

# A Sabbatical of 50 Atlantic Islands

*An Account of Spellbinder's North Atlantic Circuit July 2018 - July 2019*







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Ocean passages in **red**





## A Sabbatical of 50 Atlantic Islands

### Summary

I had long dreamt of taking my own yacht across oceans. In 2018 the opportunity came for me to turn that dream into a reality. After a long career, and with children in their late teens, I decided to stop work and take a year away, sailing south from the UK to Madeira then on via the Canaries and Cape Verde, before heading across to the Caribbean, and exploring from Grenada northwards to the BVIs. I then returned via Bermuda and the Azores. The voyage took 18 months to prepare and involved a substantial refit of my yacht Spellbinder, a 2006 Hallberg Rassy 40.

I left Portsmouth on 16<sup>th</sup> July 2018 and returned on 12<sup>th</sup> July 2019, having sailed over 10,000 miles and having set foot on exactly 50 Atlantic Islands\*. The voyage involved 6 ocean crossings\*\* of over 500 nautical miles, 26 different crew members, the Squadron rally to the Grenadines and over 150 days at sea. Spellbinder proved ideal for the purpose and she was very reliable and seaworthy.

The story of the voyage is told in these pages. The text is primarily taken from my blog (<https://travels Spellbinder.blog>) where there is much more in terms of photography, video and further narrative. It is related in the discursive style of the blog. I do hope you enjoy reading it.

*Nick Nottingham*

Romsey, September 2019

\*Islands set foot upon: **Madeira** – Porto Santo, Madeira and Ilas Desertas; **Canaries** – Tenerife, La Gomera, La Palma and Gran Canaria; **Cape Verde** – Sal, São Nicolau, Santa Luzia and São Vicente; **Windward Islands** – Dominica, Martinique, St Lucia, St Vincent, Bequia, Mustique, Mayreau, Union Island, Petit Rameau and Baradal (Tobago Cays), Petit St Vincent, Sandy Island, Carriacou and Grenada; **Leeward Islands** – Terre-de-Haut, Ilet à Cabrit, Basse Terre (Guadeloupe), Antigua, Barbuda, Nevis, Basse Terre (Saint Kitts), Saint Barts, Saint Martin, Anguilla (including Prickly Pear island); **BVIs** – Virgin Gorda, Tortola, Cooper Island, Salt Island, Peter Island, Norman Island, Jost Van Dyke, Anegada; **Bermuda**; **Azores** – Flores, Terceira, São Miguel; **UK** – Isle of Wight and mainland Great Britain

\*\* Ocean passages over 1000 NM: Gosport to Madeira (1345 NM, 9 days); Cape Verde to Martinique (2100 NM, 13 days); Bermuda to Azores (1659 NM, 12 days); Azores to Gosport (1400 NM, 12 days)



# Map of the Cruise

Key:

Ocean Passages

Cruises

Departure:  
Portsmouth 16 Jul 18

Arrival:  
Portsmouth 12 Jul 19







## Chapter One – The Search for Spellbinder

I have enjoyed sailing yachts since my twenties, and progressed over the years sailing on many different types and following the RYA syllabus up to RYA Yachtmaster (Ocean), culminating in being the mate on a Challenge 67 yacht on passage from Rio de Janeiro to Cape Town, calling in at Tristan da Cunha. I bought my first yacht in 2007, a Moody 33 Mk II called Kianga.

I sailed many thousands of miles in her as my family grew up. We ranged along the UK coast from Southwold in Suffolk to Scilly, and across the Channel we ranged from Ouistreham in Normandy to Piriac-sur-Mer in Southern Brittany, and many points in between. She was a wonderful, sturdy yacht which looked after us in challenging conditions. She gave us some excellent shared experiences but by 2016, with my sons aged 13 and 15, we had grown out of her size-wise and I reluctantly sold her. The search for a replacement began straight away although I did not let on! I knew I wanted a cruiser, rather than a racer, and wanted a larger yacht which would be capable of taking me across oceans while being small enough to cruise home and European waters. By March 2017 I had settled on a Hallberg Rassy 40, in large part for their build quality, seaworthiness and accommodation. There were few on the market but I eventually settled on Spellbinder, which was for sale through Transworld Yachts in Hamble Point.

Spellbinder had been bought new in 2006 by Henry Buchanan, who sailed her in the Baltic and undertook an Atlantic circuit before cruising the Mediterranean for a few years. A Royal Cruising Club member, he is the author of the Atlantic Spain and Portugal Pilot published by Imray under the auspices of the Royal Cruising Club Pilotage Foundation (RCCPF).



*The moment of purchase in June 2017 – with Spellbinder's previous owner, Henry Buchanan*



## Chapter Two – Spellbinder’s Refit 2017-2018

I started planning the re-fit back in June 2017. There were three main parts: hull blasting and Coppercoating, a series of improvements to Spellbinder's energy, navigation and communications systems, and bending on a new fully-battened mainsail and furling genoa from Jeckells.



*New Coppercoated Hull*

On the energy front, 6 new batteries were installed and supported by 4 separate solar panels, which can be increased to 5 when the bimini is up. On the sprayhood, a solar panel now zips in and connects to a plug inside the cockpit, in a recess by the shore power input. On the bimini, two zips were sewn in to allow for two panels. The final panel is a 90w one permanently mounted ahead of the mast. The total power of the solar panels is more than 300w, which was enough to run the yacht's systems for most of the time, particularly when used in conjunction with the towed generator on passage. Each panel has its own charging controller, to maximise output.



The domestic battery banks were replaced with 6 Rolls FS 250 6v batteries, giving a total of 750 amp hours (aH). This is a significant increase on the previous bank gave me more flexibility and endurance. The black battery at the front is the dedicated starter battery.



On the communications front, I installed an Icom M802 SSB and Red Box and Wi-fi Bat system. The former is designed to give Spellbinder long range radio voice and data communications. It consists of the radio itself, an AT 141 automatic tuner, and an SCS P4dragon DR-7400 Pactor modem.



The radio is mounted at the chart table - above is a picture of it tuned to Radio 4 (I dreamt of and did listen to the cricket and BBC World while crossing the Atlantic). The primary voice and data communications took place on HF. The modem allows the unit to be linked to a laptop and using specialist software by SailMail (Airmail 3) I was able to send and receive basic text emails from anywhere.

The unit is linked to a long antenna which runs up the backstay:



The final piece of communications equipment installed was a Red Box and Wi-fi Bat. The former is a router, which takes various inputs (satellite, WiFi, 3/4G etc) and fires the signal around the yacht. I used it for capturing Wi-Fi at distance - typically anchored off beaches etc, you can link into the WiFi provided by bars and hotels. To do this I now have a Wi-fi Bat long range antenna, which should capture the signals, and route them via the Red Box, all controlled by a laptop. Pictures of the two systems are shown below:



On the electronics front, Spellbinder now has a Raymarine Axiom 7 Multi Function Display (MFD) in a Scanstrut helm pod, connected to AIS B which emits the yacht's position, course and speed - a very useful safety feature. The MFD was of great use in close quarter navigation (pilotage) as the helm was able to see at a glance the surrounding cartography, other yachts transmitting on AIS B, and instrumentation data such as depth, speed, wind speed and direction and tidal set and drift.



The system is Bluetooth and WiFi compatible, allowing us to update its software from the internet and relay its information to iPods and iPhones on board through the Raymarine app.

To cope with tropical conditions, 6 Hella two speed fans were installed - one in the forepeak, saloon, nav station and galley and two in the aft cabin. These helped hugely with ventilation in tropical climates. We also fitted two new sails from Jeckells: a fully-battened, three slab reef mainsail and a new furling genoa. Finally, I purchased an electric outboard and dinghy, a second-hand 125m<sup>2</sup> Parasailor downwind sail, and had a Hydrovane self-steering system fitted.



## Chapter 3 – Gosport to Madeira

*Note to reader: the following chapters are taken directly and relatively unedited from the blog, and relate the voyage as it happened*

Spellbinder arrived safely in Porto Santo, Madeira at 2000 on Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> July, a journey of 9 days or 222 hours to be exact. We covered 1300 nautical miles at an average of just under 6 knots, a speed which reflects the relatively light winds experienced over the passage – the maximum recorded gust being 18 knots, but the average being more in the 7-12 knots range.

We spent the first 40 hours largely motoring into light westerlies to get out of the English Channel. We always knew that we were unlikely to have favourable winds for this part but were thankful that they were not too strong. Rounding Ouessant 40 hours later, we headed away from the French coast and off the continental shelf, finally getting a sailable wind and for most of the Biscay crossing we were under Parasailor, steered by Hydrovane. The Parasailor is particularly good on a dead run or very broad reach and gave us stability and assurance that if the wind had got up, it would have coped. Once on the level of La Coruna, we sought out the Portuguese current and sailed with both the Parasailor and, when the wind came forward sufficiently, the gennaker. Once off the latitude of Gibraltar, we had a period of calm and more motoring before a light NW reappeared, allowing us to reach into the Madeira archipelago under gennaker again.

Spellbinder served us well and I was particularly pleased with how her systems functioned on her first long passage in my ownership. The Hydrovane will be great on long passages, and functioned well downwind with the Parasailor, but we also used the autopilot quite a lot too, as it steered a straighter (and therefore faster) line in light airs. The solar panels and towed generator did a good job at topping up the batteries but I think running the engine for a couple of hours every 2 -3 days will be necessary to make water. The watermaker itself was excellent and allowed us the luxury of a shower a day, which was thoroughly appreciated. The SSB and Pactor modem allowed me to send regular emails and download met forecasts and GRIB files, although performance was best at night, as the propagation is better. Throughout we connected to the Belgium Sailmail station, at various frequencies. The further away, the higher the frequency generally. I don't pretend I fully understand it! Finally, of note, having a freezer gives you many more options on the food front; as does the large capacity for storage on Spellbinder, which had surprised me.

We settled down as a crew very well and adopted a watch system which effectively started at around 1800 with a drink and supper together. I tended to do the first watch at 2000-2200, writing and sending emails and getting weather information, and then we went into a 'two on, two off' régime with me doing the 'graveyard' shift between 0200-0400. This allowed me to come back on watch at 0800, by which time I had had enough sleep and took over the morning, allowing my two crew to sleep in – something 18-year olds are very happy to do! After lunch we kept the afternoon informal, as all three of us were generally around. Once away from the Channel and well offshore all shipping had AIS - Automatic Identification System, which shows up on chartplotters. We could see everything around for 30-40 miles or so, including closest point of approach and time to it (CPA and TCPA) which was very reassuring, as was the fact that we transmitted on AIS too.

We took it in turns to cook lunch and dinner (and clear up afterwards) every three days, with breakfast being a 'self-help' affair depending on the time it was taken! Highlights were Tiger's Spanish omelette and pancakes and Tom's pasta Bolognese. We also baked bread, which went down well and improved with experience. Every 3 days we cleaned the yacht, taking it in turns to do the heads, galley and saloon. In sum, I think 3 is an ideal number on long passages, although in poor weather it would have its drawbacks.

We saw plenty of wildlife – dolphins most days, lots of various sea birds, some amazing sea turtles (we sailed through a ‘field’ of them about 200 NM off Madeira but were so amazed we forgot to take a photo – we had initially mistaken them for human debris). Tom saw a whale early one morning. We tried fishing with a variety of trolling lures and Tom’s home-made ‘teaser’ but to no avail.

Other highlights were flying the drone in mid Biscay, which gave us some wonderful footage. Recovery drills need to be worked on though as we did have one crash landing and nearly lost it. Also, becalmed on the latitude of Gibraltar we threw a fender over the side and went swimming, leaving one on board, of course. Swimming in the deep, clear dark blue water was fantastic, and we used the deck shower to wash off. We donned a mask and checked under the hull, and generally enjoyed ourselves. With 4000 metres below us we were definitely in the deep end. We had watched the sea temperature rise from 18 degrees to 26 over the passage, along with the air temperature. Night watches needed no extra layer towards the end.

To occupy ourselves we read a lot, and Tom and Tiger set up a sort of gym to exercise most evenings on the foredeck. We did a few sun sights, but I feel that astro navigation requires me to spend a concerted time reminding myself. Lots of music was played through the Bluetooth speaker and I had to listen to a lot of what is called ‘London grime’. There was also a lot of ‘banter’ and I learned a few phrases of teenage vernacular which had hitherto blissfully escaped me.



*Spellbinder mid-Biscay – photo taken by drone*

In sum - it was great fun and hugely rewarding, and I feel well set for the adventures ahead. Thank you, Tom and Tiger, for being such excellent crew.



## Chapter 4 – The Madeira Group

On arrival at Porto Santo, after a proper 'run ashore' to discover the delights of its nightlife, the crew hired scooters and discovered the island. Dry in comparison with Madeira itself (20 NM to the SW), it has a long sandy beach (unlike Madeira) and a dry but quite interesting interior. A few decades back NATO came and built a long runway and other infrastructure, but the island has its own charm and the people at the marina were helpful and polite. We ran on the beach, shopped, ate well and swam. Before we left we bought paint and, with a bit of artistic input from Tiger, created our own wall mural in the tradition of passing sailors. We have enough paint left for Horta in the Azores, the other famous place where such harbour wall artistry is encouraged.



*Tiger and Tom on scooters, trying (and perhaps succeeding) in looking cool*



*Our mural on the visitors' pontoon, Porto Santo*

After a couple of days we headed down to Madeira - an uneventful passage in light winds again, although we did managed to catch a seagull in our fishing line, although it escaped unhurt. We were ushered into the main port-cum-marina in Funchal, and given a temporary berth right at the far end of it, amongst the tourists and ideally placed to explore the city. After another 'run ashore' Tiger left for the airport, the rest of the family flew in, we hired a car and then had a more traditional holiday, involving walking along the *levadas* (water ducts which follow contours around the hills), sightseeing and generally relaxing. It's a wonderful island, with hugely varying geography and micro-climates, fascinating geology, great food and relaxed people. We enjoyed ourselves hugely. We also sailed one day to the Ilhas Desertas - 20 NM to the ENE - a marine reserve with one very controlled anchorage for which you need a permit. We had a boisterous reach in the Portuguese trade winds but on arrival found it a delightful spot to spend a couple of hours. We didn't see any Mediterranean Monk Seals (an endangered species - the islands shelter a small remaining colony) but did pump up the dinghy, visit the wardens and go for a short stroll and swim in waters teeming with fish.

Madeira was delightful, and we walked, ate and drank Madeira wine aplenty. We spent a further seven days in a marina adjacent to the main port ably looked after by Rafael Costa, before heading up to Qunita do Lorda, a little marina resort in the east of the island, where Spellbinder resides, awaiting her future passage south. Below are a few pictures of our time in this wonderful island, to which I look forward to returning shortly.



*Beautiful sub-tropical gardens above Funchal*



*A typical Levada walk*



*Climbing up near Madeira's highest peak, which we reached as part of a quite physical 6 hour trek - despite the easy paths!*



*Anchorage below the cliffs in Ilhas Desertas*



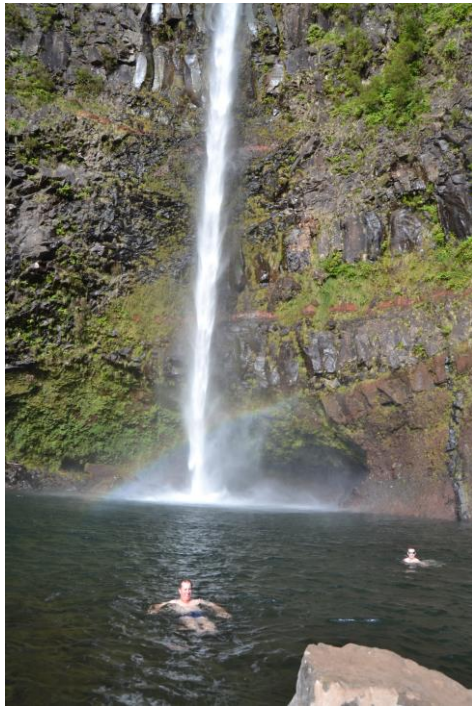
*Clouds rolling in over vertiginous valleys*



*Plenty for the student of geography...*



*Street art in downtown Funchal*



*Swimming by remote waterfalls*



*Rafael, who looked after us well in Funchal*



*Quinta Do Lorde, Spellbinder's berth in September 2018*



## Chapter 5 – Madeira to The Canaries

As the date approached for flying back to Spellbinder, I began to take an active interest in the weather, as one does. Expecting to be greeted by the usual north-easterly trades, I was surprised to find a tropical depression turning into a hurricane predicted to pass across Madeira, bringing some very strong winds and sea state. Hurricane Leslie was inbound! We had a decision to make: either go early, and risk motoring to get south and to the Canaries, or wait it out and enjoy a roller coaster downwind ride once it had passed. Given that the marinas on the south coast of Madeira have had problems and suffered damage in the past, I decided after a brief consultation with my crew that the former option was preferable, and having arrived by taxi at about 1815, by 1900 we were slipping lines. My crew were Neil and Paul - the 'Northern Contingent' - both of whom had sailed with me earlier this year as I was trialling Spellbinder. Neil had spent the previous few days aboard with his wife enjoying Madeira and had kindly got the yacht ready for sea.



