

GEMINI DUO TRIP THROUGH THE AEGEAN 2009 PART 3

Weaving through Greece and Turkey, 23 June - 20 July 2009

This part of the world has a painful history, with the population exchanges between the two countries in the early 20th century. Much was left behind and so there are disused mosques on Greek islands and Hellenic architecture in western Turkey. With the two countries lying so close to each other in the eastern Aegean, we are now hopping between Greek islands and mainland Turkey.

It was a pleasant change to only have a 4 hour journey with calm seas when we crossed from Lesbos to **Ayvalik** on the Turkish mainland. Our reason for staying in this quite big town is its proximity to **Pergamon**. We hired a car to drive 60km to the modern town of Bergama near the ancient ruined city. Pergamon first came to greatness in 300BC during the time of Alexander the Great. It has since been part of the Greek and the Roman empires and now modern Turkey. Despite temperatures in the mid 30s it was an impressive place with Greek temple and Roman amphitheatre remains amongst the many piles of carved marble and stones.

The summer months in the Aegean are marked by the *Meltemi*, a strong wind from the north. Unusually at the moment we were experiencing strong winds from the opposite direction. Therefore our southerly passage from Ayvalik to **Eski Foca** near Izmir was particularly bouncy and we were dismayed to find all moorings taken. However, opposite the main harbour new concrete quays are under construction for the fishing fleet so we cheekily tied up there for the night.

It wasn't really possible to stay any longer on that quay so despite the strong winds forecast we pressed on next morning. As soon as we got out of the shelter of the harbour we knew we were in for a rough ride. Winds were gusting Force 5 to 6 on the beam, causing the boat to roll 30 degrees from side to side. After 2 hours of that we rounded the next headland and headed straight into the southerly wind. The rolling ceased and the boat went into its "bucking bronco" mode. The bow climbed 3-4m before smashing down into the next wave. The wind climbed to Force 8 and we had to shut the windscreen with a lot of water breaking right over the boat, yet this was a more comfortable ride as *Gemini Duo* handles it well.

At this point perhaps we should describe our galley which is spacious and well equipped with full size domestic appliances. In rough seas, cupboards need to be wedged with towels to prevent contents crashing about and care must be taken when opening them to stop things falling out. It is the fridge opening which presents the biggest challenge – you really need many hands to stop bottles and bowls flying out! Luckily neither of us suffers from seasickness, but making lunch in rough seas is difficult. .

Lunch was made when we arrived at the tiny Greek island of **Oinoussa**, between Khios and mainland Turkey. We were very relieved when we tied up alongside the quay in the protected harbour. Oinoussa is not on the tourist trail. It is small, barren and insignificant but is the birthplace of several of the world's wealthiest shipping magnates who have large holiday homes on the island. Behind the mansions the village is crumbling and basic, with only one hotel, two tavernas, a couple of shops,

post office and museum, but five churches. We slept well and woke to leaden skies with thunderstorms and lightening on and off all day. Our boat benefited from the torrential rains washing off the encrusted salt. The second night was not so quiet with a local festival and band playing until 5.30am. However we only paid €10 for the two nights including electricity. Water is far more valuable than electricity and we never managed to get anything out of the taps on the quay.

We particularly wanted to visit the ancient city of Ephesus and we planned to overnight at two small fishing villages on the Turkish coast en route. The harbour entrance at the first port of call **Cesme** is dominated by a Genoese fortress in good repair - unlike the marina. With pontoons built for 400 boats, there were only about 40 tied up. A large expanse of wasteland where the marina village will stand separated us from the town. Cesme itself is great. Developing as a hot spot for Turkish tourists, the pedestrianised town centre has everything you could need.

Six hours down the coast we found **Sigacik** harbour was closed while they rebuild the marina, so we joined the other yachts at anchor in the bay. We never got to see the pretty village tucked inside crumbling medieval walls because we were too lazy to lower the dinghy! We were surprised to be visited by the coastguard in his high-speed inflatable as he went from boat to boat looking at passports and boat papers. This was our first encounter with Turkish port officials since Istanbul and we weren't even on land.

