

The Voyage CONTINUES...

Every year since an inaugural passage across the English Channel in 1988, **Barry Hill** and his crew have chartered a yacht in a different location for the third week in June, sailing over 6,500 miles and making 200 landfalls. Last year's 20th charter was in the blue, Aegean Sea.



Left: *Anastasia* sailing on the wind.

The Voyage Continues is the name we've given our annual sailing week, which began in 1988. There has been a total of 15 crew over the years, but three of the original crew of six continue to take part. With 2007 being the 20th anniversary it was decided to celebrate in style with a two week, one way passage from Athens to Rhodes in the southern Aegean. With the strong, northern Meltemi wind building at the end of June this would provide an exhilarating 500-mile, off the wind sail with an endless array

of wonderful harbours and anchorages to visit in both the Cyclades and the Dodecanese.

The crew of eight from Jakarta, Hong Kong, Singapore and the UK pitched up at the quirkily named Poisedon Hotel a day early to ensure the handover and provisioning could be done in good time to allow for a late afternoon departure. The Poisedon, in the hot southern suburbs of Athens, overlooks the vast Alimos Marina and the crew took advantage of the rooftop pool and bar for the first

sundowner of the trip.

With the local supermarket delivering the chosen selection of supplies on time we cast off at 1700 to make Aegina, 25 miles south of Athens. With a moonlit arrival finding the town quay full, we anchored off and savoured a great first day with dinner and drinks aboard. The forecast was for moderate northerlies building to F6-7 in the second week. The overall plan was to thread our way through the islands and visit a combination of favourite and

new destinations. In order to see as much as possible and also to provide the maximum amount of manoeuvring, the passage plan was built around making at least two landfalls a day, together with a full night sail. At this time of year there is good twilight and only seven hours of darkness, which is ideal for optimising night sails and making best use of the available time.

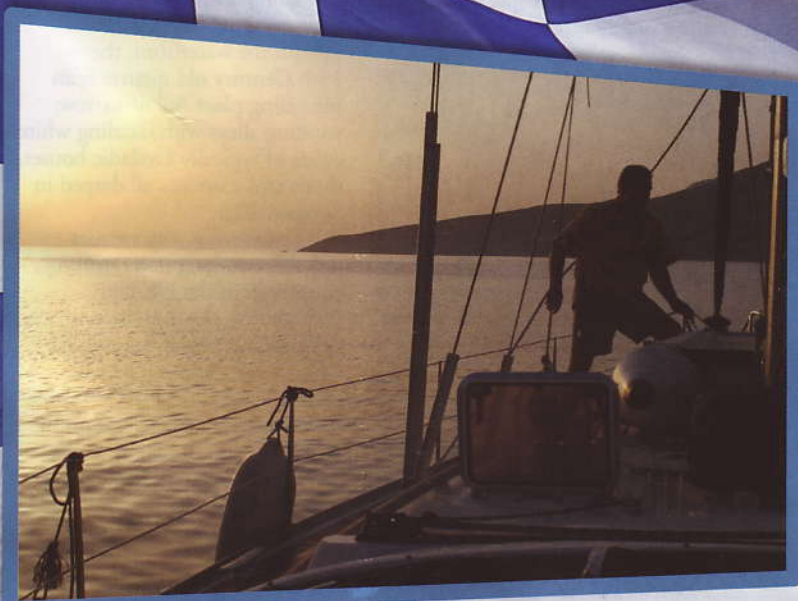
After stops at Kea and Kithnos, *Anastasia* set a course for Ermoupolis on Syros and with the large chute drawing well, we made a good 7kn under a clear blue sky. The approach to the capital of the Cyclades is stunning with the twin hills above the harbour each topped by the obligatory blue domed church and containing a mass of whitewashed buildings cascading down to the water's edge. The town buzzes with the self-importance of a commercial hub and the quayside is alive all day and night with a wide choice of bars and restaurants. The 18th Century square behind the waterfront is paved with marble and surrounded by several impressive public buildings. Off the square, more traditional tavernas and stylish boutiques can be found in the colourful backstreet alleys. This is a good place to stock up on provisions with the merchants providing a fine array of local produce and the

Weather/ when to go

The worst time to visit anywhere in Greece is in July and August when it can be unbearably hot and very windy – especially in the Cyclades. June and September are probably the best months, although May and October can be very pleasant. The prevailing wind is the Mistral, which blows down from the N and can blow F6-8 continuously for several days at a time.



Main photo: A narrow side street in Amorgas leading to the quay. Inset: Motoring into the sunset as the wind drops to a calm stillness.