*Leaving Madeira*

We headed out into a westerly Force 4 and had a nice sail through the night, passing the Ilhas Desertas to port and heading out into a light swell. By dawn the wind had died and we motored for 24 hours, ever grateful of the nautical miles we were putting to the south. There was a lovely 2 metre swell which evidently came from the hurricane area, but it was on our quarter and helped us along. The wind came back to help us the following morning, so we gave the Yanmar a rest and sailed for a few hours as Tenerife approached. You can see the big Volcano Pico de Teide (3717m) a long way off - it reminded me of closing in on Tristan da Cunha a few years ago during an east-bound Atlantic crossing.



*The impressive volcano Pico de Teide (3717m) viewed 30 NM out*

As we were taking in the view the fishing reel whirled - for the first time in many hours of trying! On Spellbinder the rule is that the crew who gets to the rod first gets to reel the fish in - or lose it. This time it was Paul - and although we didn't know it was a fish until it was 15m from the yacht, it did indeed transpire to be a beautiful dorado (also known as mahi-mahi or common dolphinfish).



*Paul doing his best to imitate Ernest Hemingway*

We got it on board ok using a small gaff I'd bought and dispatched it.



*I didn't actually catch it but it's my yacht and my fishing rod!*





*The lucky squid lure*



*Within a few minutes Neil had done an excellent job of filleting the dorado.*



*Sharp work - enough for 3 fillets for a fresh meal, three in the freezer for later. Fresh fish is a delight on passage, and this was the first time we have been lucky to catch a pelagic fish on board Spellbinder.*

After the dorado excitement we headed down the east coast of Tenerife, heading into Santa Cruz Darsena Pesquera to refuel, as we were a bit short (I wasn't sure, but with the reserve tank empty, and the working tank on the edge of the red line, in fact we had 50l left).



*Rickety Spanish pontoons. Spellbinder 378 litres of diesel better off.*

After re-fuelling, we headed further down the east coast of Tenerife towards our destination, San Miguel marina on the south-east corner of the island. The waters seem to be teeming with wildlife, and in addition to dolphins we saw a small group of pilot whales nearby:



It was dark by the time we arrived on San Miguel marina, but we were met and rafted alongside another British boat. A night in town ensued, to celebrate the end of an enjoyable passage, Neil's birthday, and the fact now that Spellbinder is down here at 28 degrees North, the easiest way back to the UK is via the trade winds and the Caribbean...

## Chapter 6 – The Western Canaries

Having arrived safely in Tenerife, my crew were keen to take advantage of our earlier than expected departure from Madeira, and we spent the next day heading over to San Sebastián in La Gomera for a night, before returning to Tenerife the next day. This gave me a taste of what was to come, as I had planned 3 separate cruises to explore the Canaries over the coming weeks. The first was with my good friends Neil and Clare and their daughter and son Molly and Harvey. They are great sailors and having picked them up from the airport we planned a 4 day cruise taking in parts of Tenerife and the neighbouring islands of La Gomera and La Palma.

Sailing in the Canaries is not necessarily straightforward: there are wind shadows, acceleration zones and an omnipresent ocean swell to look out for. Good anchorages are not plentiful and marinas tend to be full at this time of the year. However, it has its rewards: generally good weather, lots of wildlife and some great winds. We had all of these in our four days.

First stop with the new crew was La Gomera, as the winds looked fair for it. We did get a good sail at times, and decided to anchor in Playa de la Guancha, just to the south west of San Sebastián, to go for a swim. Clare swam ashore and I checked under the yacht to see the state of the anodes and how much fouling the hull had accumulated. Fortunately the former were still in good condition and the hull, thanks to its Coppercoat, had just a layer of easily-removable slime. While I was doing this a friendly German, who had anchored overnight and looked very self-sufficient, offered us a barracuda he had caught - willingly accepted in return for some chocolate cake we had on board.



*Soon filleted and into the freezer...*

After such excitement, and a bit of rain, it was time to head into San Sebastián. The entrance could easily be in Africa or the Middle East:



The place is perhaps best known for Christopher Columbus who had a mistress here and also used it as a jumping-off point from what was then pretty much the limit of the known world. It is a very Canarian town, a far cry from the tourist areas on south west Tenerife towards which it looks over 25 miles of water. Once settled into the marina (Spanish bureaucracy takes a while, and everywhere you go ship's documents, insurance and passports must be produced) we strolled the streets, climbed the ramparts and had an apéritif while watching the world go by.



*Frescoes, a bit of dilapidation and a sense of permanent fiesta*

After dinner on board we planned our sail further north, to the island of La Palma and its capital Santa de la Cruz. Having got up relatively early, we headed off and in the harbour encountered a turtle which was partially wrapped in a fishing net. We couldn't help it but hope it managed to disentangle itself.

Once clear of the shadow of La Gomera, the south westerly wind made its appearance and we had some champagne sailing under furling gennaker, arriving after a great day on the water into a spanking new marina.



*Champagne sailing, with the bimini up to provide shade*

We had time for a delightful stroll through the streets of this lovely town which again seemed utterly unspoilt by tourism. We ate out deliciously in a great restaurant on the seafront - *tapas*, fresh fish and *paella* washed down with some really quite acceptable wine from the island. Whether such wine will travel remains to be seen!

The following morning we were greeted by a fabulous double rainbow over the marina.



Our destination for the day was back to Tenerife, this time to Los Gigantes, a town built into pretty sheer cliffs which provide a fabulous backdrop. We motored to start with and were shown an impressive - albeit short - dolphin display as we left La Palma. The wind soon got up though, and having been dozing I was woken by the crew to 28 knots on the wind gauge. Three reefs were rapidly put in both sails and we had a great close reach south east, progressively shaking the reefs out during the day until we returned to the shadow of La Gomera again and it was time to motor. Heading towards Tenerife you can often use a volcano to tell the helm where to steer...



*At 3718m, El Teide dominates, when not in cloud*

Los Gigantes is a truly magnificent place for a marina. While it is not really set up for cruising yachts, we had reserved and were shown to a stern-to berth with lazy-lines. This was a first for me in Spellbinder and I am pleased to report that the manoeuvre in backwards was executed with apparent ease!



*Berthed stern-to in Los Gigantes, with the stunning cliffs providing a great backdrop.*

After a pleasant night on board, we motored out in the morning to anchor under the cliffs just off Playa De Masca, where we practiced our swimming / snorkelling / scrubbing the hull routines. It was a great spot for a few hours.



*Great cliffs at Los Gigantes - 800m vertical in places*

After lunch we headed off back to San Miguel, but en route had in mind that the stretch of water between Tenerife and La Gomera is known for its cetaceans. We weren't disappointed, and while there was not much sailing to be had we had some very close experiences with some pilot whales, as the two photos below show:



## Chapter 7 – Tenerife



It's not all about sailing, and this week, being half term, I was joined by family for some walking and sightseeing around Tenerife.

It is a fantastic island to walk and explore; one just needs to avoid the tourist centres and venture inland to find Canarian culture and fine mountains, and along the coast to find secluded spots to swim and snorkel. These activities have occupied the last few days.

With El Tiede and the adjacent peaks dominating the island, a rain shadow is formed and the geography of the south - which is almost desert-like - is in stark contrast to the sometimes lush, and very green north side which takes the trade winds and their moisture on the nose. The temperature contrast is also very palpable: routinely 26 or 27 degrees in the day at this time of the year on the south coast where we are

berthed, and single figures above 2000 metres. Canarian lifestyles are therefore hugely influenced by altitude and which side of the island one lives on.

We trekked through volcanic debris and ancient lava flows, through pine forests where the trees seem to thrive in the mineral-rich sediment, and into deep ravines where cacti flourish and water management is key to agriculture. We tasted local food, enjoying *tapas* and *paella* particularly, and swam and snorkelled. It has been a great few days. I will let the photos and captions below do the talking.



*Cacti in abundance, ready to prick the unwary walker. A deep ravine, as in the photo above, is called a 'baranco'*



*Water transport in the days before the pipe. To the right, an 'era', a stone circular platform around which horses were drawn to thresh out grain*



*Walking around in the national park at the base of El Tiede. Much evidence of phonolytic viscous obsidian and pahoehoe basaltic lava, and skeletons of magmatic dykes - honestly!*







*Firs seem to flourish beside the old lava flows - the lava here dates from a 1909 eruption*



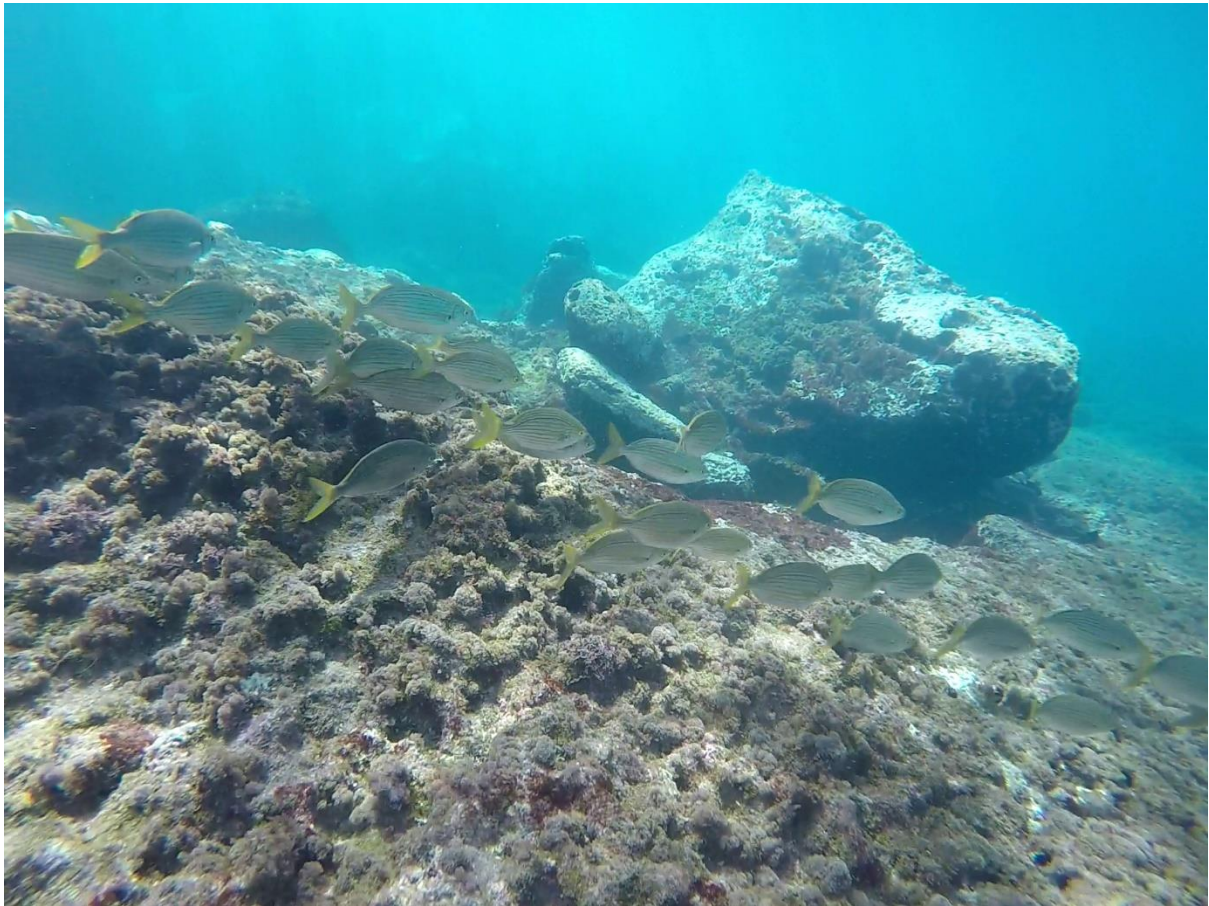
*A chaotically mangled landscape*



*Good walking around a lower volcano - this one is called 'Chinyero'*



*A Dragon Tree ('Dracaena Draco') - one of our favourites, and the natural symbol of Tenerife. They are native to the Canaries, Cape Verde, Madeira and Morocco. This one was in La Orotava, a lovely town on the north side of the island boasting fine wooden balconies in the historic centre*



*Snorkelling with the GoPro*

## Chapter 8 – Gran Canaria

Spellbinder has spent the last few days cruising Gran Canaria, the fourth of the Canary Islands which she has visited in my tenure. I know she has been here before because the previous owner's details still reside on some of the marina computers from over 10 years ago! I was joined by my friend Anthony, and together we left Tenerife for the 7 hour passage across.



*Leaving southern Tenerife in a light easterly - El Teide present as ever*

The passage across was a typical one for around here - winds bending around the islands, creating both wind shadows and acceleration zones. A grizzled French sailor told me the other day that everyone who lives here habitually goes out with one reef in their mainsail, as they will be sure to use it! It was certainly the case for our crossing: sailing in a light easterly, motor sailing to make some northing, motoring in a calm, 2 reefs in the main when entering the acceleration zone near the coast of Gran Canaria, then motoring again as we hit the lee of the headland where our destination was...all in a day's 50 nautical mile sail.

Our destination was Puerto Mogan. What used to be a small coastal village became a 1980s / 90s purpose-built development but done for once in rather tasteful style. Known as 'Little Venice', it is full of bougainvillea-strewn balconies, little canals and restaurants and bars surrounding the marina, echoing the likes of Honfleur and Saint Tropez. It has a few visitors' berths and I was lucky to get one, as this is very much the high season with lots of yachts arriving here to head across the Atlantic, via Cape Verde or direct. They were very accommodating and we were shown to a stern-to berth, and after I had completed arrival formalities we went for a stroll and enjoyed a fine meal in an Italian restaurant. The following morning we explored some more and soaked up the sights. It is the nicest marina I have been in for a while.

On leaving Puerto Mogan we had a quiet day anchoring in a couple of the bays around - the weather was sufficiently calm, and we managed some good snorkelling and, as ever, the brush came out to scrub the hull briefly. We anchored in the afternoon in Playa de Tauro - a fine yellow-sanded beach, with crystal clear waters which allowed me to verify the integrity of the hull and prop anodes and to brush away a few bits of slime which I had missed the previous week. Hull cleanliness equals better speed and time gained on long voyages...

Our destination for the night was Puerto Rico - not as pleasant as Mogan but functional enough. We moored stern-to in what is now habitual style, and wandered into town and ate well.





*Cacti at Puerto Rico*

### *View of Puerto Rico*

The following morning we had a good sail back to Tenerife - the best sailing Spellbinder has had for a few weeks, beam reaching doing 7 or 8 knots over the ground in 20 knots of wind in a fair swell across to the lee of the island, when the motor went back on.



It was a fun three days, with my friend Anthony proving his expertise in the preparation of gin and tonics, tea and coffee, and confirming his status as formal *chai wallah* to Spellbinder. At this he is rather better than in mastering the art of the clove hitch! But thank you for coming out to Tenerife Anthony, and see you on board again soon.



*Fêtant la fin du voyage*

*Leaving Puerto Rico, heading for Tenerife before hitting the winds. A volcano to aim for...*

## Chapter 9 – Preparing for Cape Verde

After a short break back in UK to catch up with family and the real world (I do hate November weather in UK though, and all my prejudices about it being too cold and wet were dutifully reinforced), I have spent the last few days gathering crew and preparing for what should be a 5 day trip downwind to Cape Verde. We depart tomorrow, Monday 12th November, for Sal - the most north-eastern island of the archipelago.

My good friend Crispin arrived on Friday evening and on Saturday we sailed over to Gran Canaria and Puerto Mogan to pick up Simon, who had been cycling on the island. Our trip across was quite fruity - a maximum of 24 knots true, but we were hard on the wind and swell for the best part of 5 hours before it stopped completely as we reached the lee of Gran Canaria. The camera does tend to lie when you take photos of fairly boisterous conditions (the seas flatten somehow) and the photo below doesn't fully convey what we ploughed through, let alone the water we shipped - but at least the sun was out!



Once in the calm we anchored in a small bay in what proved to be terminal moraine - not the best surface for an anchor - but enough for us to have a quick snorkel and see some fish, before heading into Puerto Mogan, where I had been a few days before. It is truly a lovely spot, albeit an artificially contrived one:





*Spellbinder's berth  
for the night in  
Puerto Mogan*

There we met Simon, had a cup of tea (as we are British and it was time) and went out for a lovely meal.

In the morning I showed Simon around Spellbinder and we slipped and re-fueled - for the last time before reaching the Caribbean, I hope. Our trip back to

Tenerife was in contrast to the previous day's thrashing; once we eventually found the true wind, we were able to broad reach for most of the way, a lot of it under furling gennaker. Great sailing, with dolphins to boot (and a sailing blog can never have enough photos of dolphins...)!







*Champagne conditions being enjoyed by Crispin and Simon...and our friends at the bow.*



On arrival back at San Miguel marina we berthed, and spent an hour preparing Spellbinder for her next long passage. I went up the mast to check the rigging, we fitted the Hydrovane rudder and bimini solar panels, and readied the towed generator. Tonight I am meeting Charles at the airport, having handed back the hire car I have had for the last month or so (at £12 a day). The forecast looks fairly benign, and we look forward to a 5 day trip downwind, and down-swell to Sal in Cape Verde. I will report back, all going well, when we arrive.



*Checking all's well aloft...*

## Chapter 10 – Passage to Cape Verde

Spellbinder has arrived safely in Palmeira, Sal, Cape Verde after 5 and a half days at sea, having left Tenerife on Mon 12th November. We had a good passage, with a bit of adventure and many new experiences.

