

June 6, 2006

Early Friday afternoon, April 28, we departed Rome. Last September when we crossed the Tyrrhenian Sea from Corsica to Rome, we motorsailed the entire distance. This time back across the Tyrrhenian Sea to the Maddelena Islands in northeast Sardinia was no different. After motorsailing 140 nautical miles, we anchored late Saturday afternoon in Cala Spalmatore on Maddalena Island.

We stayed five weeks in Sardinia. Our first five days we relaxed and enjoyed the beauty of the Maddelena Islands, first at Cala Spalmatore and next at Porto Palma on Caprera Island. As it was early in the sailing season, we had these anchorages all to ourselves, a special treat.



Friday, May 5, we departed the Maddelena Islands and traveled 6 nautical miles down to Porto Cervo on the northeastern coast of Sardinia. During the peak of the cruising season in July and August, this marina along the “Costa Smeralda” is a millionaires’ playground. We had expected to see at least a few expensive yachts here, but the marina was still quite deserted. We just anchored one night in Porto Cervo due to a change in wind direction.



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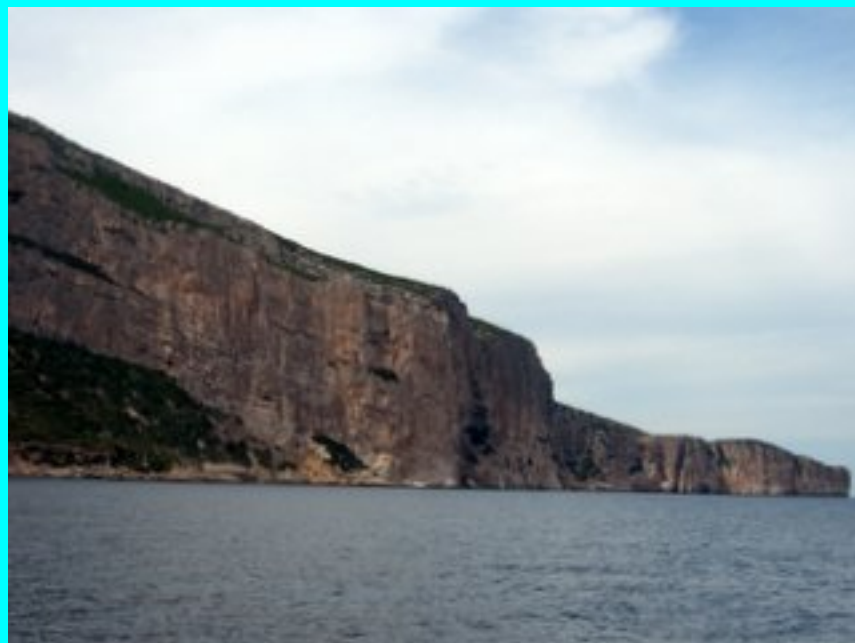
Saturday we traveled 9 nautical miles down to Porto di Cugnana, a beautiful well-protected anchorage. We spent five days here, staying a couple days longer than planned due to a passing cold front. We never tired of this anchorage's mountain scenery.



Thursday, May 11, we departed Porto di Cugnana traveling 22 nautical miles down to the beautiful bay of Porto Brandinghi. Since arriving in Sardinia, we had either motored or motorsailed, but today we just sailed, a rare occurrence. From Porto Brandinghi we had a great view of Tavolara Island, a striking, narrow, steep chunk of granite.



Friday we motorsailed the rest of the way down to Arbatax Marina, 57 nautical miles. It was in Arbatax that we planned to haul our boat out of the water, plus our German cruising friends, Uli and Imke, were staying at the marina. As we traveled along the coastline we passed the medieval coastal town of Posada perched high up on a hill and later the cliffs along the Golfo di Orosei. Posada was unique as most of the old Sardinian towns were built inland to safeguard against both outside invaders and coastal malaria, eradicated only in the 1950's.