CRUISING

GREECE

AEGEAN SEA

Eastern

TURKEY

IONIAN SEA

ATHENS

Aegina

Kea

Kithnos

Syros

Delos

Leros

Paros

Naxos

Iraklia

Amorgos

Astipalaia

Nisiros

Tilos

Simi

RHODE

CRETE

The area

Chartering in Greece really got off the ground in the late 1970s and it has remained enduringly popular. It has the longest coastline in the Mediterranean, once you unravel the indented coastline and untangle the islands. It also has some of the most consistent winds in the Mediterranean and settled summer weather, so not surprisingly this makes it a wonderful sailing area. There are anchorages everywhere, harbours big and small and even the odd marina or two.

For some, however, its popularity has led to criticisms that it is overcrowded now and in places it is impossible to get into harbours of an evening. Apart from one or two places, this is manifestly not true and with a little effort you can get off the beaten track to some quite stunning anchorages and harbours where you may even crave a little company.

The Cyclades, though not as green and luscious as the Ionian or N Aegean, are an interesting and strangely beautiful group of islands, particularly the southernmost ones. Navigation is simple with few obstacles and deep water everywhere, but winds here can be stronger than other more sheltered areas of the Aegean and Ionian, particularly in mid-summer, when the sea breeze can get up to F8 for a time. It usually dies down, though, by early evening.

Getting there

In the summer there are frequent flights from most of the regional UK airports to Athens and many by the low cost airlines. The flight itself takes around 3½-4 hours and Athens airport is just a 40-minute taxi ride from the marina. Alternatively, there is a tram, which takes a little longer, but is a fraction of the price.

fish market satisfying the need for ever more ice.

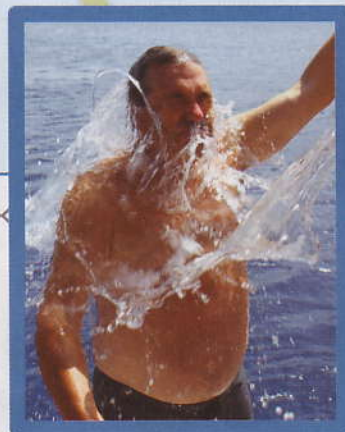
A departure at sunrise was rewarded with a good breeze to make the 20 miles for a swim and lunch stop at Delos. Delos was considered to be the last and best anchorage between Europe and Asia and hence became the political and religious centre of the ancient world. The extensive ruins are worth a visit and attract a constant stream of tripper boats from nearby Mykonos. Much remains from the early civilization including the theatre, the five lions guarding the lake, the temple in the great square of Apollo and

impressive mosaics of dolphins, panthers and birds.

In the anchorage, the meltemi was increasing and warranted an anchor watch, thus preventing all the crew making the dinghy trip ashore. After a fine lunch on board we took advantage of the new breeze and headed south to Paros. Paros is my favourite island, having first backpacked here in the 80s.

In September 2000 the ferry *Samina Express* hit the Portes rocks that guard the approach to the principal township of Paroikia. Eighty people died in the worst maritime disaster in

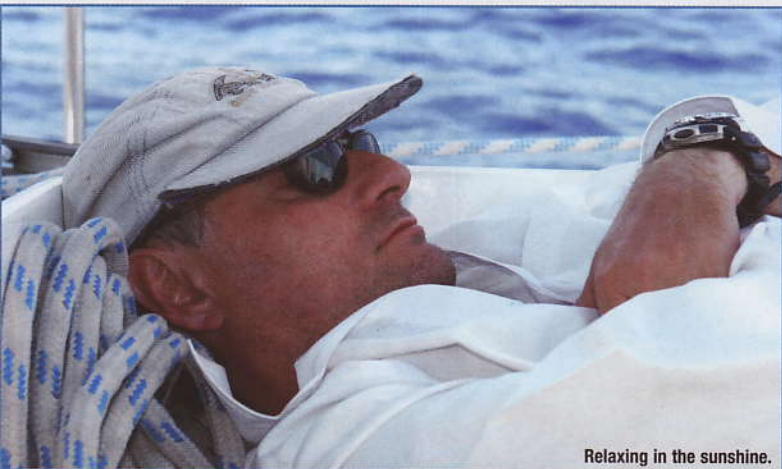
Right: A fresh water shower to cool down.
Below: The luxurious interior of our Greek-built Ocean Star 51.2 yacht.