We left Tenerife having checked out with immigration and found a nice beam wind to clear the immediate island. A few miles off, however, the seas were confused with swell and winds crossing providing a bumpy few hours. The wind was consistently behind us though, and we experimented with various sail sets as we tried to make progress. The first night we goose-winged, with consequent rolling keeping us all awake, and self-stowing all my gear! The next day we pulled out the Parasailor and gave it a really good run. It is an excellent sail, and I tend to fly it without pole or mainsail with two guys and two sheets, with one of each taking up the tension on each side.

The sail allowed us to sail virtually dead downwind and has the added advantage of lifting the bow which limits rolling. We sailed fast and straight with it, and it is remarkably stable in anything above 8 or 9 knots of true wind. The difficulty comes when it needs to be taken down, and we got caught out in a squall on the second night at around 2am. All hands on deck as the wind speed reached 26 knots - the limit being 20, really. Thanks to the determined efforts of Simon and Crispin, and a little help from the anchor windlass, we got it down but not without a 2-metre tear at the bottom. I think I shall be much more reticent flying it at night, when the squalls come; dead downwind with it during the day, but bear away if necessary and broad reach with white sails during the night, I think.

The middle period of the voyage was taken over by running repairs - to the Parasailor (excellent job with tape and the Singer sewing machine - thank you Charles for introducing me to the concept of thread tension), to chafe on the bimini (Singer again, I'm getting good at it), to a solar panel, a dive down to clear a broken sheet attached to a joint in the rudder (thanks Charles - always handy to have a free diver on board) and various modifications to our arrangements of sheets and guys as we learned what was best. It is certainly the most prolonged period of dead downwind sailing I have done and will be really useful experience for the Atlantic.

As we progressed south the temperature increased and the wind died away, leaving us to motorsail or motor the final 36 hours. Highlights were toasting our arrival in the Tropics; almost catching a large dorado but landing a smaller one; getting up to finding a dozen flying fish on deck, and frying them for breakfast, and seeing a whale spout. We settled into a good routine and ate and drank well.

We made a careful night entry by moonlight into Palmeira and anchored outside the two dozen yachts which are here. In the morning the swell had got up and we were a bit too close to the beach; luckily with a bit of help from a local we were able to weigh anchor and take up a buoy away from the swell, more in the centre of the harbour. The surf is amazing in what are 4 metre swells caused by strong weather north of the Canaries. Two hours at immigration followed (we are in Africa, after all...) and a trip to the airport to bid farewell to Charles, who somehow will contrive to be on some Army ranges in west Wales tomorrow morning! Crispin departs tonight and Simon and I will head west to explore the neighbouring islands over the next few days, before aiming for Mindelo, Sao Vicente for Thursday and a final crew change prior to the Atlantic crossing.

Here are the photos which try to tell the tale of our trip down here:



*Leaving Tenerife - Charles (L) and Simon (R)*



*We baked bread most days and made yoghurt. Crispin's loaf (shown) and Simon's rolls won the Great Spellbinder Bake-Off*

*The skipper disproportionately happy with his new 12-volt rechargeable coffee grinder*



*Tropical Atlantic rainbow. The weather was cooler and cloudier than I had expected*



*The Parasailor doing its stuff*



*Running repairs to the aforementioned Parasailor. Thank you Charles for actually reading the manual and alerting me to the importance of Fred Tension...*



*The big one that just got away - a beautiful, probably male dorado with amazing rainbow colours...*

*...and the one that didn't. A smaller female we think*



*Celebrating our arrival in the Tropic of Cancer. 6pm sun downers became a regular part of our routine as we reflected on the voyage so far*



*The morning haul of flying fish - fried in olive oil, they made a delicious breakfast*



*As we neared Cape Verde, we saw squadrons of these fish flying around*



*Sal sighted. We had a cautious arrival, as the buoyage lights don't always work and there have been many recent changes*



*Palmeira harbour. Spellbinder is the only yacht with a burgee, now that there aren't any British yachts present! There is considerable surf in the background*





*Tuna market on the quayside - gory!*



*The editor at work*



## Chapter 11 – Cape Verde Islands

Having said farewell to Crispin and Charles, Simon and I headed off from Palmeira, Sal on Monday 19th November to explore some of the northern (windward) Cape Verde islands.

There was considerable swell as we motored in light winds away from Sal heading south south-west towards Sao Nicolau. The interval between the waves was quite long – perhaps 150m – but the waves themselves were 4-5 metres from peak to trough. Caused by heavy weather to the north and west (we were amazed to see the BBC footage from Tenerife of hotel balconies being wiped away by the waves) it was mesmeric to motor though, and not at all unpleasant.

It was a 45 nautical mile passage and we threw out the fishing line as is our habit – more out of hope than expectation. We were richly rewarded, however, hooking two excellent and quite large dorado. No sooner had Simon landed the first and filleted it, I had the second on the line.



*Simon's dorado. They are beautiful fish, but lose their beautiful blue, rainbow-like sheen the moment they come out of the water*



*I'm sure mine was bigger...*



*Dorado are easy to filet, and we when cut up we ended up with 24 large steaks in the freezer, which my Atlantic crew will enjoy. The meat is absolutely delicious*

By the time we arrived at Sao Nicolau it was dark, and we anchored under some cliffs opposite a little village called Caracas. After a quiet night we took the dinghy over to the village for an explore. It's quite remote, and accessible only by dirt track, so coming in by sea was the best way. We met a few of the villagers who were plying their fishing boats,

using nets, spears and sticks with hooks to trap, shoot and winkle out the plentiful sea life around. They were indifferently friendly, and we felt at ease despite the evident disparity of wealth and lifestyles. We made sure we made a purchase at the small shop.



*Dinghy landing at Caracas*





*Not a friendly dog*



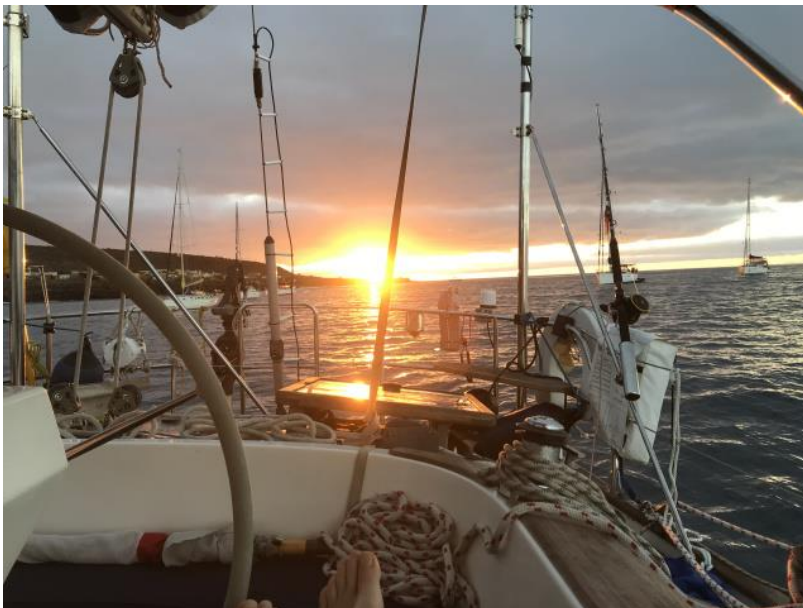
*Tarrafal harbour, with Spellbinder at anchor in the background*

After strolling around the village for an hour or so, we went back to the yacht and headed further round the island to a big wide bay and port called Tarrafal, where we based ourselves for a couple of days to explore the island. Having anchored, we explored the town (the second biggest on Sao Nicolau) and arranged for a guided tour the next day. Again, we found the people friendly and nonthreatening, and enjoyed meeting the boys who surround any arriving dinghy on the beach, eager to be paid a coin or two for the dubious service of watching over your dinghy. Those that could say 'God save the Queen' clearly were rewarded the most!



*Bizarrely, we came across a wrecked Moody undergoing Cape Verdean renovation!*

The next day began, as so many others, with a cup of tea in the cockpit watching the sun come up about 7am. It's not too hot during the day, but adapting an 'early to bed, early to rise' routine makes the most of the daylight and the cooler hours.



*Another dawn cup of tea, well before colours...*

We met our guide Aqualino at the café by the fish market and spent a day with him exploring the island. It was magnificent. We first climbed the highest peak (Monte Gordo) – albeit with a major head start by 4x4 – and looked down at the anchorage far below, admiring the greenness of the 'wet' side of the island and the coolness brought about by the altitude.



*View from the summit of Monte Gordo (1312m) with Tarrafal far below.*

We spent the rest of the day touring the island, including the capital Ribeira Brava, which is nestled in the hills – established there both because of the water source and also to give some distance and warning from invading pirates in decades past. We saw wonderful scenery, fine seascapes and learned much from our witty guide who loved to flirt with all the women he came across – in true guide fashion, he seemed to know everyone, and claimed to be the the only Aqualino in Sao Nicolau. We ate in a local restaurant next door to the chief of police (a character straight out of *Starsky and Hutch*), visited our guide's house (which he is trying to turn into a guest house by the sea), and met his Brazilian neighbour. At the end of the day, over dinner, we reflected that the modest sum we had paid him had been well spent, as we had captured the taste of the island, and begun to scratch under its surface.







*Portuguese canon*





*Our guide showing us his house by the beach...*



*...and his extensive garden, including pineapples and yams grown in unorthodox pots*



The next day we left Sao Nicolau early, heading over to a little island called Ilha de Luzia. It is a nature reserve (turtles come ashore in late summer and lay their eggs) – a barren uninhabited island with hills and a beautiful long white beach.



*Ilha de Luzia*

We snorkelled off a rock and went ashore to fly the drone and to enjoy the wildness of it all. By mid-afternoon the wind had got up, and we enjoyed a breezy sail into Mindelo, one of the great ports of the eastern Atlantic. It is the only marina in Cape Verde and we were allocated a good berth from which to prepare for the Atlantic crossing. The place is busy, with dozens of European yachts and their crews and a couple of rallies about to head west, including the second ARC + which ends up in the Grenadines. I'm glad I'm an independent though, and have appreciated the flexibility it has given me.

We loved what we saw of Cape Verde, and it has made me glad that I took the time to explore some of it. It has made me want to come back and spent more time here – next time we'll head to the southern (leeward) chain and see what they are like. Cape Verde is ruggedly beautiful, and the people friendly and on the up. The walking is amazing. I sensed positive vibes from it, and while you are clearly in Africa not Europe – the poverty is evident – the place is modernising and heading the right way, with little sign of undue western interference of vulgar development.

As I write this Simon has headed home and my Atlantic crew – Alan and Neil – are about to arrive at Mindelo airport. We have a couple of days to prepare Spellbinder. The next blog, I hope, will tell the story of the crossing.



## Chapter 12 – Atlantic Crossing East to West

Spellbinder and her crew arrived safely in Le Marin, Martinique at 1750 on Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> December after a 13-day and 6-hour, 2100 nautical mile passage from Mindelo, Sao Vicente, Cape Verde. It has been a fantastic experience – challenging at times, but we all now have a real sense of achievement.

We enjoyed Mindelo and the taste of Africa it gave us. Provisioning was a bit of a challenge and we bought a lot of fresh fruit and vegetables from the local markets, washing it all in Milton sterilising fluid to kill off cockroach eggs and any other unwanted infestations (so far so good). The marina was quite well set up and we enjoyed meeting some of the ARC + crews, although were glad we had chosen to be independent, most of all in terms of flexibility in our departure time. I am also very independently spirited! We ate well in the local restaurants as well as on the marina floating pontoon. As it was, we left a few hours after the ARC + fleet, having re-fuelled and having persuaded a testy immigration official to give me my ship's documents back. Charm, extreme courtesy, a modicum of humour dosed with feigned obsequiousness worked in the end.



*Views of Mindelo*



*The floating pontoon, Mindelo marina*



*Spellbinder's berth at Mindelo*



*Fresh fruit and vegetables, washed in anti-cockroach egg Milton sterilising fluid*



*The crew before departure – from left to right Alan, Neil and me. Alan arrived in the Caribbean considerably more facially hirsute!*



*Leaving Mindelo behind*



We were blessed with reasonably good conditions throughout most of the passage. After a blustery departure through the wind acceleration zone between Sao Vicente and Santo Antão (which saw gusts well into the 30-knot bracket) we settled into what were well-established Trade Winds which varied between 12 to 25 knots, with the average being in the 17-22 knot bracket. The swell at times was significant – 3-4 metres at times although the average was 2 to 3 – but it was largely behind us and although we occasionally fell off a big wave and corkscrewed, for the most part it was an easy motion. We had sun every day with varying amounts of cloud, and the odd light shower, particularly at night. We overtook some of the ARC+ yachts in the early stages but quickly lost track of them.

We goose-winged on starboard tack most of the way, finding it a bit too gusty for the Parasailor until the latest stages of the trip, when it came into its own in lighter airs for a day before being caught out in a squall, necessitating a swift taking down and a future trip to the sailmakers. For the most part we had a reef in the main and genoa, and used the Raymarine Autohelm to steer us in windvane mode (ie keeping a specified angle to the wind) as it kept a straighter line and coped better heading straight downwind. We varied its level of responsiveness until we found the right balance, and although we paid a price in terms of battery drain it served us very well. The Trade Winds served us well until the penultimate day, when they dropped to below 10 knots and we reluctantly had to motor for a few hours.



*Fairly typical Atlantic rollers coming up behind us. We got used to them and enjoyed the surge they gave Spellbinder every few seconds*





*We saw  
many  
sunrises  
astern...*



*...and many  
sunsets  
ahead. No green  
flashes  
though. On the  
horizon, one of the  
few other yachts  
we encountered*

We settled into a good routine as a crew and took it in turns to cook lunch and dinner, breakfast being a DIY affair according to individuals' wake up times. We had an informal watch system during the day, with someone always in the cockpit, but at night formalised a '2 on – 4 off' regime with me putting the boat to bed (2000-2200, during which time I used the SSB (HF radio) to write and receive emails, and get GRIB weather files), doing a middle of the night watch (0200-0400) and waking her up (0800). I made sure I did a dawn and dusk 'patrol' of the fore deck to look out for chafe and anything untoward, as well as to pick up the self-sacrificing flying fish which greeted me most mornings! Alan and Neil filled in the watches between, swapping around halfway through the passage. Every three days we cleaned the yacht, and every 15 degrees traveled west we put the clocks back by an hour.

We ate really well, benefiting from my shopping in Tenerife and the freezer – and we all baked bread and Neil cakes and scones, and magnificent Yorkshire puddings! We ensured we had a drink and nibbles (soft or beer) before lunch and ‘sun downers’ to review the day and look forward to the next. Every 500 miles the gin and tonics came out to make another quarter of the passage completed.



*Celebrating another 500 miles sailed*



*Some fine baking took place – here, bread and scones courtesy of Neil*



*A dawn patrol's typical flying fish haul*

As expected, we spent a fair amount of time mending things. Early on my Aquagen (water electricity generator) lost its towed propeller due either to metal fatigue or just towing something it couldn't handle – we obviously imagine it was a huge blue marlin! We couldn't fix this so were obliged to run the engine daily for 2-3 hours to service our electricity needs, which mainly went into refrigeration and autopilot. We also managed to bend the spinnaker pole slightly by tensioning the downhaul too tight, but not to the extent that it impaired performance. We had a heads blockage caused by, of all things, a curtain clip falling into the bowl and occupying a key bend in the pipework (note to self – always keep the bowl shut). I now understand my heads pipework much better! Our main VHF died owing to a blown fuse and me not quite having the right one to replace it (another note to self...) but otherwise it was a case of minor repairs. I have decided that you can never have enough epoxy glue on board...



*Pumping out the bilges*



*Trade Wind rig*

Sadly we didn't see much in terms of wildlife – some distant pilot whale fins but no dolphins or whales. We saw three types of bird in mid-Atlantic – petrels (supremely agile wave hoppers); shearwaters; and my favourite of all tropic birds, with long white tails. Other signs of life were few and far between – the odd yacht with whom we talked on VHF (including a French retired navy gang, and a somewhat ascetic German single-hander called Peter, who was struggling to make 4 knots (complaining about barnacles on his hull) and relied on catching tuna. I also spoke to a Dutch training tall ship called AMSTERDAM – when I talked to the watch officer I discovered he was from Shetland! When you are just a small dot with a horizon of a few miles in the midst of a huge ocean, it is not surprising that you see little evidence of other human life. We saw other AIS 'contacts' on the chartplotter but they rarely came into sight.

It was a great pleasure making landfall in Martinique, and we cracked open a bottle of champagne once moored up. We are certainly in the Caribbean, but also clearly in France – I had *magret de canard* washed down with a bottle of *Graves* last night to celebrate our arrival. We are now in recovery mode, having a day to ourselves before attacking various boat maintenance jobs on Monday. 13 days at an average of 500 steps (according to my watch) means we all need some exercise too! We plan to spend a few days from Tuesday cruising Martinique's west coast before coming home to UK for Christmas. The temperature change will be a shock...