On the other hand, Greek port police usually want to see our papers. You have to be careful travelling between the two countries as officially every time you leave and re-enter Turkish waters you are meant to hand in and then reapply for the boat *transit log*. It is not just the cost but the length of time it takes to obtain the transit log which deters, so we had to make sure we told the relevant officials that our last port and next port were in their own country. We kept two log books going so as not to get confused.

Further down the Turkish coast the next day we stopped at **Kusadasi** to visit the ruins of **Ephesus** 15 km inland. We had strayed from our usual "hire a car and do it ourselves" mode and booked a tour for the next morning. After an hour waiting to be collected and two mobile phone calls our transport finally arrived and took us to the town of Selcuk where we joined a happy busload of mainly US and Australian tourists. Our gabbling Turkish guide was enthusiastic but barely understandable, but nevertheless the site was spectacular dating from 1000BC with the ruins on view today being largely Roman. The main temple is enormous - 4 times the size of the Parthenon. We were very tired after 3 hours of walking in 35C hot sunshine and were looking forward to returning to the marina and its swimming pool. We were then told that as the rest of the group was staying in Selcuk, we were being dropped at bus depot to take the dolmus (mini bus) back to Kusdasi town centre. We will revert to hiring a car next time!

Kusadasi itself is totally geared towards tourism with all day English breakfast, Irish pubs and sports bars everywhere. Huge cruise liners berth in the harbour and fleets of coaches ferry their passengers to and from Ephesus every day.

En route back to Greece and the island of Samos we passed through a channel only 1 mile wide that separates the two countries. There was a lovely bay for a lunchtime stop and swim, the only problem being that the channel was a main thoroughfare for

the cruise liners which sent large bow waves onto us when they passed and spilt our drinks! We stopped one night in pretty Pithagoria harbour on **Samos** tied up right in the town centre. Although the restaurants and bars were only 15m away they all stopped at a reasonable hour and we had a good night's sleep after a decent meal in a nearby taverna.

Continuing our southerly passage through the Dodecanese islands, the next day (1st July) we stopped for lunch and a swim in the quiet bay on the tiny island of **Agathonisi** but decided not to stay as the wind was getting up. The short trip to the even smaller island of **Arki** was rather rough with wind on our nose and swell on our beam but there was a solid concrete quay tucked up a protected cove. With about a dozen houses, two tavernas and one shop, it is a very quiet place indeed.

Next morning we left Arki in heavy seas heading 15nm due west to **Patmos**. To reduce the rolling action we headed down wind 10 miles past our destination before turning and heading upwind into the harbour which took us 3 hours in all. There was plenty of space on the quay in the large harbour although no electricity or water provided. Ten minutes after we docked the fuel man and the water man with their mini tankers were touting for business. We wish the diesel was as cheap as the water (1€ per litre for diesel vs 6€ for 250 litres of drinking water). We joined the throngs of religious tourists making their pilgrimage to the cave of St John where he wrote the Revelations then up to the Monastery of St John that overlooks Patmos.

On both nights we were sandwiched between giant super yachts which ran their generators all night to keep their illuminations and gizmos operational. The morning we left there was much fun and games as the boat on our right had dropped its anchor over the chain of the 150ft Azzurra II on our left. When Azzurra tried to lift her anchor the boat on our other side shot out from its mooring. Six crew spent an hour untangling the two chains. Fun to watch when it's not your anchor!

Just 3 hours journey brought us to **Leros** where we stopped at a small marina in the main harbour of Lakki. The large buildings round the bay date from the Italian occupation and it has the feel of an old movie set. In the late 1950s the Greek government sent most of the country's mentally handicapped here which gave Leros the reputation of being "strange". The institutions are now closed and the islanders are very friendly and welcoming. .

Leros's nearest neighbour is **Kalymnos** which our pilot book said has a factory for filling gas bottles outside the main port. We have two 6kg Dutch gas bottles which were supplied with our boat to fit neatly into a locker. One bottle lasted through the whole of last season and it finally ran out this year while we were still in Istanbul. Since then we have asked at most places we have stopped and often been sent on wild goose chases through mazes of narrow streets. The catch is that where gas is available, it is either Greek or Turkish gas where an empty bottle is swapped for a full one. As our gas bottles are Dutch we couldn't make a swap, and nowhere seemed to sell new bottles, nor the new regulator we would need. We found a space on the busy quay in the large working port at Kalymnos and went to the nearby yacht club. Amazingly they said they could arrange for our bottle to be filled and returned next morning – and to our surprise it was!