Greece for 35 years. Paroikia has been noticeably tidied up over the years, but the old-world charm remains. The waterfront is now home to many delightful bars and restaurants, which provide a good refuge from the midday sun to watch the constant coming and going of the ferries bringing the throngs of holidaymakers. Behind the waterfront, the 13th Century old quarter is an intriguing place full of narrow, winding alleys with dazzling white cubes of typically Cycladic houses, shops and churches all draped in bougainvillea.

The following day we met up with two long term cruising couples from the UK and Denmark in the tiny harbour of Naoussa. Their boats bristled with all the trappings of self-sufficient gear and they were able to provide valuable advice on the small, less visited islands to the south of Naxos. We made good use of the information and made six interesting landfalls in the next couple of days. After sorting out crossed anchor chains in the





Relaxing in the sunshine.

thriving harbour of Amorgos on the island of the same name, we set sail at sunset in still, misty conditions for the 60-mile run to Leros. By the time of the first watch change the breeze had picked up and we enjoyed a good sail under the stars to arrive at Lakki just after sun up. Lakki stands at the head of the deep bay that was used as the Italian naval base during their occupation in the second world war.

The next day was spent exploring several anchorages on Leros and ended with a great meal in the Stavros Restaurant in the quaint fishing harbour of Ayia Marina. The plan for the

following day's passage to Astipalaia was brutally interrupted when Andy suffered a bad gash to his finger. We were well equipped with medical kit and were able to make a reasonable dressing, but it needed professional attention, so the 100hp engine was put to good use to get back to the hospital at Lakki. We finally made the quay of Skala on Astipalaia well after nightfall, but were still able to find some excellent Greek hospitality at a quayside restaurant to reflect on the dark day of the trip.

Nisiros is an extinct volcano in the southern Dodecanese. Arriving late in the evening we found the two small harbours

on the northern coast full, one with a flotilla and the other with Turkish gulets. After a brief negotiation with the harbourmaster at Mandraki we nudged *Anastasia* into a snug stern-to berth and all was well. The island is a charming spot off the tourist trail where water from the well is a daily chore. Trippers come on organized visits to the volcano, but we managed to hire our own bus for €70 to make the three-hour round trip. The dusty bus without air conditioning struggled up the hairy, hairpin-riddled road until we made the rim, but it was worth the trip to see the scale of the two and a half mile crater.

Simi is the jewel of the eastern Aegean and another island with a spectacular approach. The steep sides of the harbour are covered with blue, amber and cream houses built one upon the other amongst crops of pine. The harbour is a continuous bustle with yachts, gulets, power boats and fishing boats, all manoeuvring for a berth. Around the quayside, trendy shops, restaurants and music bars

make this a good destination for several days. A champagne sail to the mediaeval town of Rhodes was a fitting end to a great trip and with late flights out we had plenty of time to explore the walled city, which was once home to the Knights of St John.

The twentieth anniversary of *The Voyage Continues* visited 16 islands, made 31 landfalls and covered 515 miles. Long may it continue. ■

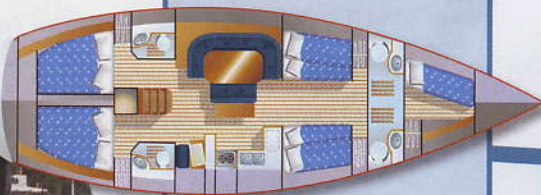
Charter operator

We booked our charter in the UK through Cosmos Yachting, which was superb all the way through. Cosmos offers a full line of yachts from monohulls to catamarans, accommodating two to 10 people.

The handover by the Cosmos base in Athens ranked amongst the best in our experience.

Cost: Approx £3,950 (June 2008), one-way fee £500 extra.

Contact: Cosmos Yachting 0800 376 9070 www.cosmosyachting.com



Our boat

Anastasia is a well found Ocean Star 51.2, comprising five cabins, a spacious saloon, a well equipped galley, an impressive navigation station and a superb cockpit. The refrigeration system was supplemented by a daily ice run to fill the large cockpit table compartment to provide a constant supply of cold ones.

Food and drink

Greek cuisine is simple, a little bit samey, but very tasty and pleasantly inexpensive. It is famous for its Greek salad – lettuce with egg, olives, anchovies, tuna, feta and cucumber. Evening specialities include Kleftiko (slow cooked lamb), spicy meat balls and freshly caught fish. Local wines are mostly very drinkable, though not strong. If in doubt, try the rose or order a 0.5ltr carafe of the house wine.



Berthed stern to and taking on water. The crew prepares for another day at sea.