*Arrival in Cul de Sac de Marin*



*There are advantages to arriving in France. The real Caribbean can wait...*

DAILY DISTANCES 14:00 <sup>WAT</sup>  
15:50 <sup>CV TIME</sup>  
16:50 <sup>WAT</sup>

START	LOG	DIST	GPS TO WP	DIST
SUN 25 NOV	26435	—	2088	—
MON 26 NOV	26583	148 (6.2)	1907	181 (7.5)
TUE 27 NOV	26728	145 (6.0)	1745	162 (6.7)
WED 28 NOV	26861	133 (5.5)	1595	150 (6.2)
THU 29 NOV	27016	155 (6.5)	1427	168 (7)
FRI 30 NOV	27161	145 (6.0)	1270	157 (6.5)
SAT 1 DEC	27303	142 (5.9)	1112	158 (6.5)
SUN 2 DEC	27441	138 (5.7)	959	153 (6.4)
MON 3 DEC	27593	152 (6.3)	790	169 (7.0)
TUE 4 DEC	27752	159 (6.6)	622	168 (7.0)
WED 5 DEC	27889	137 (5.7)	478	144 (6.0)
THU 6 DEC	28038	149 (6.2)	319	157 (6.6)
FRI 7 DEC	28174	136 (5.7)	174	145 (6.0)
SAT 8 DEC	28316	132 (5.7)	16	158 (6.6)
SUN 9 DEC				

Daily distances through the water (left column) and over the ground (right). We averaged over 150 NM over the ground, at about 6.5 knots

So, a long-held ambition to sail my own yacht across the Atlantic has been fulfilled for me, and I am delighted. I could not have done so easily without my excellent team – Alan and Neil were just what you need in terms of easy-going, resilient, flexible, reliable and resourceful crew. Thank you to both; it was a great adventure. The Atlantic circuit is now halfway complete.

## Chapter 13 – Martinique Before Christmas

It took us a couple of days to recover from the Atlantic crossing – a day just for ourselves, and a day for Spellbinder. The latter included trips to a sailmaker, rigger and metal workshop to get various repairs in train, and a couple of inevitable trips to the chandlers to stock up on bits and pieces. Thank you to my crew, Alan and Neil, for their help and forbearance in turning Spellbinder around. By Tuesday 12th Dec we were on our way, aiming to explore Martinique's west coast.

It didn't disappoint. The mix of French first world investment and Caribbean culture is an enticing one: you feel as if you are in the Tropics, but enveloped in a comfort blanket of western European standards. I was even able to pick up a prescription from a French doctor in Besançon by producing my *carte vitale* (French social security card) – in seconds, the computer systems linking instantaneously to the homeland...



*HMS Diamond Rock, that was*

First stop was to Saint Pierre at the top of the island, passing by Ile de Diamant, once captured and commissioned by the British as 'HMS Diamond Rock' as it occupies a strategic position in the St Lucia strait. The French and British contested the Caribbean for a long time, and while the French eventually won out in Martinique there were periods of British occupation.

Saint Pierre was known as the Paris of the West Indies until the local volcano destroyed all around (28,000 souls) in 1902, despite giving everyone plenty of notice of its intent. Thousands died, and among the single digit survivors was a prisoner in his cell, who had a rather better day. Today it is a small beach-side town which is more Caribbean than French in character, and we enjoyed the long beach and snorkelling over some sunken statues. It was an ideal first stop, and Alan and I walked up to a statue of the Virgin Mary which dominated the bay to take some exercise and fly the drone.



*View of Saint Pierre beach with the volcano sleeping peacefully*



*The same view as seen by the drone...*



*...which we also flew round us.*





*Nice anchorage too, and scene of the first 'planteur', my rum-based sundowner of choice*

We enjoyed Saint Pierre but the next day we had an appointment to keep with the commander of the French naval base, who had very kindly offered to show us around Fort Louis (formerly Fort Edward – see comment about shared history above). Damien and his colleague Yvan (who had single handed across the Atlantic to arrive in his posting – *chapeau mon ami*) very kindly met us as we moored up in the base and we had a very informative and enjoyable tour of the fort, which like so many French forts had taken inspiration in their design from Vauban. We enjoyed the wild iguanas which roamed the fort, had a coffee in Damien's office and – of course – shared champagne on Spellbinder by way of *remerciement*. Thank you my friends for your company and hospitality.



*All three of us in uniform?*



The view from  
Fort ~~Edward~~ Louis



A random  
iguana, now  
obviously  
French

We anchored back in front of the fort and the next day visited Fort de France, the island's capital. Not much to report – a bit of shopping, and a nice enough city, but we were keen to move on and find some beaches off which to anchor.



*We expected this type of market...*



*...but had forgotten that it was nearly Christmas. The juxtaposition of Christmas trees and tropical plants in 30 degrees takes a little getting used to.*

There then followed a succession of anchorages off beaches – *Trois Ilets, Anse Mitan, Anse Noire, Grande Anse and Les Anses D'Arlet* for any that know Martinique. All delightful in their own way – lovely sand, coconut trees, great swimming and snorkeling and the inevitable fabulous views at sunset. My favourite was *Anse Noire*, a little bay where we were one of only two yachts overnight, the other yacht being *Daaal II*, from which Joss and Aurélie came over and had a drink. It was good to meet such a fine example of British-French co-operation!



*Spellbinder in Anse Noire – ‘noire’ because the sand was volcanic black, unlike the beach next door, by way of a strange geological quirk*



*Turtle's head, filmed by my Go Pro...*



*...(s)he, and the symbiotic accompanying sucking fish, made agreeable swimming companions*



*We had a tranquil time in Anse Noire*



We had a great trip, a just reward for the planning and effort of the Atlantic crossing. We finished our time in Saint Anne, just outside Le Marin where we had a gastronomic last lunch before heading back to our berth, cleaning up Spellbinder, having a drink with neighbours Sorin and Ana from Romania (who were very British, having an Oyster for a yacht and having berthed her in Limehouse for three years). We then put Spellbinder to bed to await the return in January of her skipper and new crew, for further adventures.



## Chapter 14 – The Squadron Grenadines Rally

I returned to Martinique in late January and found *Spellbinder* in good condition after her Christmas stay in Le Marin. My new crew were Peter and Janet, old friends, Squadron members and themselves owners and accomplished sailors of a Hallberg Rassy 37, and they helped me prepare *Spellbinder* for her further travels and in particular the RYS Rally to the Grenadines.

In December I had set in train a number of post Atlantic crossing repairs – the mending of my bent spinnaker pole; fixing a leak on the high pressure side of the watermaker; repairs to our Parasailor downwind sail, and the replacement of the old Furuno radar with a new Raymarine Quantum model. I was delighted to find all had been done – *chapeau* Le Marin – and the first morning was spent gathering up bits and pieces (including transporting my newly repaired, and slightly shorter spinnaker pole by dinghy through a mangrove swamp) and paying bills. By the afternoon of the first day we were away.

Over the first few days I re-discovered Martinique with Peter and Janet – Sainte Anne, Les Anses D'Arlet, Anse Noire and Saint Pierre, all of which are covered in the last post. We settled into a wonderfully relaxed rhythm of early morning tea, swims and short sails followed by more swimming or snorkelling and sampling the various 'Planteurs' (rum punches) as we headed north.



*First stop, St Anne, and a dinghy dock with sun loungers*



*Peter's early morning swim given rainbow approval*



*More random beaches and sun downers. No green flash spotted yet though...*





*Another mellow evening with Spellbinder anchored in Anse Noire, my favourite bay in Martinique*

We checked out of Martinique in Saint Pierre. The French have an excellent online self-declaration system and I was able to clear out *Spellbinder* and her crew at 'Alsace à Kay', a great Alsatian restaurant with apéritif in hand. The next morning we set sail for Rodney Bay, Saint Lucia to join the RYS cruise, which was gathering at Rodney Bay marina. RYS cruise took us down Saint Lucia to Marigot Bay, a wonderful little inlet where we had our first party. There then followed a series of stops in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and eventually in Grenada where the 10 day cruise ended. We came and went with the rally, sometimes doing our own thing but generally enjoying the organised events. Highlights were playing cricket in Bequia followed by a reception in Jack's Bar, and the next day another party up in the hills in an ex-Prime Minister's residence; a very privileged tour of Mustique, with a magnificent reception in a member's house followed by a beach BBQ; lobster barbecued in Tobago Cays; a great long lunch in Petit Saint Vincent, and various other events, some impromptu and others organised, which together made for a very special 10 days. We spent most of our overnights at anchor. I had been encouraged to buy a barbecue for *Spellbinder*, and Peter put it to great use. I also had great fun flying the drone, where it was allowed, and took some great footage.



*A lovely evening in Wallilabou, Saint Vincent, where we christened the barbecue*





*Cricket in Bequia...*





*...followed by a reception high up on the island*



*Anchored in Tobago Cays*



*Saltwhistle Bay on Mayreau, my favourite bay in the Windwards.*



*The same bay looking out towards Tobago Cays, with Spellbinder in the foreground*



*Another view of Saltwhistle...*



*...which has a great horizontally growing coconut tree on which to sit for crew photographs*



*Great sign, but the owner had no need to thank the crew of Spellbinder!*



*Not a bad view from Petit Saint Vincent, as we prepared for lunch*



*Squadron Rally evening drinks rafted up in Chatham Bay, Union Island*



We also enjoyed some great sailing in addition to the social agenda. The wind was very kind, and we raced downwind between the islands. Thank you to Richard, owner of the lovely yacht *Titania* of Cowes for the following photographs of *Spellbinder* enjoying herself:



It was an excellent and well-organised cruise. We ended up in Port Louis, Grenada, where I will shortly be joined by family for the return trip north to Saint Lucia. Grenada marks the southern extremity of this trip, and in effect the halfway point. So far, so good; the sabbatical is shaping up nicely, with much to look forward to.



## Chapter 15 – The Windwards South to North

Following the RYS cruise, Sue and Jonty joined me in Grenada to spend half term sailing back up the Windwards chain to Saint Lucia. As there is often a northerly element to the easterly trade winds, and combined with the current which sets west, more often than not we were quite hard on the wind. That said, there was nothing too drastic and we spent a very pleasant and memorable week together with lots of swimming, snorkelling, walking and eating well. The itinerary for those interested was: **Grenada** – Port Louis, Dragon Bay, and Tyrell Bay and Sandy Island on Carriacou; **Saint Vincent and the Grenadines** – Clifton and Chatham Bay on Union Island, Saltwhistle Bay and Tobago Cays on and by Mayreau, Admiralty Bay in Bequia, and Petit Byahaut and Wallilabou on Saint Vincent itself; **Saint Lucia** – Marigot Bay.

Rather than describe each and every event I simply leave you with some of the photos we took, with a little commentary under each.



*Taken in Clifton. Feet in the 'merde' but always looking proud – the cockerel's fate. My French friends love the analogy, particularly when their rugby team is having a tough time...*





*We walked high up above Chatham Bay on Union Island to a ridge where we got great views over the anchorage. A giant soldier appeared to have left his helmet here in the 1940s...*



*We came across a hermit crab on this walk too*





*Views above and along Saltwhistle Bay, Mayreau*



*Obligatory lobster tails in Tobago Cays. We also swam with turtles and Sue had two large black rays pass underneath her when swimming.*



*I can't quite recall which beach this was, but thought the photo was worth putting in the blog anyway...*

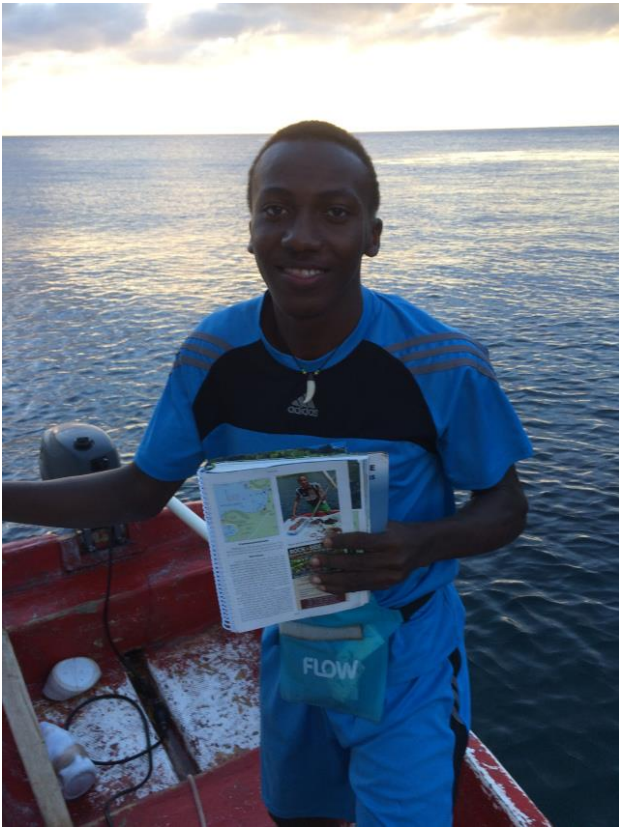




*One of the better-known local boats in Bequia. Inspired by tobacco, perhaps?*



*Petit Byahout, a small bay on the western coast of Saint Vincent. Utterly deserted and accessible only by sea, we had some of our best snorkelling here in gin-clear water. Photo taken by the drone.*



*One of the many boat boys / men who greet you in Wallilabou. This is Zico, very proudly showing us his photo in Doyle's guidebook.*



*Sunset in Wallilabou. We anchored off and ran a long line to a palm tree ashore.*



*Marigot Bay, Saint Lucia. We walked up another high ridge through rain forest to get the view. It was a luxurious finish in a lovely spot.*





*Sunset in Marigot Bay.....*



*...where I also had my haircut by this fine gentleman, who not only has one of the best-positioned barber shops in the world, but also cuts the Saint Lucian Prime Minister's hair...*

It was a memorable week. After saying goodbye to Sue and Jonty, I single-handedly Spellbinder on quite a boisterous passage north back up to Martinique, where I am readying Spellbinder for her next crew, who arrive this coming weekend. We will be spending the first two weeks of March heading up the Leewards, all going well.

## Chapter 16 – The Leeward Islands – Dominica, Guadeloupe, and Antigua and Barbuda

After Sue and Jonty headed back to UK, I sailed single-handed back from Saint Lucia in a blustery F6/7 to Martinique to await the arrival of my next crew. It was quite the roughest passage which Spellbinder has endured since leaving UK last July, but I managed it with just some minor repairs to make to the bimini. I then had a few days on my own getting Spellbinder ready, which gave me the opportunity to catch up with boat jobs and re-visit a couple of nice anchorages.

The next crew comprised David and Johnny and Lucy. They arrived as Martinique was in full carnival mode. It was quite windy and rainy – the rain inevitably followed by sun – but nothing could stop the people of Fort de France from dressing up *Mardi Gras* style and thronging the streets. Men dressed as women, women dressed as men – anything went in a riot of colour and loud music. It truly was party time and we enjoyed the atmosphere, although it made getting back to the yacht with the crew's bags all a bit of a challenge.





*Carnival dressing up in Fort de France, Martinique*

The carnival was centred around Savannah Park, just opposite the dinghy dock. It also rather famously has a statue of the Empress Josephine which somebody decapitated a few years back, and which has never been replaced. There is a slight 'edge' in the French islands about their history – particularly regarding the slave trade – a contention which runs on today in a slightly different way to the anglophone islands. Josephine's presence did,

however, give the name to an excellent restaurant called 'L'Impératrice' which David and I enjoyed prior to Johnny and Lucy's arrival.



*A headless Josephine*

Our aim of the next leg was to head gently north to explore the southern Leeward Islands. First stop on our cruise was Saint Pierre in NW Martinique. This was my third visit and we enjoyed checking out of the excellent *Alsace à Kay* and eating by the beach on the terrace at *La Vague*. We also swam over the underwater statues. It was a good shake-out sail but the next morning – after replenishing our stocks of fruit and vegetables at the early morning market – we headed for Dominica. This part of the Caribbean Sea is interesting in that in the days before longitude could be accurately obtained, ships sailed down the 16th degree of latitude, arriving between Dominica and Guadeloupe, and then turned either left to the Windwards, or right to the Leewards: it is a point of demarcation.

The passage across was quite boisterous and the crew 'found their sea legs' to use an appropriate euphemism. The Trades had been quite strong for a few days and the swell therefore quite big. However, once in the lee of the island, as is often the case, the sea flattened out completely, the wind dropped and we motored into the wide Prince Rupert's Bay and the town of Portsmouth. Portsmouth and the rest of Dominica was ravaged by Hurricane Maria in September 2017 and the damage wrought was plain to see, with forests still flattened and many buildings still damaged.



*Hurricane damage from Maria in September 2017. Many of the buildings in Portsmouth were still uninhabitable*



The people of this poor Commonwealth island are resilient though, and the Portsmouth residents have organised themselves to help visiting yachts. The PAYS (Portsmouth Association of Yacht Services) comprises a dozen or so men who help each other deliver various services including buoys, trips into the interior and beach BBQs. We were met quite far out by one of them called Alexis, who showed us to a buoy and came on board to discuss what we might do. The next day, having checked in (and out) of Customs and Immigration we went by boat up Indian River, seeing iguana and a variety of tropical birds and crabs. At the end was a bar where we were introduced to coconut rum punch, which was lovely, even at 1030am.



*Thank you, Alexis,  
for propelling us by  
motor then by oar  
up the Indian River*



*The rather beautiful ginger flower, which has medicinal uses. Alexis swore by it and the benefits of coconut. He may be right – the world's most long-lived person died in Dominica recently at the age of 129*



In the afternoon we headed into the interior of Dominica by taxi, visiting tropical rain forests and swimming in a waterfall.



*It was nice to swim in fresh water for a change*



*Tropical rain forest, Dominica*



*Banana tree,  
showing a pod  
about to burst*

That evening virtually all the yacht crews in the bay came together for a beach BBQ, which turned into quite a party and got the crew dancing. The next day we opted to leave Dominica, although I am sure it has a great deal to offer. We sensed that the population was doing its best, but couldn't help wondering about the extent of UK DFID funding for this and the other hurricane-ravaged Commonwealth countries, which proudly use the East Caribbean Dollar with the Queen's head on it.

