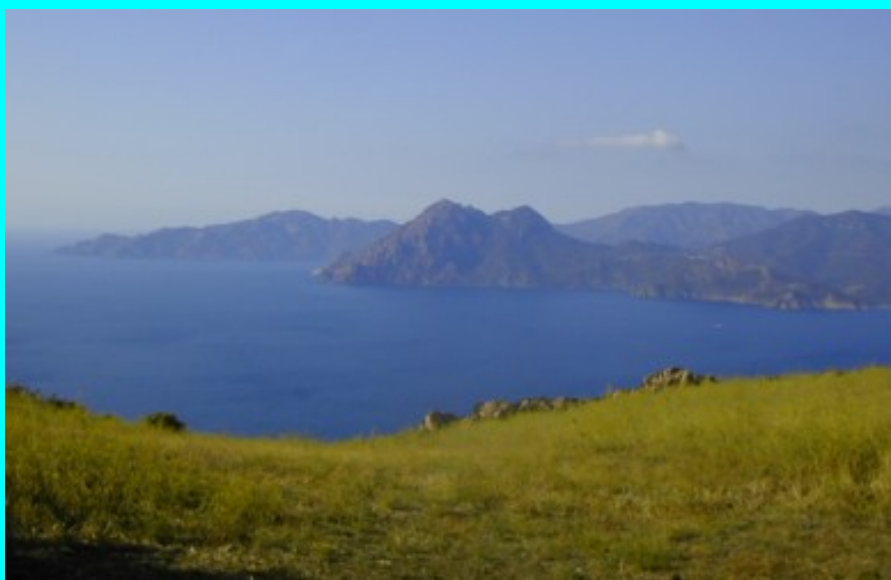
We spent 20 days anchored in the harbor at the head of the Gulf of Porto-Vecchio. With all-around protection, this anchorage made the perfect base from which to explore Corsica. The old walled Genoese town of Porto-Vecchio, perched on top a hill with the surrounding mountains as a backdrop, made a stunning setting. We enjoyed this charming historic town, and from our boat we often heard the sound of the town’s church bell high on top the hill. Three times a week the ferry from Marseille, France, made a stopover in this harbor.



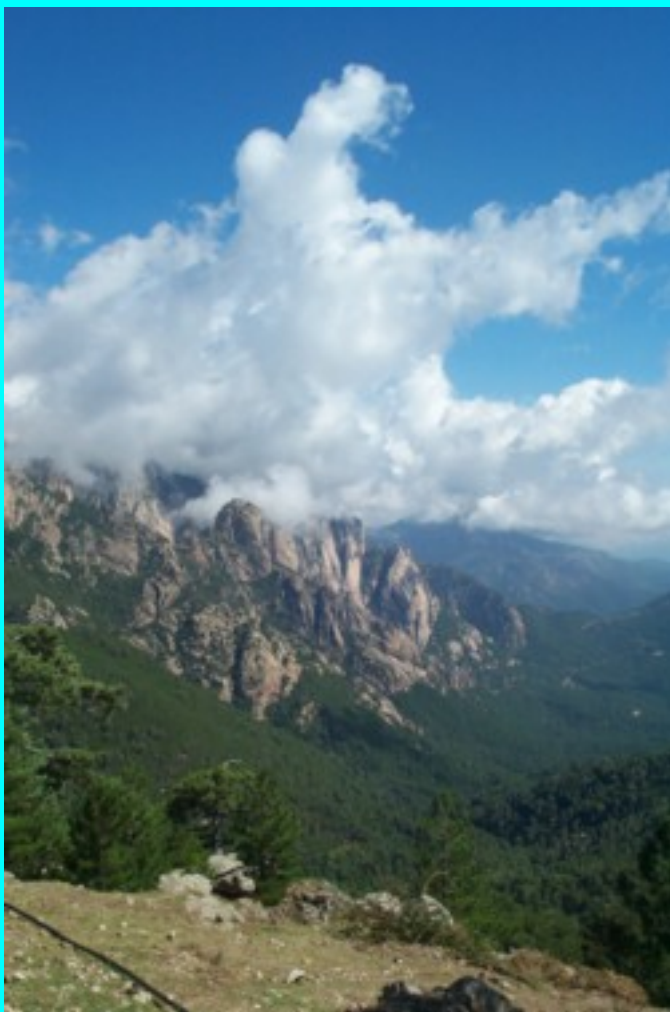
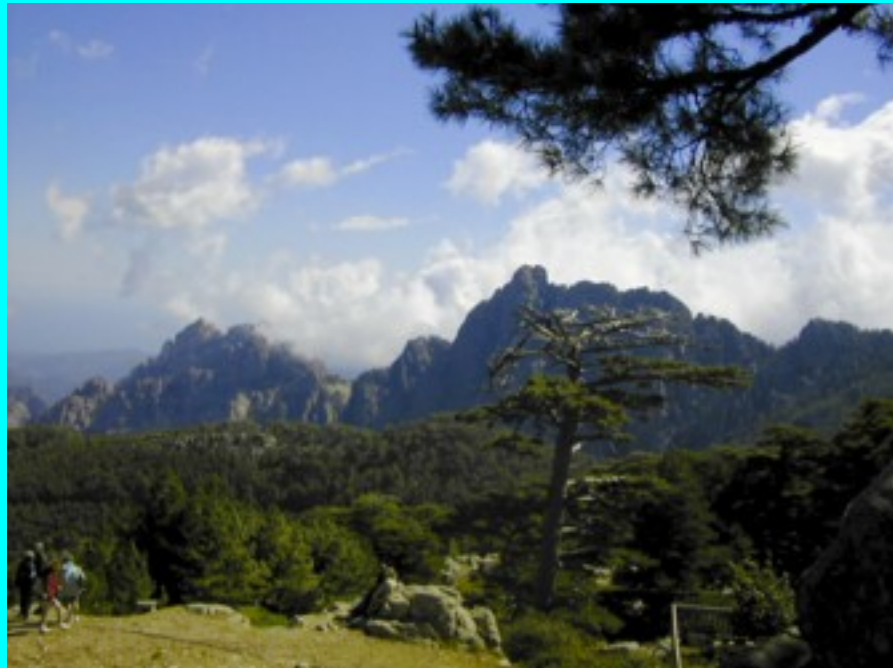
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During our stay in Porto-Vecchio, we rented a car with our friends, John and Sharon, and toured the island. Corsica was a beautiful mountainous island with impressive and varied scenery, and the mountain villages we traveled through were classic with their stone houses and architecture. In all, we traveled 550 miles in three days, driving mostly along narrow winding mountain roads.