We decided to avoid Kos and head back to Turkey where we stopped for one night at **Turgutreis**, north of Bodrum. It was just a waypoint for the **Gulf of Gokova** which is

so different from anywhere else we have visited on this trip. Mid afternoon we pulled into a sheltered inlet surrounded by pine clad hills with crystal clear waters and were met by a man in a speed boat who offered up a laid line attached to a rickety floating pontoon outside the Mary Rose Restaurant, one of three tavernas in the hamlet of **Cokertme**. No charge is made for stopping here and using their electricity and water as long as you eat in their restaurant.

Our next night in the Gokova Gulf was at anchor in a group of islands called variously, **Snake, Castle and Cleopatra**. It was busy with gulets and day tripper boats, but they all departed by sunset leaving us and one yacht in the bay. It is popular because of the very fine sand on the beach which is said to have been brought here from Egypt by Cleopatra's barges for Mark Anthony's enjoyment. After a very quiet night we left as the tripper boats were arriving and headed east for **Sogut**, a hamlet tucked up a magnificent inlet between high wooded hills, a charming spot where we spent the night and enjoyed the swimming.

Our last night in the beautiful Gokova gulf was in the harbour of **Kormen** which although very small is the ferry port for Datcha on the other side of the narrow peninsula. We were tied up to the only restaurant which had a surge of clients before the ferry for Bodrum left. We had an excellent but expensive fish meal that evening and left early the next day to go round the headland to Datcha before the forecast gales arrived.

There was plenty of space at **Datcha** when we arrived at lunchtime on Sunday but over the next few days more and more yachts arrived to shelter from the gale force winds. Even in the protected harbour winds touched Force 7. Datcha is a delightful place to be marooned in. Once a small fishing port, it retains its village feel while catering for visitors from all over the world. It is a great place to watch the yachts and gulets jostle for space on arrival and cross their anchor chains in the process. Departures were often delayed for some time while crews struggled to untangle their knotted chains. We hired a car to visit the ancient city of **Knidos** on the end of the Datcha peninsula. The Greek ruins hail from 4th century BC and some of the structures are quite remarkable and the site was uncrowded. .

After five nights the wind dropped enough for us to leave Datcha and make the trip across the bay to the tiny fishing village of **Bozburun** which used to be the sponge fishing centre of Turkey. Now most of the gulets, the traditional Turkish wooden sailing boats used for private cruising, are built in the next bay while the pretty harbour welcomes visiting yachts.

After a most relaxing visit we rounded the final peninsula and spent the last night of our voyage in the inlet of **Bozuk Buku** beneath the ruins of ancient Loryma. The day started well with no wind and mirror-glass sea but later it became our "day of mishaps". We anchored up and took a long rope to shore, something we had never done before. Too lazy to launch the dinghy, Roger swam some 45m to shore and tied the rope to a large rock. Later the wind changed direction and pushed the boat closer and closer to the rocks and we decided it was best to move. Back to the rock Roger swam, struggled to get the knot undone while the boat was getting ever nearer to the cliff face and when the rope was released it got caught round the propeller when Diane put the boat into gear. We think that reverse gear may have been used instead of neutral at some point! Roger then had to go under the boat three times to cut away the rope from the prop. Once free and moving again we headed for the

nearby restaurant pontoon where we enjoyed a nice dinner on the terrace while the wind worked itself up again. Deciding to put another ball fender between us and the next yacht, Roger pushed the yacht away and in the process fell between the two boats fully dressed! His wallet, money and credit cards dried out by next morning.

These were our first mishaps on the whole journey, so we thought it best to head straight for this year's final destination of **Marmaris** where we will leave the boat in the excellent Yacht Marina for the winter.

It has taken us 8 weeks to travel 925 nautical miles (1017 miles or 1620km) from Istanbul to Marmaris through the Sea of Marmara, the Dardanelles and the Aegean.

It is 40C + with no wind, so we are looking forward to returning home this week for some typical English summer weather.

Anchors down!

Roger and Diane



GEMINI
DUO
LONDON