Next stop was France and Guadeloupe. Some Dutch chaps in a Dufour 40 had challenged us to a race, but at the appointed time they did not appear (they did, however, visit us with some beer to apologise later in Guadeloupe – they had partied too hard...). A pity, as I had fancied Spellbinder's chances. We did though have a good passage up and entered into Les Saintes, a group of small islands to the south of the mainland. Not having tacked Spellbinder since July, I saw an opportunity and did so to approach the anchorage. Writing this reminds me of a time I met an Ocean Cruising Club member and asked him whether his yacht tacked well; he replied 'my dear chap, I'm not sure as we only tend to tack on Tuesdays'.

The islands of Les Saintes are incredibly beautiful, and well run by the French. Electric mountain bikes seemed the way to go to explore the main island. Never having ridden one,

they were a revelation; all the pleasure of biking with none of the sweat and toil associated with grinding uphill in 30° of heat. I hadn't appreciated that if you want more exercise, you simply dial down the electrical assistance, so you have the best of both worlds. I sense another purchase coming back in UK...



*Lucy enjoying helming between the islands, watched by Johnny*



*On electric mountain bikes, near Fort Napoleon, Les Saintes, Guadeloupe*



*Views of Les Saintes. They really are lovely islands, and part of the Guadeloupe archipelago*



*Sargasso weed piled up on the windward coast of Les Saintes, as on all the windward coasts of the Caribbean I have been to so far. One species triumphing over Mother Nature. In practical terms, the beaches smell and it is difficult to fish with a lure, but these are first world problems...*

After our very pleasant stay in Les Saintes, which included a memorable lunch after our bike ride, taking another buoy beside the 'Pain à Sucre' (sugar loaf) hill, and a brief foray up the deserted Ile Cabrit to visit more ancient military fortifications, we headed over to the Guadeloupe mainland.

First stop was the Plage de Malendure, a nice but windy anchorage opposite a marine national park founded by Jacques Cousteau. We had a lovely dinner overlooking the anchorage and then in the morning swam around Pigeon Island, which proved to be the best snorkelling of all our trip. With large fish everywhere, it was like swimming in an aquarium.



*Inquisitive fish inhabiting Pigeon Island*



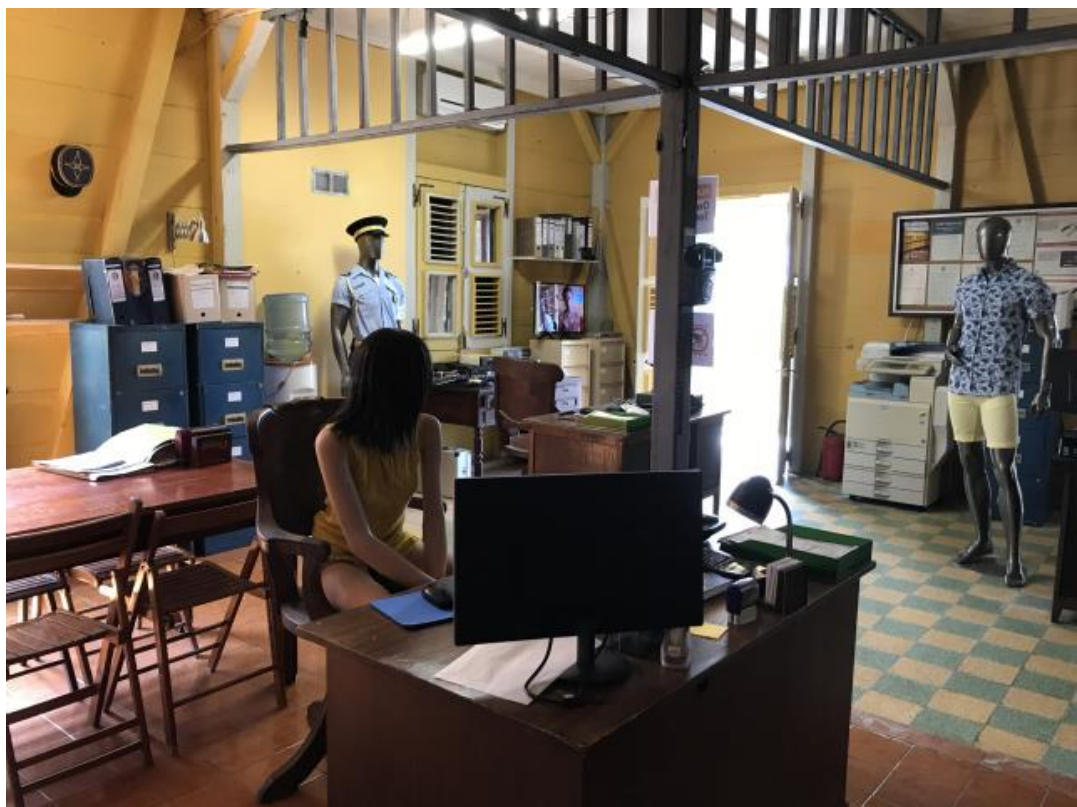
*An otherwise unremarkable photograph, but I wanted to show the black shapes, which are the Pigeon Island fish: large, varied, and everywhere*



Next stop for the night was Deshaies, on the north west coast of mainland Guadeloupe. I wanted to visit for two reasons: firstly, it is easy to check out, and secondly, it is the place where they base the filming of the BBC's 'Death in Paradise (DIP)' which – despite its formulaic nature – is strangely compelling. Deshaies proved delightful – a small bay, quite sheltered, with everything a yachtsman needs in a compact place. We visited the DIP film set, had a memorable sun-downer in 'Catherine's Bar', and David visited some remarkable botanic gardens.



*Memorable sun downer in Catherine's Bar, as featured routinely at the end of each 'Death in Paradise'.*





*On the film set of 'Death in Paradise'*

We left Deshaies after a nice breakfast in town. Antigua beckoned, and a few hours later after another memorable sail we entered English Harbour and the delightful Nelson's Dockyard marina. Berthed stern-to, we found ourselves at the heart of 18th and 19th century Britain exerting its influence in the Caribbean. Delightful architecture, great facilities, and a great base. We toured the harbour by dinghy, visited Galleon's Beach and the Dockyard museum (if only they had known about the role of mosquitoes in malaria and Yellow Fever) and generally sorted our lives out.



*View from Boom restaurant, looking across to Nelson's Dockyard*



*Superyachts and Georgian architecture. Spellbinder was amongst the smallest yacht berthed in Nelson's Dockyard...*



*Galleon's Beach, English Harbour*

A friend of a friend Bill and his wife Sam – residents of Antigua during the long Chicago winter – came on board for a drink and told us of Antiguan life and where to go. One place they had not visited, however, was Barbuda, which was to prove a memorable 2-day trip. 7 hours to the north of Antigua, it was devastated by Hurricane Irma, and the population was evacuated later when another hurricane beckoned. It is recovering very slowly, but is the most magical of semi-deserted places, with an incredible 11- mile beach, by which we anchored once we had navigated our way in through the reefs. Devastation, beauty, wildness – the photos tell the story.



*It was nice to have lighter winds behind the beam – the cruising chute helped propel us to Barbuda and back. I hadn't used it since Biscay*



*The devastated, formerly luxurious Lighthouse Bay Hotel*



*Hurricane-induced breach into the main lagoon in Barbuda*



*The crew walking along part of the magnificent 11-mile beach – here at Low Bay, where we anchored*



*Sunset at anchor. I am loving my drone, and its possibilities*

It was a lovely stay overnight in a remarkable spot, seemingly at the end of the world. Real life did beckon though, and we sailed back to Antigua for the inevitable crew change-over.

We loved the southern Leewards and their diversity in particular. Thank you David, Johnny and Lucy for being such great crew. Next stop the northern Leewards, and onto the BVIs...





## Chapter 17 – The Leeward Islands – Saint Christopher (Kitts) and Nevis, Saint Barthélemy, Saint Martin / Sint Maarten and Anguilla

Spellbinder has spent the last 10 days exploring the northern Leeward Islands of Saint Christopher (Kitts) and Nevis, Saint Barthélemy (Saint Bart's), Saint Martin / Sint Maarten and Anguilla. She is now tucked up in a quiet marina in the British Virgin Islands while I fly back to UK for a couple of weeks to catch up with the real world, while wondering whether I will be entering an EU country and leaving one which has firm plans no longer to be so! The more time I spend in the Caribbean, the less I care...

Crew for the last leg was my old Army friend Patrick, who flew from New Zealand via New York to join me. We had no particular plan other than to head north and explore, and once we had readied Spellbinder we set out from English Harbour Antigua on a 50-mile passage to the very round island of Nevis. It was a long day's sail downwind, under working jib alone, enjoying the surfing waves as the giant round island got ever closer. Once arrived, we anchored off the main town of Charlestown awaiting customs and immigration for the next morning. Charlestown has an aura of colonial past – Nelson married a Nevis girl (Fanny Nisbet) while he was stationed in Antigua and Nevis people seem proud of their history.



*Spellbinder off Charlestown, Nevis, with Saint Kitts behind*

Nevis was once full of slave plantations of which the main reminders are old stone windmills, which were used for crushing the sugar cane. Quite a lot of these old plantations have now been turned into boutique hotels, and our first stop was to flag down a bus and visit one called Golden Rock. High up on the hillside, surrounded by beautiful gardens it was both beautiful and enchanting – but for me there was also a pervasive sense of the blood, sweat and harshness of those enslaved there who built the buildings now inhabited by wealthy guests. Patrick and I had the most expensive coffee in the Caribbean before heading down via another bus to explore Charlestown more fully.





*Tropical gardens in a boutique hotel made out of former slave sugar plantation buildings*

We couldn't quite understand why the town was being spruced up with such un-Caribbean alacrity, but we learnt that HRH The Prince of Wales was due to visit a couple of days later. VIPs often comment that the smell of fresh paint follows them everywhere, and this was a good example. We visited some thermal baths and then the Nelson museum, which in addition to charting the latter's life also had a good section on Nevis's recent history and road to independence. This independence came via British-enforced federation with Anguilla and Saint Kitts, of which we learned more in Anguilla.

Our morning in Nevis was fun but in the afternoon we sailed over to White House Bay in Saint Kitts, one of the nicest anchorages of the leg. The snorkelling was good, including over the length of a sizeable wreck. White House Bay is adjacent to a giant marina in construction, which already has room for several super yachts taking up part of a sheltered lagoon. Once complete, it will become one of the largest bases in the Leewards, competing with the likes of Antigua. We had a great night in a beach bar called Salt Plage, talking to conferencing Americans, a Russian who had just gained her Saint Kitts citizenship (congratulations Maria!), and many others who had a story to tell.

The next day we went on a car tour of Saint Kitts, visiting a large Napoleonic fort called Brimstone built by the British, and having lunch on the windward shore by a beach protected by a reef. We enjoyed the island for its natural beauty and history, but also for the great mix of people we encountered.



*Brimstone Fort, built to defend Saint Kitts from the French, who successfully overran it in 1782, only for the island to be re-ceded a year later to the British by treaty.*



*Re-enacting locals in the uniform of the 4th West Indian Regiment*



*We checked out here!*



*We enjoyed Saint Kitts, but not the throngs of cruise ship tourists and the associated shops full of tat which had invaded the cruise ship terminal at Basseterre, the capital. On the right, one of the world's biggest cruise ships. A neat summation of everything I stand against in terms of never going on shepherded travel, although 'chacun à son goût'*

Saint Barts was next, and a great contrast. Our arrival coincided with the Bucket Regatta, an invitational competition for sailing yachts over 35 metres in length. Never have I encountered so many beautiful and ostentatious craft, most registered for tax reasons in fiscally-friendly nations, and others, for whom limitless wealth is just a state of life, flying their owners' nationalities, often American. They were an awesome sight and beautiful to behold, and I was struck by the power and noise as they sailed by. Once again, they made Spellbinder look tiny.



*The most beautiful, to my eye, of the big yachts in Gustavia Harbour, Saint Barts...*





*...and the ugliest, but the eye of the beholder is all. This one is Yacht 'A' owned by a Russian billionaire*



*The view over Gustavia, capital of Saint Barts*





*Spellbinder at anchor at sunset in the crowded harbour of Gustavia*

We enjoyed Gustavia and the views around and over the harbour, and had a fine *planteur* (rum punch) in one of the bars in the harbour. St Barts exudes money and has quickly recovered from the devastation caused by Hurricane Irma in 2017, unlike some neighbouring islands. The next day we headed to a beautiful bay called *Anse des Colombiers* where we swam with turtles, I scrubbed the hull and we strolled around. I have never encountered both wild turtles and wild tortoises within a few hundred yards of each other. Much less busy than the packed harbour at Gustavia, *Colombiers* was delightful.



*'Planteurs', Saint Barts style*



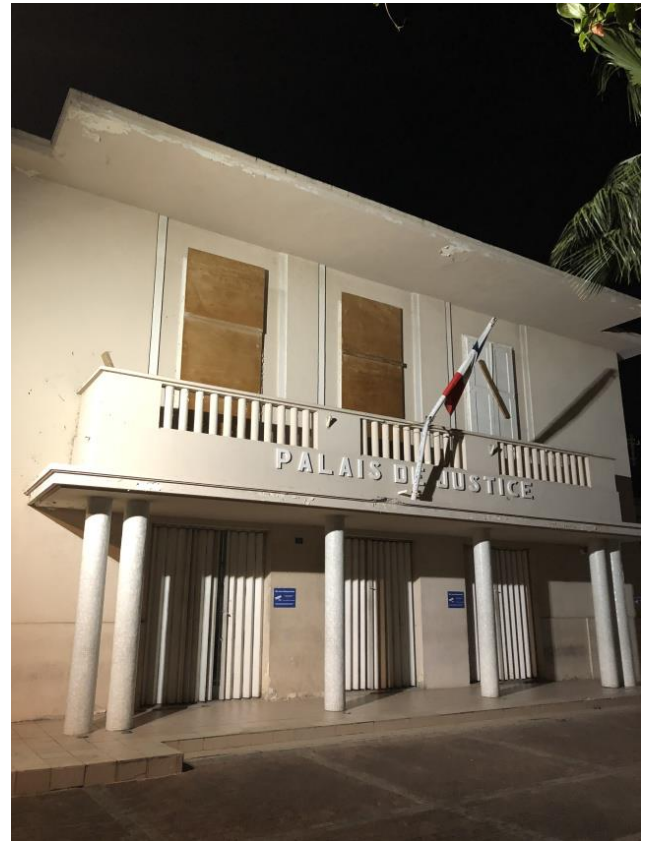
*Having swum with wild turtles, we met wild tortoises*

En route to our next destination, Saint Martin / Sint Maarten, we stopped at a wild bay between the islands which might have been in the Outer Hebrides.

Saint Martin / Sint Maarten is an interesting island, as it is divided into a French side in the north and a Dutch side in the south. The story goes that in order to decide the boundary, a Frenchman and a Dutchman got drunk together and afterwards the Frenchman headed north along the coast while the Dutchman headed south. Where they met would be the boundary. As the Dutchman met a woman en route, the Frenchman covered more ground and they ended up with more territory...but I might have thought it would have been the other way around...

We headed round the south of the island past the airport which is directly past the beach, and the subject of YouTube videos where the beachgoers can virtually touch the wheels of landing aircraft and can be blown away by those taking off.

We anchored in the northern (French) part in Marigot Bay. Going ashore, we were struck by the impact of the devastation caused by Irma and how little the island had recovered, compared by Saint Bart's. It was indeed a sad place and we didn't linger. Two things summed it up for me – the *Palais de Justice* still boarded up (one would have thought the French state would have acted quicker – the Dutch side appears to be making more progress) and a comment from a Frenchman to the effect that the next time the wrecks in the inner lagoon would be moved would be by the next hurricane. The photos tell the story:



After Saint Martin, Anguilla: we had a cracking day's reach up to this wonderful island, which made a great impression on us. A British Overseas Territory, Anguilla has a wonderful recent history of having been 'invaded' by the UK in 1969 when we thought that it was being overrun by gangsters and prone to sedition. On arrival, the Parachute Regiment battalion which was sent to quell the 'insurrection' was met by islanders who just invited them to a party and to discuss things the next day. Or so the story goes, as related by Remy, our guide who showed us the island. The events led to Anguilla gaining its independence from an enforced association with Saint Kitts and Nevis, while remaining under the British crown. They are very proud of this story, but I can believe it, having met some very relaxed and amiable Anguillans.



*Thank you for your informative tour  
Remy*

After the tour we enjoyed the beachfront in Road Bay, and in particular Elvis's Bar, a remarkable establishment run by the man himself. Not only does this beachfront bar have the best WiFi we encountered in the Leewards (video calling my eldest son Tom while swinging in a hammock gave me great pleasure) it also has great service and lots of beach games anyone can play. We had two excellent nights there and again met some great people. Anguillans are laid-back, uncomplicated and friendly, and we much enjoyed our stay there.



*Elvis, the epitome of Anguillan cool. Lest you are mistaken, he's the one on the right...*

We also visited a couple of the marine parks and had lunch at Crocus Bay, which was lovely. There was an excellent live band and we subsequently learnt that the lead singer was Omari Banks, one of the few Anguillans to have played cricket for the West Indies. He was immensely talented, and I bought a CD of his reggae music which I hope will bring back some great memories.