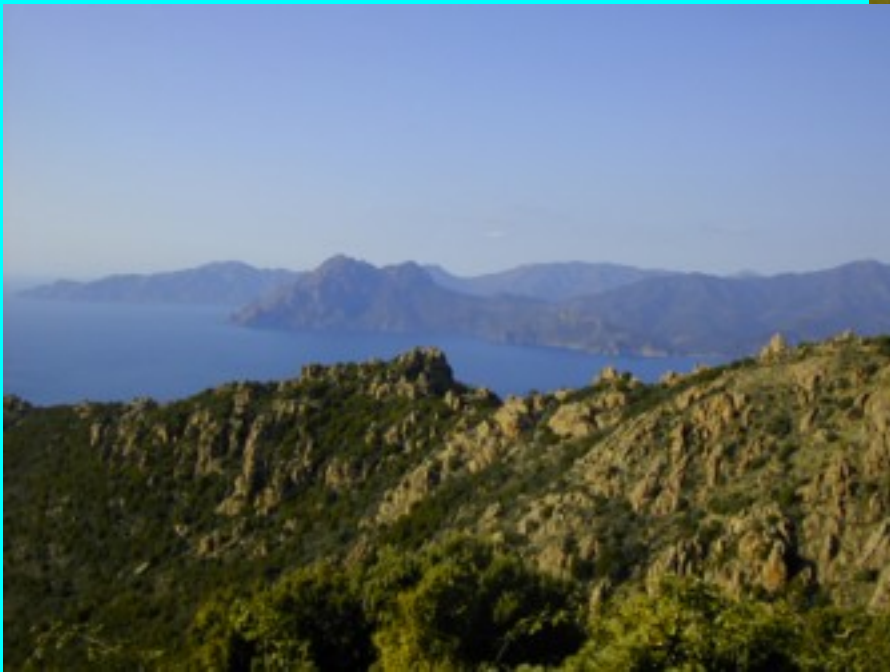
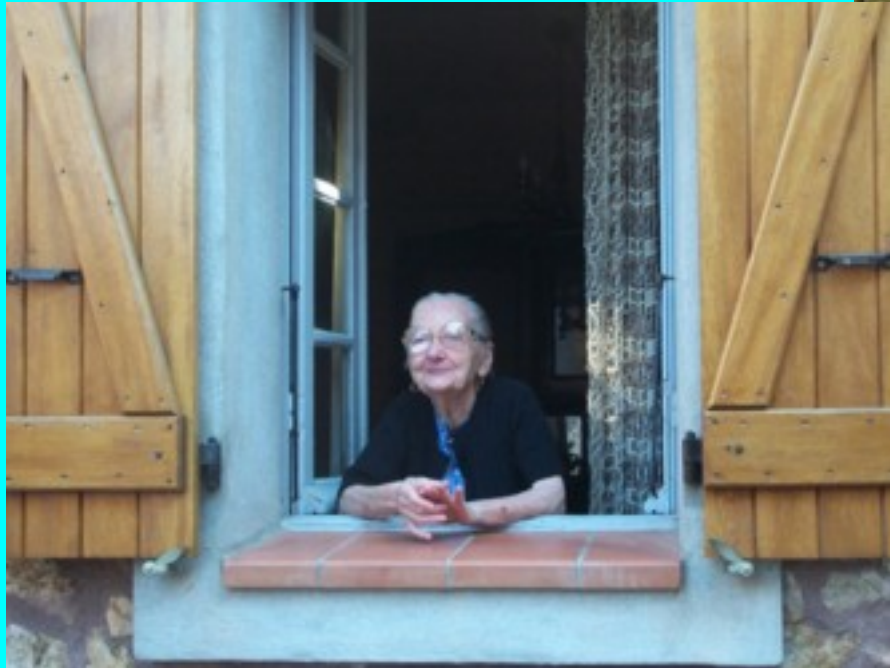
Saturday, September 10, we drove north along the mountain road to Zonza, a picturesque mountain village. From there, we drove to Bavella to view the jagged granite peaks called “Needles of Bavella” (Aiguilles de Bavella). As Corsica was a paradise for outdoor enthusiasts, quite a few people were out that day hiking, backpacking, and mountain climbing.