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We spent 3½ weeks in Arbatax and could easily have stayed longer. The surrounding mountain scenery was beautiful, and Arbatax was noted for its red rock formations. Although Arbatax was a ferry port, it was really a small village. The main town was Tortoli, a short bus ride away. In both Tortoli and Arbatax the Sardinian people went out of their way to make us feel welcomed, helping us whenever needed and expecting nothing in return. After the large impersonal atmosphere of the marina in Ostia, Arbatax Marina was a refreshing change due to its intimate, laid-back atmosphere. In the marina there were quite a few German cruising boats, and many an evening was spent eating out at local restaurants. We succumbed to the German habits of many toasts and socializing late into the evening.



*Med-moor from the stern of Kuhela*



*Arbtrax in background*



*Marina*



*Uli, Phil & Imke*

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We spent one week out of the water in the boatyard installing a new sea cock, fixing the damage to the smashed teak caprail caused while checking-in at Benalmadena Marina in Spain a year ago, putting on new bottom paint, and waxing the boat.



Once back in the water, we rented a car to explore northern and central Sardinia with our cruising friends, John and Sharon. Early Saturday morning, May 27, we drove three hours across the mountains to Fertilia, just north of Alghero on the northwest coast of Sardinia, to pick up John and Sharon. From there we visited Sassari, Sardinia's second largest city, and nearby the Church of the Santissima Trinita de Saccargia, an impressive Pisan-Romanesque church constructed during the 12th century. Later we visited one of the Bronze age "Tomb of the Giants" at the Nuraghic site near Arzachena. This tomb was actually an ancient burial ground fronted by what seemed like a giant's door (believed by archeologists to be a door separating this life from the next). Before stopping for the night in Posada, we visited Porto Cervo and San Teodoro.



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*Looking Toward the Giant's Door at front of Burial Ground*



*Countryside, Northeastern Sardinia*



*Burial Trench*

When we first saw Posada from sea, it caught our eye perched high up on that hill. To spend the night in this quaint medieval village was quite special, and we had a lovely view of the countryside from our room.



*Note the Short Door*



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Sunday we drove along the winding Gennargentu mountain roads of the Barbagia region in central eastern Sardinia making a circuit of some of the hill towns from Oliena, Orgosolo, and Mamoiada in the north to Meana Sardo, Sorgono, and Aritzo in the south. As it was Sunday these villages were relatively quiet with not much activity. Around 5 p.m., though, everyone came out to visit and stroll, and these village roads filled with people. We spent our second night in Orgosolo, a town known since the 1960's for its expression of social and political statements through art graffiti.



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More than anywhere else in Sardinia the people of this region are firmly attached to their traditions. While in Mamoiada Mary visited the Museum of Mamuthones and Mediterranean Masks. Here on January 17th the winter celebration of Saint Anthonio takes place. In Mamoiada locals dressing up as Mamuthones and Issohadores parade down the streets. The roots of the celebration go back to pagan times. The Mamuthone represents “winter” (sad) and the Issohadore “spring” (fertility), and these rituals represent the hope for a bountiful farming season.



*Mamuthones*



*Bells weigh about 66 pounds*

Monday morning, May 29, we visited the town of Nuoro, driving first up to the top of Monte Ortobene, 3133 feet high, for views of Nuoro and the surrounding countryside. Afterwards we visited the museum in Nuoro displaying traditional Sardinian costumes. In Sardinia there are around 350 communities, and each has its own unique costume. Until the end of the 19th century the majority of Sardinia was quite isolated from the outside world.



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After leaving Nuoro, we drove up along the west coast to Fertilia to drop off John and Sharon before returning to Arbatax. Along our drive we saw many Bronze age Nuraghi towers dotting the landscape. Altogether, there are about 7000 of these towers in Sardinia.



Our departure from Sardinia was delayed a few days due to a low pressure system passing through. On June 6 we finally departed Sardinia for Sicily. The hospitality of the Sardinian people will always be one of our most cherished memories of Sardinia.

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