*Meeting Omari Banks. Great cricketer, great musician*



*Off Crocus Bay*



*Sandy Island, one of the marine parks, surrounded by reefs. It was an interesting dinghy ride in, and the solitude was spoiled by a large birthday party taking place. Anguillans like to play their music very LOUD*



*Anguilla's beaches are magnificent*

After Anguilla, we had a 90-mile overnight downwind and down swell passage to the BVIs, where Spellbinder now sits awaiting her next adventures. It was good to be out in the Atlantic again. The BVIs call next, but thereafter 3 longish passages await to get Spellbinder back home via Bermuda and the Azores.



*Only 3 courtesy flags left to fly...*

The Leewards made for wonderful cruising; the variety is enormous, and the scenery stunning. I hope these last two blogs have done them some justice.



*Thanks Patrick for being a great crew and for all the craic!*



## Chapter 17 – The British Virgin Islands

After a brief trip back to UK to catch up with family and domestic life, I returned a couple of weeks ago to Tortola to await the next crew. Crispin, Ann and my god daughter Lottie arrived and were joined a few days later by eldest son Tom. Together, we have just spent a wonderful few days sailing around this excellent, sheltered and benign cruising area.

Benign, that is, outside of the hurricane season. Hurricanes *Irma* and *Maria* (September 2017) hit the BVIs in common with the neighbouring islands and the damage caused by them is still very obvious. The islanders are recovering well though, and despite a lack of greenery and many destroyed buildings and boats, life has resumed. It will, however, take many more years for a full recovery.

First stop for us was Virgin Gorda, and Gorda Sound. Some of the iconic yacht bases (Bitter End, Yacht Club Costa Smeralda) are still rebuilding but Leverick Bay has been reconstructed quickly and appears to be benefiting from good trade. We motored up there into the prevailing wind, picked up a buoy, and met the local Cruising Association Honorary Local representative and had drinks with Simon and Nichola, the crew of another yacht, *Parati*, we had previously met in Madeira.



*Leverick Bay*

The next morning, after a motor around the Bay to see the state of the repairs, we headed down to The Baths on the leeward side of Virgin Gorda. We swam ashore with our stuff in a big waterproof Ortleib bag, and enjoyed the boulders, snorkelling and views from the restaurant at the top of the hill. Our destination for the night was Salt Island, an uninhabited spot which provided us with a tranquil anchorage in company with a couple of large yachts. I took the opportunity to fly the drone, and we swam the next morning over the wreck of RMS Rhone, which sank in October 1867 after another hurricane.



*Anchorage off Salt Island. A rather larger yacht (and ensign) belonging to another Squadron member behind.*



*Stroll up to a peak on Salt Island – photo taken by the drone*



*Crispin diving down to inspect the wreck of RMS Rhone...*



*...which is still fairly intact. You can see much of the superstructure, masts and even the propeller*

After Salt Island we returned to pick up Tom and headed back across to the southern BVIs to visit Norman and Peter Islands, sailing around both in a clockwise direction to enjoy the wind and Atlantic swell. On Norman Island there is a ship called 'Willie T' which attracts many to its bar and location. It's quite a party place...



*Tourists jumping off Willie T. You might recognise the famous figure stood on the left – a well-known resident of the BVIs, and knight of the realm...*

We didn't fancy a full-on party so instead motored over to Peter Island, where we found a delightful anchorage (Little Harbour) where the yachts and boats were anchored in a semi-circle with lines taken ashore. We took ours to a pontoon, and enjoyed a tranquil evening and night with turtles swimming around and rays fanning over the seabed beneath us. As I inspected the anchor, a ray with a long tail was passing over...it seemed like a good omen.



*Little Harbour – a tranquil place on a deserted island*



*As the winds tend to come from the east, our bow usually lies in that direction, and we view the setting sun from the stern. With a line ashore, in shelter, this time the opposite was the case*



*This used to be a nice house on the tip of Peter Island...as seen by the drone*

After this fabulous anchorage we headed over to one of the BVIs' renowned snorkelling sites, called The Indians, by Pelican Island. Picking up a buoy, here we had the best snorkelling of the week, amidst a myriad of fish and coral.



*Snorkelling amidst the resident fish of The Indians*

Next was Jost Van Dyke, an island to the north of the archipelago. Here we entered White Bay, where there was little water but we managed to anchor first on a short chain, then were offered a buoy by a parting catamaran. I looked at the previous owner's blog from 2008 and we had a very similar experience, just touching the sand in one place as we manoeuvred about. One day Spellbinder will get a skipper who knows what they're doing! But out here sometimes these things happen, particularly if you are adventurous and know that water will be tight. What's important is to have an escape route!

At White Bay we visited the famous Soggy Dollar Bar – so called because of the wet nature of the notes which are often brought ashore by cruisers. We enjoyed the cocktails, beach games and a wonderful rising moon over the beach.



*A Soggy Dollar 'Painkiller'. Never have a third...*



*Full moon rising*

In the morning Crispin and Tom went for one of their morning runs, enjoying the views from the hilltops over Jost Van Dyke.

A quick trip to Great Harbour followed, to visit the famous Foxy's Bar – Foxy is well known in the BVIs and was recently awarded an MBE. We didn't see him though, but the place certainly looks as if it has hosted some great parties. After a coffee and a breakfast for the runners, we headed around to Little Jost Van Dyke and Diamond Cay to have lunch in a lovely beach shack called Bee Line, where we enjoyed the relative isolation of what was little more than a beach shack.



*Beach games at Bee Line. Lottie and Tom comparing juggling skills.*



Our destination for the evening was Trellis Bay, for the famous Full Moon Party. There were dozens of yachts already in place, but we anchored where we could and went in to enjoy the bars, music, artwork and braziers in the water. It was great fun and rightly attracts a good crowd when it happens.



*Full Moon Party Trellis Bay and a decorative brazier*

We awoke slightly the worse for wear and headed over to a delightful little island called Marina Cay for a restorative fruit punch. This little island was also ravaged but is coming back, and another time I'd spend a night on a buoy here and enjoy the views.



*Marina Cay. Some coconut palms survived Irma, and some didn't...*

Our final day was spent on a buoy in the Dogs, a small group of islands which are uninhabited but which are good for snorkelling and generally watching the world go by. We had lunch, swam and flew the drone – a familiar combination. We have been gradually scrubbing the hull to get rid of the growth of the past few months – not enormous, and the

Coppercoat is largely doing its job – but necessary nonetheless as I look forward to three long passages ahead to return to the UK.



*Spellbinder in The Dogs*



*Tom diving deep to scrub the keel. Thanks too to Crispin for helping with this – we now have a relatively clean bottom!*

And that was it – back to Tortola for a final dinner, and an early start for Crispin, Ann and Lottie to fly back to UK. Thank you to all three for being such a great crew and company.

Tom and I now have a few days to explore Anegada, a beautiful coral atoll 13 miles north of Virgin Gorda, from where I write – a separate blog will follow. Thereafter the passage home starts in earnest – to Bermuda at the end of the month, to the Azores at the end of May, and back to UK in early July, all going well.



*Tom enjoying helming, although he hates the bimini, which restricts his ability to trim the sails...*



*Thanks  
Crispin and  
Ann...*



*...and Lottie! Glad you enjoyed yourselves*



## Chapter 18 – Anegada and preparations for Bermuda

I have spent the last few days on Spellbinder with my eldest son Tom. We visited Anegada, a small island which is part of the BVIs and to their north. It proved to be a very special place, meriting its own blog post. We also spent a bit of time preparing Spellbinder for the next phase of the adventure, which will be a see her undertaking three long passages to return to UK in July.

Anegada is a coral atoll, no more than a few feet high. Only 250 or so permanent residents live there and there is little significant modern development. It was pretty much flattened by Hurricane Irma but has bounced back.

We had a good close reach up there in 15 knots or so of wind. Since arriving in the Caribbean, I have had just a working jib as a foresail, as the breeze is ever present and a genoa would often need reefing. It has worked well and was new out of the bag as Spellbinder's previous owner barely used it. The trip to and from Anegada was a great example of a perfectly balanced rig making 6-7 knots without fuss.

Anegada has some of the most azure of azure waters:



*You only see Anegada from a short distance off – it's very flat, and the trees are the first things you see*

The anchorage was at Setting Point, and we crossed the reefs with barely any water under our keel – I knew it would be tight, as we were at springs, but I reckon we had about 20cm under the keel. It was too shallow to pick up a buoy so we anchored off in hard coral sand, digging in the anchor as best we could then doing something definitely not taught in the RYA syllabus – diving down on the anchor and piling rocks and stones over it. You can do that when you anchor in 2.5m in tropical waters!



*Setting Point anchorage – pretty shallow!*

On arrival Tom and I hired a 4x4 and toured the island. It was the first time I had been driven by Tom, who coped well with a beat-up (no passenger side wing mirror) left hand drive automatic car driving on the left-hand side of the road. Rental cars are easy on Anegada – cash, no deposit, few details required – you can't go far!



*My very casual-looking chauffeur for the day*





We saw many fine beaches, snorkelled on one (Loblolly) and had lunch at the Anegada Beach Club on the north side. We also visited Cow Wreck Bay and saw pink flamingos in the distance from a vantage point.





*Pomato Point, the other anchorage, which is more remote*



*Anegada signs*

Tom went for a run in the evening, cooled off in the sea and that evening we ate lobster – which seems ubiquitous – at a restaurant called the Lobster Trap. It was delicious. The lady who runs the restaurant and the Anegada Beach Club told us she orders 700lb of lobster a day – it seems the seas can sustain this level of fishing.



*Sunset  
run,  
and  
cooling  
off in  
the  
sea...*



*...before a  
lobster fest*

Before leaving back for Virgin Gorda and Tortola we had a couple of boat jobs to do. Nothing significant has broken on Spellbinder so far (except that which I have broken myself) but I was looking in the engine bay and saw that the water pump had sprung a leak. Fortunately I had a spare on board and we swapped it over quite quickly. I also noticed that the calorifier had moved on its mounting as a nut had come undone – this required us both entering the engine bay and despite the cramped surrounding achieving the fix. Sweaty job though...



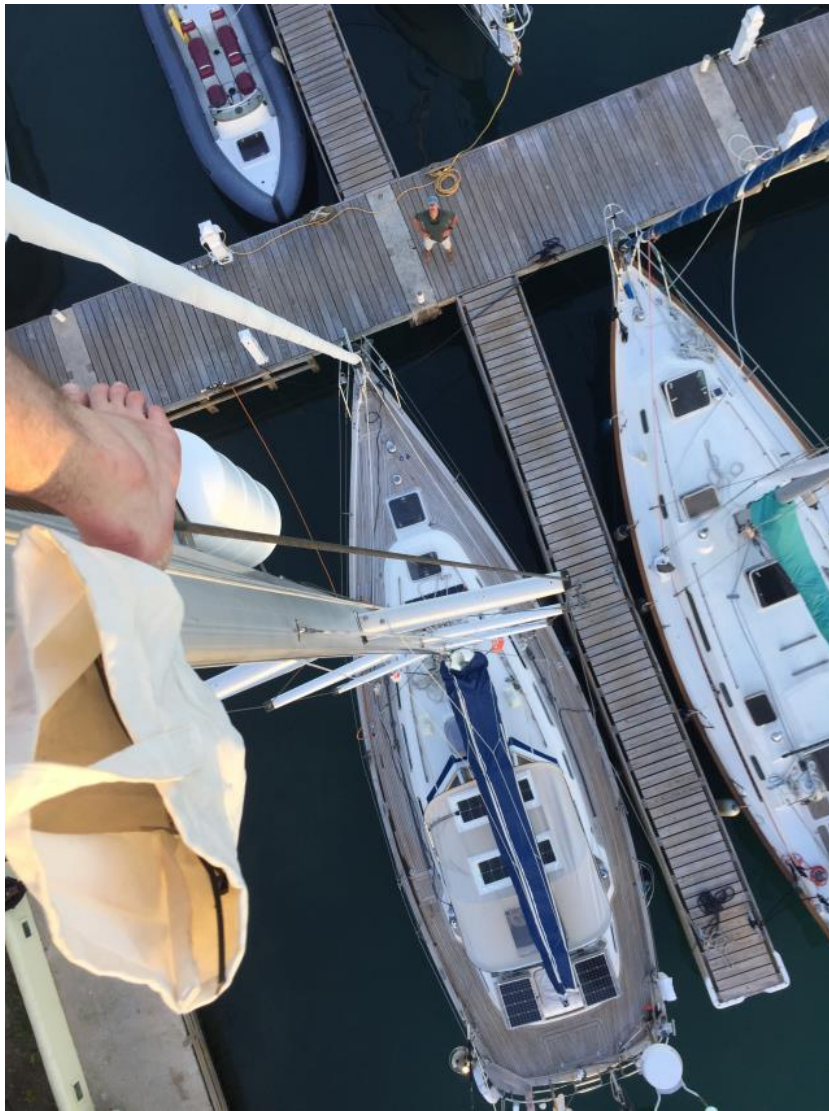
*Trying to find the source of the leak*

We had a good passage back south, had a night in Gorda Sound (Leverick Bay) and Tom, seeing a mountain, duly ran up it.



*View of Leverick Bay from above*

After lunch in Cooper Island, we headed back to Tortola to our berth. The final evening was spent preparing Spellbinder for long distance cruising – jib down, genoa and furling gennaker bent on, and a trip up the mast to inspect the rigging and replace a block.



*The view taken by Tom from the top of the mast. I do look small down there...*

Anegada was wonderful, and a fitting final sail to the cruise of the BVIs. I have thoroughly enjoyed it here and can see why it is such a popular cruising destination. It was also great father and son time – thank you Tom.

Next stop Bermuda – on current plans we depart Sunday. We should have some nice easterlies, but a dropping high pressure means I suspect we'll motor the last bit...

## Chapter 19 – Passage to Bermuda

The passage from the BVIs to Bermuda is about 850 nautical miles, and the pilot book advises that for the first few hundred miles, the south east Trades should help you along. As you near Bermuda, however, you are liable to meet calms. And so it transpired – 4 days of steady winds between 14 and 22 knots just behind the beam, followed by a brief gennaker run as the winds lightened, followed by 24 hours driven by Mr Yanmar. We arrived after a 5 day, 8 hour passage averaging 6.5 knots. Crew for this trip were Neil and François.

My stay in the BVIs had been made greatly more enjoyable by the team from Penn's Landing, the little 12-dock marina which made me feel very welcome and which provided Spellbinder with an excellent base. Thanks to the marine manager Justin and Rick in particular, who were great. We left Penn's and headed over to Virgin Gorda to check out of the BVIs, before raising the sails and starting our passage.



*François and I preparing to leave Penn's Landing*



### *Farewell to the BVIs*

The winds were strong enough to push us along well, but also kicked up moderate seas which gave my crew early bouts of seasickness, from which they thankfully recovered after a couple of days. This was a trip which proved perfect for two bits of kit which had yet to come into their own. I had used the Hydrovane a little during the Atlantic crossing, but directly downwind the Raymarine autopilot proved more accurate and faster. Across the wind, however, the Hydrovane came into its own and steered us straight and fast for 4 whole days, keeping the wind just behind the beam and on track, without using a single amp. The other bit of kit which proved useful was the Aqua4Gen – a towed propeller generator which put in a steady 5 or 6 amps. I had used it when crossing the Atlantic but lost the propeller due to metal fatigue after the first day. Luckily, I had a spare, and having repaired the generator in Martinique I found that in conjunction with the solar panels the two kept on top of the electrical demands, meaning that I only ran the engine every 3 days, mainly to get hot water.

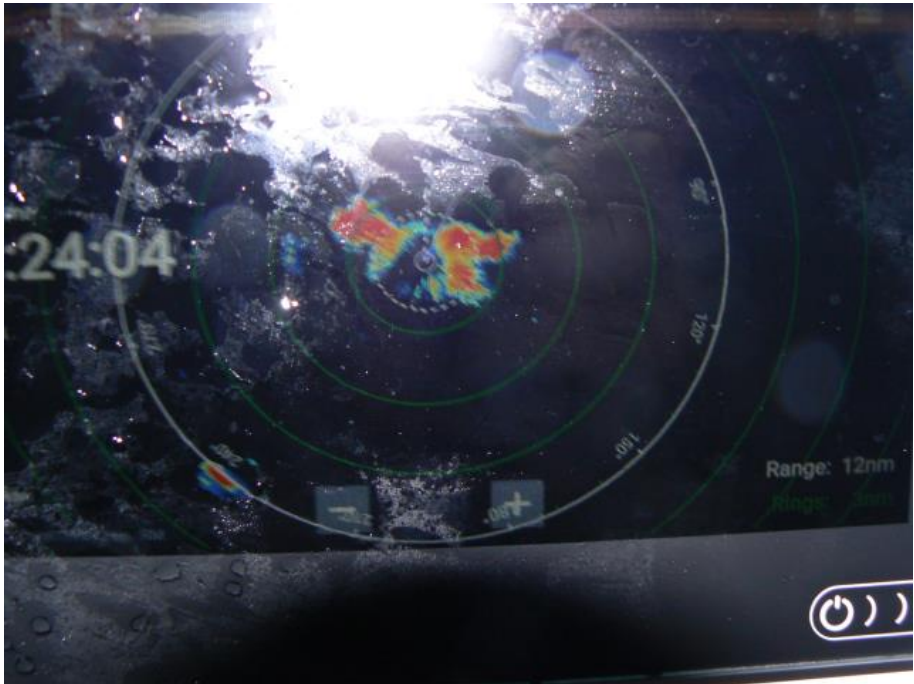




*Hydrovane and Aqua4Gen in action*

The passage was full of delightful sunsets and sunrises, a few flying fish and the odd squall, but few other yachts.