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We next drove across the mountains to the west coast of Corsica. After a quick stop in the village of Piana, we passed through the “Calanques de Piana”. These granite rocks had been sculpted into intriguing formations by the forces of nature, and with the afternoon sun they took on a golden hue. From the Calanques we continued our trip north to the town of Calvi.



Genoa had ruled Corsica for five centuries, and during this period the Genoese built impressive citadels and watchtowers around the island for defensive purposes. One of the most impressive citadels was in Calvi, which dated back to the 13th century. As the sun set, we explored the narrow cobbled streets of this citadel. We spent the night just north of Calvi in L’Ile Rousse.



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Sunday, September 11, we drove east to Bastia, situated along Corsica's northeastern coast and its second largest town. Afterwards, we traveled inland and south to the charming town of Corte. Located in the center of Corsica, Corte was where the Corsican independence movement had its origins, first against the Genoese and then against the French, and this town still maintained a proud spirit of nationalism. Even now, the people of Corsica considered themselves first Corsican, second French. The Corsican language was still spoken throughout Corsica, and as we traveled around the island we noticed the names on many road signs crossed out with the Corsican names written in their place. From an outlook platform in Corte we had excellent views of the town and countryside and of the southern end of the citadel perched high up on a rock. From Corte, we drove south along the eastern coastline to Bonifacio where we enjoyed the evening before returning to our boat in Porto-Vecchio.



Monday morning, September 12, we drove to Filitosa, the most famous prehistoric site in Corsica. Filitosa contained early human shelters beneath rocks dating from 6000 BC to statue-menhirs dating from 1800 to 1000 BC. The more advanced statue-menhirs showed facial features and sometimes warriors' weapons, armor, and backbone.



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In the afternoon, we drove back to Bonifacio to enjoy further this Genoese town and citadel perched on the promontory overlooking the harbor. Unlike when we were first here on September 1, the harbor no longer was a “madhouse”. Eleven days had made quite a difference in the amount of summer boat traffic. During the days of Genoese rule, there was only one entrance to Bonifacio’s upper town, and it was quite impressive. High up on the promontory, we had beautiful views of the harbor and of the white limestone cliffs of Bonifacio, with the “grain of sand”, a solitary stack of limestone rock, prominent in the foreground. Underneath some of the outermost buildings in the upper town, the limestone cliffs had actually been eaten away making for a very interesting and unusual sight.



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That evening we attended in Porto-Vecchio a Corsican concert starring the Corsican singer Jacques Culioli. It was the perfect end to a wonderful three days.

During our stay in Corsica we could feel the weather change from summer to fall. Unsettled weather seemed to be more frequent, with heavy rain at times. The topsides of our boat were finally looking white and clean again. On Thursday, September 22, the first day of autumn, we departed Corsica for Rome, Italy. The winds we had hoped for never materialized, and so we motorsailed our way across the Tyrrhenian Sea to Rome, a distance of 134 nautical miles. En route, we were thrilled to observe our first large whale in the Mediterranean, only 100 yards off the stern of our boat. Twenty-five hours after departing Corsica we arrived at Porto Turistico di Roma, the marina in which we will be staying this winter.

Porto Turistico di Roma, located in Ostia near the original century 1st century AD Roman port, is a new first class marina consisting of 810 berths. The marina is almost completely full, and most of the berths are taken up by Italian boats, not foreign boats like last winter in Lagos, Portugal. Since our arrival we have been warmly welcomed by our Italian boat neighbors, making for a very special first week. This huge marina, almost a quarter of a mile in length, is full of shops and restaurants, and it has been fun to watch families come enjoy this marina and stroll along its esplanade, especially on the weekends.

We fly home to Florida for the holidays on October 13 and return to Rome on January 18. We will be in this marina until the first part of May when the weather once more turns favorable. During our stay here we plan to leisurely explore Rome, just an hour away via the metro, and also take side trips via the train to other parts of Italy.



*This is the Classic "Med Moore" for "Kuhela" ... When in Rome ... Do as the Romans Do.*

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