*The Raymarine Quantum radar, when switched to weather mode, proved adept at picking up squally showers*



*The skipper catching up on his sleep...*



*Neil surveying the scene*



*A somewhat recovered François...*



*...who provided saucisson with the apéro – a Spellbinder specialty*



*Coming back up into the yacht after clearing the Sargasso weed from the Hydrovane rudder – the weed proved a real impediment, and precluded fishing as the lure would always catch it. I estimate 5% of the sea's surface was covered in the stuff*



*As the winds died, we enjoyed our gennaker for a few hours*

After our 24 hours of motoring, we were called up by Bermuda Radio as we approached, and they guided us via the 'Town Cut' into St George's Harbour. It's a great entrance and landfall. One in we tied up at the Customs and Immigration dock, where we went through the formalities required and were dealt with very efficiently. We spent the night across the way tied to the quay, and with the 'Q' flag down (formalities complete) we were able to go into town and enjoy a couple of drinks. It was a fun passage, not without its challenges, but with a great sense of accomplishment.



*Entering the Town Cut at sunset – good timing!*



*Docked the next morning opposite Customs and Immigration, Ordnance Island, St George's*



*Arrival drinks. Thank you to Neil and François for your crewing duties!*

## Chapter 20 – Bermuda

Having left the British Virgin Islands in good time, we have had a good opportunity to explore the wonderful island of Bermuda. After conducting our Customs and Immigration obligations, the day after arrival we headed around the north of the island to Hamilton, where we berthed at the Royal Bermuda Yacht Club. From there, we hired scooters and had a most enjoyable couple of days exploring. It brought back memories for me, as I had stayed with a friend here for a couple of weeks back in the early nineties.

The Royal Bermuda Yacht Club, which charges \$4 / foot to dock, is easily the most expensive marina I have ever berthed in. That said, the facilities are smart and excellent, we were made to feel really welcome, and the Club is full of yachting memorabilia and history. We split the costs and it made a great base.



*A properly Royal club...*



*...which was hosting a top-level international keel boat regatta during our stay*







*There was a good set of royal yacht club burgees, including that of the one to which I belong*



*There were sumptuous surroundings in which to relax...*



*...and when in Bermuda, wear Bermudan shorts when talking to the members!*

The first day we headed over to Dockyard, where there is an old British Naval base which features traditionally robust Nelsonian-era architecture. It has been somewhat marred by the proximity of the cruise ship terminal, but there was an excellent museum in the Commissioner's House, which occupied us for a couple of hours as we learned about the history of Bermuda from the earliest settlers – who were shipwrecked – to the present day. Bermuda's geographical isolation has in so many ways influenced its history.



*The Commissioner's House*



*Naval ramparts, looking north*



*Bermuda hosted the America's Cup in 2017 – the US entry, Oracle Team left their yacht on display*



*We visited a cemetery en route to the Dockyard, with the graves of several dozen Royal Naval personnel from World War Two*



*View of Bermuda looking towards Hamilton from the lighthouse*



*Welcomed back to Hamilton by the statue of Johnny Barnes, a resident who stood and waved at traffic every day between 1986 and 2015*

The second day we re-visited Saint George's by land, enjoying some great beaches on the way.



*Church Bay beach*





*The team on their scooters – note the state-of-the-art helmets!*



*Saint George's. Bermudan business attire is fairly widespread still – shorts, long socks and sometimes topped with a blazer*



*Danish sail training  
tall ship in Saint  
George's*



*View from Ordnance Island, Saint George's*





*Another beautiful American yacht. I liked this one as the skipper has his or her own cabin, companionway entrance and private stern deck to enjoy, while the crew sail the yacht*



*Bermudan roofs – universally whitewashed, and with a unique rain-catching gutter which funnels all the rainwater into storage*



*View of the Town Square, Saint George's*

We headed back to Hamilton and the next morning said goodbye to François. Neil and I then sailed back to Saint George's, where I had negotiated a mooring. It was a good passage, and we almost managed to enter the Town Cut and go into the harbour under sail.



*Sailing through the Town Cut*

We enjoyed Bermuda immensely. Spellbinder is now based here awaiting her next crew to take her to the Azores, with a departure planned for towards the end of the month. There are quite a few yachts gathering here, including the ARC return leg, and several fellow members of the Ocean Cruising Club are inbound. It should be a sociable time.



## Chapter 20 – Bermuda to The Azores

Bermuda had been fun – we had good company with several fellow Ocean Cruising Club (OCC) members, it proved a good place to stock up (albeit at prices which would make the finest organic grocer in Belgravia seem like an Asda mega-discount store), and fine weather. My crew for the return Atlantic crossing were Alan and Julian, and when they flew in we began to prepare Spellbinder for what would be a 1700 nautical mile passage to Flores in the Azores.

We had time to make the most of Bermuda as strong northerlies delayed our departure by a couple of days. The crew toured the island by bus, we filled up with diesel, provisioned and generally got ourselves organised.



*OCC drinks aboard Spellbinder in St George's Harbour – it's a very international club*



*Delightfully illustrated Bermudan dollars*



*Waiting to fuel up. With the prospect of light airs, we needed to fill every single litre of fuel capacity. Spellbinder holds about 440 litres of diesel, enough for about 950 nautical miles of motoring*



*Final crew dinner before departure*



*Leaving Bermuda*

We left Bermuda through the St George's Town Cut at around midday on 27th May, heading out into light winds which allowed us to broad reach, firstly under white sails then under

gennaker. It was a perfect way of easing into a long passage, with fine weather and good boat speeds.

The rest of the passage served up lots of light winds, calm patches, enormous amounts of animal life, and one or two mechanical challenges. For the most part we were either goose-winged in stronger winds (although nothing much above 22 knots) or flying the Parasailor, which proved invaluable in propelling us along downwind in true winds of 7-14 knots.



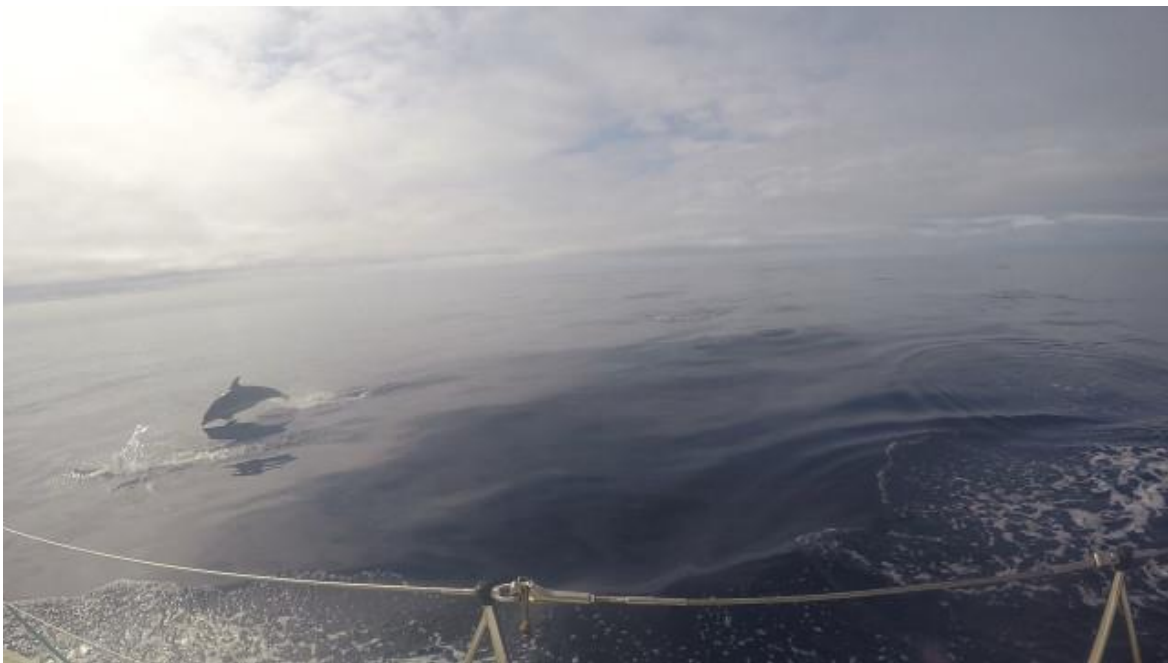
*We had two long runs under Parasailor – the longest being 44 hours, all steered by the Hydrovane. It made a real difference, as otherwise we would have drifted at 2-3 knots, or would have been forced to motor*

Mother Nature served up some real treats on this passage. We saw many, many dolphins and porpoises, and several whales – although the latter proved extremely difficult to photograph, as by the time you get a camera out they tend to have dived, leaving a blow-hole if you are lucky. We experienced dolphins swimming with us at night, leaving trails of phosphorescence like torpedoes darting around and under the hull. We also saw hundreds of thousands of Portuguese Men O' War, which filled the ocean rather like the Sargasso weed had done down in the Caribbean.





*Dolphin school approaching...*



*...and one of the daily displays they treated us to*



*Portuguese Man O' War. They were everywhere, wrapping themselves in our fishing line and towed generator. They seem to move along in the current, blown by their own 'sail'*

A day out of Bermuda the Raymarine autopilot failed – a bit of a blow, for while the Hydrovane will steer us effectively at all wind speeds and angles of wind, when it was calm we were obliged to hand steer. Fortunately, these periods were quite short, and we learnt to use the Hydrovane to steer us when motoring or motor sailing too. The diagnosis is a broken clutch on the drive unit, which I hope to repair in the UK shortly, to allow us to use it for the final leg back to UK. Everything else worked though, so we enjoyed daily showers thanks to the watermaker, and good food thanks to the freezer.



*Dismantling the autopilot drive unit*

Life on board was good – we ate and drank well, established a very workable watch system and enjoyed some fine sailing in calm seas, with swell generally less than 1.5m. The SSB HF long distance radio came into its own, with daily OCC nets where we could talk to each other even when several hundred miles apart. Quite a community grew up. There was also a more formal evening check in with an American organisation which tracks yachts crossing the Atlantic, and also daily met broadcasts from the redoubtable American meteorologist Chris Parker, which proved very useful in planning our route. My good friend Julian would also email me regular weather routing advice, so we were well served.



*The skipper relaxing mid-ocean. Fishing was a complete disaster though!*



*Washing day*



*Photographing one of the many fine sunsets*





*Midday beers on the fore deck, under gennaker*

We sighted Flores, the northernmost island in the Azores, about 50 nautical miles out. Arriving in the outer harbour about 5am, we anchored and waited for daylight, before heading into what is a cramped harbour with a major hazard in the entrance. A while back a lump of jetty fell into the water (it had been poorly constructed, and was un-reinforced). It is marked by a green starboard-hand marker, which is difficult to see in the dark. For a tired American sailor, used to buoyage the other way around ('red right returning') it could prove disastrous – we saw a UK yacht almost come to grief. Luckily, we were aware of it. We had logged almost 1700 nautical miles, and the passage had taken 12 and a half days; of that we had sailed 9 of them and motored the rest.



*Talking on the radio as we approached Flores*

Once tied up, we strolled up into the village, had some celebratory beers and flew the drone, mixing with some of the international crews who had recently crossed, some of whom we had been talking to on the SSB. It was a public holiday – no-one was about, and most things were closed, so we decided to head out the next day for the islands in the centre of the archipelago. The next blog will recount Spellbinder's cruise of some of the Azores.



*Flores harbour, as seen by the drone. You can make out the dangerous lump of jetty right in the entrance*

## Chapter 21 – A Taste of The Azores

I often seem to write my blogs at airports – something to do with the WiFi, no doubt, but also because I tend to be at them when there is a change of crew, marking the end of a stage of this journey. And so it is today: Spellbinder has been in the Azores now for over three weeks, and is about to depart with new crew for her final leg of this Atlantic circuit, from Ponta Delgada on São Miguel back to UK.

From Flores, with the original Atlantic crew, we headed straight for the island of Terceira. I would have loved to have visited Horta, a great mid-Atlantic crossroads for cruisers (a night at the Cafe Sport bar and painting your yacht's mural on the harbour wall are rites of passage), but it will have to wait for another time. At this time of year it is very crowded, and the winds and time precluded a visit. However, we found a snug berth in Praia da Vitória, from where I was able to fly back to UK briefly. During my absence Julian stayed aboard for a few days – a good thing, as there were 40+ knot winds one night.

The autopilot had broken a couple of days out from Bermuda, so I was keen to get it fixed. Julian and I had done a good diagnosis, which was confirmed when I took it to David at Hudson Marine on the Hamble. A new clutch for the drive unit was required, which we duly fitted. I'm pleased to report that all is now well – a good thing, as steering while motoring through ocean calms is no fun at all!



*Fixing the Raymarine autopilot drive unit*

Once back in the Azores, I explored Terceira, hiring a car. It was fiesta time, and I joined fellow Ocean Cruising Club (OCC) members to watch the bull run in Angra do Heroísmo. They block off a few streets and let half a dozen bulls run rampage. Amateur matadors play with the bulls, and if you can touch their horns (thankfully protected with a soft end placed over them) the crowd roars in approval. Beer and testosterone combine to make men do dangerous things, and every year people get hurt or worse.



*Parade and dancing before the release of the bulls. Olé!*



*Bulls on the run, Angra do Heroísmo...*





*A local matador showing off...*



*...but I think the bull rather got the better of him*

Most spectators are safely sat on lorry beds, or up in trees, but we found a spot where a local said that in 61 years of watching it, no bull had ever come near. He was wrong! Luckily no-one was hurt, including the bull. It was a tad discombobulating though.

After an hour the bulls are rounded up and returned to their farms. That evening there was a bullfight in the local arena, but although they place darts in the bull's body it is illegal in Portugal to kill them. It was difficult to envisage all this happening in UK: not the thing of Health and Safety and the RSPCA! But in the Azores, it is part of the very cultural fabric, as much as cricket is with us.

Terceira was lovely, for its architecture particularly.



*Ornate architecture, dates of construction clearly shown*





*Churches in the same style*



*Statue of bulls in Angra do Heroismo*



*Ugly silos spruced up with vibrant depictions*



*Street in Angra do Heroísmo,  
ready for the fiesta*



*Looking south from the island: a typical Azorian patchwork of fields*

My time on Terceira ended with a fun and international OCC gathering, kindly organised by Jonathan and Anne Lloyd (photo courtesy of the local OCC port officer, Lina Lane-Thornton).



The next morning the weather was set fair for a passage down to Ponta Delgada on the island of São Miguel. It was to be single-handed, so I left the marina at dusk and anchored in the harbour, so as to get an easy start early the next morning. The passage proved straightforward – I left just before dawn into a nice broad reaching wind, albeit with a 2-3

metre swell on the beam. At 90 nautical miles, this was the equivalent of a Channel crossing and for me the longest single-handed passage I have undertaken so far.



*On passage between Terceira and São Miguel, amidst seagulls*



*Heading down the São Miguel south coast*

After 13 hours I arrived safely in Ponta Delgada, found a berth and sorted out formalities in the morning.

Before the arrival of the next crew I hired a car and explored the island. Like all of them there is ample evidence of EU money being spent: modern roads and infrastructure, and a system which seems to work. São Miguel is, like many of the others, volcanic in nature and I explored two areas of great beauty: Caldeira des Sete Cidades and Furnas.

The former is a town right down in the bottom of a volcanic crater, with two lakes named Lagoa Verde and Azul (green and blue). It is a truly spectacular descent.



*Caldeira des Sete Cidades and its lakes*

Over in Furnas, there are thermal springs galore, where you can bathe and also eat the local dish *Cozido*, a delicious stew.



*Thermal springs...*



*... 'Cozido', geo-thermally slow-cooked for your delight...*





*...which required a geo-thermal bath to aid digestion*

The flora on São Miguel is spectacular, with ubiquitous hydrangea and agapanthus lining the roads.







*Delightful flora abounds*

It's a lovely island. As elsewhere in the Azores, I found the people calm, polite and helpful, and English is widely spoken. They know how to be kind and welcoming to tourists. Prices are extremely reasonable (and a positive delight after Bermuda) and the cuisine delicious. I have just tasted the Azores – and I will be back. Having crossed the Atlantic twice, the distance from Falmouth (7 or 8 days for Spellbinder, with fair winds) means that the Azores will continue to call me.

Tomorrow I depart with my new crew – elder son Tom, and friend Crispin – for the final passage back to UK. This morning I filled up with fresh fruit and vegetables in the local market, and studied the weather forecast – not that favourable, with a round-about approach needed to ride the west side of an anti-cyclone and to avoid some north easterly winds. It will take us a few more days than it might.

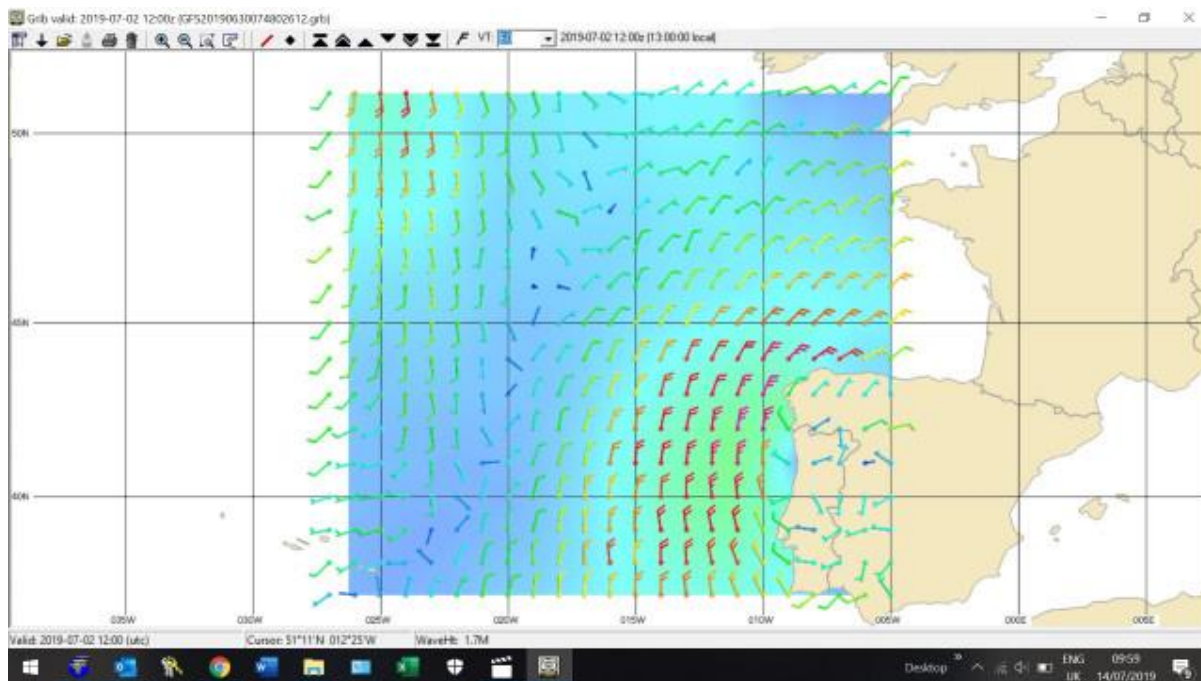


*The market at Ponta Delgada*



## Chapter 22 – Azores to UK

The final passage of Spellbinder's Atlantic circuit was from Ponta Delgada in the Azores to her home berth in Gosport, a trip of some 1400 nautical miles. Normally I would expect to be in Falmouth after 7 or 8 days, but we were faced with an interesting routing challenge, with a large depression forming over north west Spain.



*The Grib (weather forecast) file showing strong northerly and north easterly winds west of Spain and into Biscay*

We were therefore obliged to head north first, using some light southerly winds to get ourselves up to around 46 or 47 degrees north, before turning east and trying to find some fair winds and favourable currents to take us into the Western Approaches.

Crew for this leg were eldest son Tom and friend Crispin, who were each returning for their third time during this year's voyage. After preparations had been completed in Ponta Delgada, we refuelled and headed off.



*Leaving Sao Miguel*

For the first few days we had fair winds, making good use of the Parasailor, motoring a fair bit and gradually gaining the required degrees north. Julian, my ever-faithful weather adviser, kept us on the straight and narrow through nightly email exchanges and we had to make careful note of the engine hours used, as fuel consumption would be critical. Eventually I made the call after 7 days to head east at 46 degrees 30 minutes north, and we cut the corner of the low pressure, motor sailing though the swell until we reached the other side.



*Sailing with the Parasailor...*



*...and furling gennaker, when we had the angle. Sailing into the dawn, and away from the sunset was, of course, the exact opposite of our Atlantic crossing in December*

We kept ourselves busy – reading, cooking, carrying out running repairs and for two of the crew, daily exercises.





*The advantages of having a son studying physics at university – electrical and electronic repairs were effected flawlessly*



*Wholly unnecessary physical exercise carried out enthusiastically by two of the crew, while the skipper watched, glass of wine in hand...*





*...their exertions seemed to make them happy though*



*We baked five loaves, all them a disaster with the texture of bricks. We think that the tropical climate wasn't good for the yeast*

Once through the low-pressure system we had light winds and fair currents, and gradually made progress towards Scilly, where we needed to refuel. I had been concerned about fuel consumption, but having emptied the contents of the reserve tank into the main one, I was able to calculate it more scientifically. Having kept the revs down, we had been sipping fuel at about 2.2 litres an hour, which gave us plenty in hand.



*'Hands To Bathe'...post exercise dip in the deep Atlantic*



*Motoring through glassy calms*

We saw many dolphins, and many whales – particularly one evening, when all around us there appeared to be whale spouts, showing up white against the dark cloud which was in front of the setting sun. You will have to take my word for it, as they were too far away to photograph effectively.

Approaching Scilly after 10 days, we flew the drone and enjoyed spectacular images and video of passing Bishop's Rock lighthouse.



*Approaching the Western Isles, Scilly*



*Sailing past Bishop's Rock lighthouse*



*Retrieving the drone – always a slightly nerve-wracking experience*

Once past Bishop's Rock we went into Hugh Town on St Mary's to refuel and Crispin topped us up with fresh food. To await a fair tide round Land's End and the Lizard, we anchored in the Eastern Isles for lunch.



*At anchor in the wonderful Eastern Isles. We were lucky to have calm conditions*

We had a good a good sail down the south coast, enjoying a spectacular Parasailor run from Portland to Swanage, before anchoring again in Studland Bay to await a window into Hurst Narrows and the Solent.



*Parasailor propelling us along nicely, a few miles off Portland Bill*



*At anchor off Old Harry's Rock – almost home...*

Our night entry into the Solent was uneventful, and we tied up in Cowes in the RYS Haven at 0330. We thought we would have some kudos for sailing in from the Azores, but the neighbouring yacht had just come in from a Transat race from Newport, Rhode Island, and was turning around overnight to race to Saint Malo!

After a fine breakfast, we cleaned Spellbinder up and then had an excellent lunch to celebrate our arrival and the end of the year's voyage. My friend Peter had kindly ordered champagne for us – thank you for your thoughtful and timely gesture! After lunch Tom and I took Spellbinder back to her berth in Gosport, completing our circuit of the North Atlantic. Thank you, Tom and Crispin, for your excellent company on this memorable trip.



*All dressed up for a celebratory lunch*





## Chapter 25 – Reflections

10 days after returning to Gosport after my year away sailing around the North Atlantic, I find myself in the Outer Hebrides on a non-sailing family holiday. It is a *dreich* day, and I am sitting in South Uist looking west out over the Atlantic through the *mizzle*. It seems a fitting time to reflect on what has been an excellent and successful year, full of challenge, adventure and friendship.

Firstly, some statistics. *Spellbinder* left Gosport on 16th July 2018, returning almost exactly a year later on 12th July 2019. During that time:

- She logged 10,083 nautical miles;
- Of that distance, she sailed approximately 7000 miles and motored 3000;
- She visited 50 different islands\*;
- She had 26 different crew members, several of whom did multiple trips;
- She undertook 4 ocean passages\*\* of more than 1000 nautical miles each;
- I spent 214 days on board: 152 were sailing days or on passage, and 61 nights were spent at sea.

It went to plan, more or less, thanks to lots of preparation, planning and thinking beforehand, the reliability of *Spellbinder*, the devotion and experience of her various crew, and plenty of good fortune.

From a personal perspective, it was the fulfilment of a long-held dream. Having sailed my previous yacht *Kianga* on cross-Channel and coastal voyages only, the ocean was always going to call, and my experience in 2007 of being the mate on board a Challenge 67 yacht from Rio de Janeiro to Cape Town (via Tristan Da Cunha) had whetted my appetite. The purchase of *Spellbinder*, and my decision to leave a career of 33 years and take a sabbatical gave me the necessary opportunity.

It was always going to be atypical; most people I met during the year were either groups in their early twenties or in their 60s and 70s, sailing as couples. My circumstances required inviting friends and family to participate, necessitating the coordination of lots of people and the keeping to a broad timetable – so often the enemy of the cruising lifestyle, as weather and breakages can easily intervene. I was lucky on both counts. The weather didn't really affect my plans – at worst delaying a couple of departures by a day or two. I suffered few breakages aboard which I was unable to fix straight away, or improvise around – in part due to having many spares on board, but also because I built in some time to the programme to get things fixed. My own ineptitude ripped a sail and bent a spinnaker pole during the first Atlantic crossing, but both were repaired in Martinique. The only thing of consequence to go wrong was the Raymarine autopilot, between Bermuda and the Azores – luckily we could use the Hydrovane for most of the trip, even motor sailing. As far as crew were concerned, everyone who had committed turned up, and to them I am deeply grateful.

*Spellbinder* proved to be an excellent yacht for the purpose, and the ocean pedigree of Hallberg Rassy became clear to me. I was fortunate in inheriting a very well-maintained yacht, and the refit I carried out in Gosport over 2017 and early 2018 proved well worth the effort. Life was very comfortable on board – the freezer, water maker, storage and tankage and hot water system making life particularly pleasant, allowing us to eat well and take daily showers. Communications worked well, with the SSB and Pactor modem becoming my principal means to send and receive emails and download grib weather files. The SSB also came into its own for passage radio call-ins, which added to our safety and sense of an ocean community. The sat phone was for emergencies and the odd mid-ocean phone

call. Of the other equipment I would cite the following as being particularly useful: the Hydrovane, for many hours and miles of trouble-free and mechanical steering, requiring not a single amp; the Parasailor, which allowed us to sail dead downwind in light airs (7-12 knots) when otherwise we would have struggled or resorted to the motor; the Coppercoat on the hull, which in combination with a regular light scrub (something one can do in the tropics) kept the hull smooth and our boat speeds up; and the drone, which took some wonderful footage. We were also very grateful for the fans which had been installed. On the electrical side, the solar panels proved a disappointment (a poor design had been installed) but after their replacement in the BVIs I found that in conjunction with the Aqua4gen (a water towed generator) I was fairly self-sufficient in the tropics. The increase in battery power to 750 amp hours proved a wise move. Finally, my new helm plotter, on a swivel in the cockpit and interlinked with the AIS and radar feeds, proved sufficient for all our needs and I didn't even use the one which had previously been installed. On the sailing side, the new genoa and mainsail from Jeckells were excellent. In the Caribbean, with more consistently strong winds, I found the working gib more than adequate. With the Parasailor (cited above) and gennaker – which was excellent when reaching in light airs – I found I had everything I needed. Had we encountered gale force winds, we had the removable forestay and storm staysail which, in conjunction with a deep third reef, would have been ideal. In the event we only encountered winds in excess of 30 knots once, and then only briefly.

I met some wonderful people during the voyage, of all nationalities. The challenges of sailing binds people together (it might seem from the outside to be an idyllic lifestyle but in reality is quite hard work and full of challenge!) and *Spellbinder's* guest book has many more entries. We encountered no crime and the locals we met were on the whole extremely friendly and helpful. Joining the Ocean Cruising Club was a real pleasure, and opened the way to meeting a great group of international sailors. I was surprised by the lack of young British people on yachts – there were many more French, German, Dutch and Scandinavian sailors in their twenties who had cobbled together to make dreams happen, sailing small yachts long distances while in the prime of their youth. Perhaps we Anglo-Saxons have lost the ability to do this – has life become too serious too soon? Do university debts impede this now, or are people too eager to gain employment or a mortgage?

The geography and culture I encountered were as wonderful as expected. I loved Madeira and the Canaries, but on another trip would spend more time in Cape Verde – they are wonderful, the people relaxed and friendly, and relatively unexplored. I wish I had planned another week or two there. Perhaps next time I will head to Suriname from Cape Verde. I had already sailed in the Windward Islands and they were as beautiful as I remembered, although increasingly crowded. Martinique was new to me though, and I found the west coast a delight – Le Marin is an ideal landfall after an Atlantic crossing. Sailing north, the Leewards are great islands to cruise, but the effects of the 2017 hurricanes (*Irma* and *Maria*) have left their mark. Dominica was the poorest of the countries we visited, but its lack of development is an attraction in itself. It made me reflect on the various constitutional choices these islands have made in the last 70 years, and the consequences of those choices. Of the other Leeward islands, Barbuda and Anguilla stood out to me as being the most beautiful. The BVIs had also been ravaged by *Irma* but are bouncing back; I can see why they are such a wonderful cruising ground, given their closeness and the ease of sailing. Anegada was the best of them. I found Bermuda expensive but quite interesting, and the Azores requiring a summer to be spent there – as with so many of the east Atlantic volcanic islands, the walking was superb.

By way of conclusion – it was a fantastic year, one I am already savouring in retrospect. I will continue to do so. It was an excellent mix of challenge (the first days of a long ocean passage are full of uncertainty, and it invariably took me a few days to sleep well), adventure, beauty, fun and cultural delight. It has left me relaxed and happy, and ready for new adventures. On the sailing side, I suspect *Spellbinder* will remain in European waters for the next few seasons – western Scotland, Ireland, Scandinavia and the Baltic call – but I would love to do another Atlantic circuit one day.

A final word to all my crew, and to my family – thank you for all your support. Without you none of this would have been feasible. I will shortly publish a further blog summarising each leg, to thank you more directly.

\*Islands set foot upon: **Madeira** – Porto Santo, Madeira and Ilas Desertas; **Canaries** – Tenerife, La Gomera, La Palma and Gran Canaria; **Cape Verde** – Sal, São Nicolau, Santa Luzia and São Vicente; **Windward Islands** – Dominica, Martinique, St Lucia, St Vincent, Bequia, Mustique, Mayreau, Union Island, Petit Rameau and Baradal (Tobago Cays), Petit St Vincent, Sandy Island, Carriacou and Grenada; **Leeward Islands** – Terre-de-Haut, Ilet à Cabrit, Basse Terre (Guadeloupe), Antigua, Barbuda, Nevis, Basse Terre (Saint Kitts), Saint Barts, Saint Martin, Anguilla (including Prickly Pear island); **BVIs** – Virgin Gorda, Tortola, Cooper Island, Salt Island, Peter Island, Norman Island, Jost Van Dyke, Anegada; **Bermuda**; **Azores** – Flores, Terceira, São Miguel; **UK** – Isle of Wight and mainland Great Britain

\*\* Ocean passages over 1000 NM: Gosport to Madeira (1345 NM, 9 days); Cape Verde to Martinique (2100 NM, 13 days); Bermuda to Azores (1659 NM, 12 days); Azores to Gosport (1400 NM, 12 days)





## Annex – Spellbinder Equipment, Layout and Statistics



Spellbinder is a Hallberg Rassy 40, designed by German Frers. She is hull number 66, was built in 2005 and commissioned in 2006.

**Layout.** She has a centre cockpit layout and has 3 cabins – the main saloon, an aft cabin with a single and double berth, and a traditional forepeak with two singles which can be made into a double – in theory sleeping 7. She has a heads to port at the base of the companionway ladder, and to starboard a linear galley.

### Statistics:

- Length Over All (LOA): 12.4m / 40'8"
- Waterline length 10.6m / 34'9"
- Draft (unladen): 1.99m / 6'6"
- Beam: 3.82m / 12'6"
- Displacement 10.00 tonnes
- Gross tonnage 14.79
- Fuel capacity 445l
- Water capacity 460l

**Engine and Drivetrain.** She is equipped with a Yanmar 4JH 4E 54HP engine, which has an additional 120A alternator for fast battery charging. She has a 3 blade Gori folding prop.

**Bluewater fit-out.** Spellbinder was upgraded by her first owner to make her bluewater (extended offshore sailing) capable, and I have since added various bits and pieces. She has a Spectra Newport 400 12v water maker and satellite communications (Iridium, Sat C

and Icom 802 SSB linked to a Pactor 4 modem) as well as a number of other modifications appropriate to offshore passage making. These include fresh and saltwater manual foot pumps, LED lights throughout, 6 12v Hella fans for ventilation, 5 x solar panels totalling 310W, and a water towed generator (Aqua4gen). She has a WiFi booster and MailaSail Red Box system. She has two diesel tanks which give her some 900nm of range, and two water tanks, and in addition to her normal fridge she has a separate fridge / freezer.

**Rig and Sails:** She has a Selden rig with 3 spreaders and a removal forestay for a storm gib. All reefing is done at the mast, which has 'granny bars' for support. She has a double bow roller, to support a removal bowsprit for a furling gennaker (116m<sup>2</sup>) with furling mechanism and a Kobra 2 anchor with 60m of 8mm chain on an electric windlass. She also has a Breeze kedge anchor on chain and rope. Other sails are a 125m<sup>2</sup> Parasailor, a fully battened slab reefed main (49.1m<sup>2</sup>) by Jeckells with 3 reefs enclosed in a stack pack, a genoa (51.6m<sup>2</sup>), a working jib (38.9m<sup>2</sup>) and storm gib (13.1m<sup>2</sup>) which hanks on to a removable forestay. She has a spinnaker boom stowed on the mast (Selden MDS batten system), adjustable genoa cars, running back stays, a backstay tensioner and Selden Rodstay vang.

**Navigation.** She has a Furuno Black Box system 14 » TFT Chartplotter, interlinked to AIS and radar (Furuno 2.2KW) with Weatherfax. She also has Raymarine AIS B linked to an Axiom 7 Multifunction Display at the helm, which provides WiFi navigational data. There is a Raymarine ST7001G+ quadrant-mounted autopilot with giro rate processor Type II, along with Raymarine ST60 wind, speed and depth gauges. She has a Hydrovane self-steering system which also acts as an emergency rudder.

**Electrical.** She is powered by 6 x Rolls FS250 domestic 6v batteries giving a total of 720 aH, and a single separate 12v engine start battery. There is a galvanic isolator, Mastervolt MASS 12v/60A 230v charge controller and a Mastervolt battery manager. The modifications outlined above allow her batteries to be charged by engine, solar, wind or towed generator. The solar, wind and towed generators are each linked to separate charging mechanisms, giving redundancy.