

# **Mina<sup>2</sup> South America**

## **Transcript of Blog**

### **5 November 2010 to 25 January 2011**

#### ***Mina<sup>2</sup>* Restarts Adventure in Perfect Condition – Or So We Thought**

**Date: 5 November 2010**

**Position: Lago Azul – Ilha Grande 23:05.2S 44:14.3W**

I don't know how many component parts make up a modern yacht but it is thousands. Like any complicated combination of electrics, electronics, wire, rope, sailcloth, canvas, wood and glass fibre, if you pick it up on a regular basis and slam it down sideways onto something hard, spray it with salt water and subject it to extreme heat and the withering effects of tropical ultra-violet rays they all, in turn (and sometimes all together), break, wear out, fade and need re-varnishing, re-sewing, re-splicing, re-pairing or simply re-replacing. If there are (say) 2,000 bits and they all last on average five years, then you are talking about 400 jobs that need doing every year.

So when I arrived on the boat three weeks ago lugging bags containing one T-shirt, a spare pair of socks and 60 kg of spare parts and other boat bits, the "To Do" list was as long as a lavatory roll. I had two and a half weeks before the Downstairs Skipper was to arrive and she would be expecting all the work to be done and the boat in a state of perfection. No time to waste. Up every morning before dawn, I laboured without break until after dark, had a quick meal and was in bed, exhausted, by 2200 hrs. Some jobs took minutes; others took an entire day and a few I found were beyond my own capabilities. Enter my Guardian Angels, Maria-Teresa and Assis, a wonderful Brazilian couple who live on a large catamaran in the marina. They had taken it upon themselves to look after *Mina<sup>2</sup>* during my six-month absence – arranging for the bottom to be scrubbed regularly in this petri dish of warm water and marine growth, and keeping the mushrooms from growing down below in the hot and humid atmosphere.



### ***Mina*<sup>2</sup> in her snug berth in Marina Bracuhy**

Nothing was too much trouble for them; no problem that did not have a solution. Between them and Luis, a charming Argentine doctor who also lives aboard his boat in the marina, the day of the arrival of The Queen of The Downstairs Department approached and everything was in order. The DS was to arrive shortly after midnight and I spent the afternoon applying the finishing touches. A bit of polishing here, a final pass of the vacuum there. One last cleansing flush of the heads (the loos) and – disaster. The aft head (where our cabins is) jammed solid.

When the DS arrived on board in the early hours, without a glance she walked past the pristine decks, the gleaming superstructure, coiled ropes and the immaculately stitched new suede coverings, went below and said “God alive, what’s that ghastly smell?”. I had spent the entire evening completely dismantling the head and was still no closer to identifying the problem.

After a difficult night, I spent our first morning together dismantling more and more of the boat until, at last, I found the source of the problem. A small but inquisitive fish had found its way into the inlet pipe of the mechanism, got jammed, and died. And with it died any attempts to flush the head. On finding the putrefying cause of the problem, I was triumphant. The DS was disgusted. But within minutes, all was reassembled in perfect working order including the relationship of *Mina*<sup>2's</sup> two skippers. We were ready to sail off into the sunset on our paradise cruise down the coast of Brazil.



### **Tim's triumphant discovery in the loo pipe**

The following morning my back went out. Those that know me know that I get the occasional twinge. On a scale of 1 to 10, this was a mere 7 (10 involves screaming in agony, fainting with pain and hospitalisation) but it was enough to prevent me from getting out of the cockpit, let alone getting off the boat or contemplating the start of our cruise until Drastic Measures were taken. I carry with me for such eventualities, courtesy of my doctor, a Killer Cocktail of three of the most powerful drugs known to man. Whilst guaranteed to solve the problem by turning my body to jelly and relieving the symptoms into submission, they also turn my brain to jelly. I knocked the pills back, painfully retired to bed, said au revoir to the DS and passed out for 24 hours.

Two days later, on 3 November, with my back brace tightly secured and chewing Ibuprofen, we (well, the DS actually) cast off our lines and after 7 months *Mina*<sup>2</sup> motored out of Brachuhy Marina.

Dear Readers, do not expect Great Adventures this year. Last year our 10,000 nautical miles, four continents and ten different countries was a bit of an exception. This year, in contrast, is planned to be a much more relaxed 1200 mile jaunt down the coast of South America from Brazil, through Uruguay ending up in Buenos Aires in Argentina, home of course to the DS.

We start off in the bay of Ilha Grande in between Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo (Santos). 40 miles long and 20 miles deep with 365 tropical islands, the bay is one of the great cruising grounds of the world and the DS and I will be wandering around here for a week or two. Even Expedition Boats need a holiday from time to time.

Once we get to Santos the gaps between safe havens increase somewhat, involving passages of several days, so the DS will wisely leave the boat and go and visit her mother in BA and I will be joined by the Three Musketeers, Lawrence, Tom and

Richard, who plan to join me for the passages down to Montevideo in Uruguay. We should arrive in BA shortly before Christmas.

So, much in the same way as you wouldn't burden your friends with blogs of your holidays, my updates are likely to be sporadic – not the daily fix of last year but perhaps a weekly update to keep you in touch with our whereabouts.

We're currently three days in to our wanderings which have consisted of drifting to a perfect tropical island and anchoring off a deserted palm-fringed beach; barbecue a large steak or sausages and chicken hearts for lunch washed down with a heart-lifting caipirinha, then swimming in the warm, crystal clear azure waters with the exotic fish and mermaids prior to a little siesta after the exertions of the morning. See how dull it all is?



### **One of the hundreds of secluded beach anchorages**

The only slight glitch is that our autopilot (electronic self-steering mechanism) has packed up which means we have to hand steer everywhere, which is a bore. I spent most of yesterday morning on the phone to Raymarine in the UK and pulling the boat apart trying to identify the problem. If we can't source the faulty component here, then it will have to be couriered out to us – but you can't expect everything in life to be perfect.

Today we went to yet another delightful anchorage. I was rowed ashore by the DS like one of Nelson's admirals (I'm milking the bad back as much as I can – I can see it going on for weeks) and we walked a mile and a half through the jungle across a peninsula to the most spectacular beach we've ever seen. En route, whilst keeping an eye open for killer snakes and man-eating spiders, we came across some delightful friendly little marmosets / lemurs / monkeys with tufted ears and long striped tails (I'm sure Jo Gipps will put me right on this one). An enchanting day.



**Our jungle friends**



**The perfect beach**

**Cold, Wet Days in Paradise**

**Date: 15 November 2010**

**Position: Bahia do Ilha Grande**





When we were here last March it was so incredibly hot we threw ourselves into the bath-warm sea at every opportunity and even a T-shirt was more than one could bear. And one of the problems with this area is that there is rarely any wind to cool one down. At the moment things are different.

The trouble started about five nights ago. The DS and I had anchored off a lovely secluded beach for a peaceful night's sleep. At 0430 we awoke with the wind screaming through the rigging. We were pinned to a lee shore which was only a few metres behind us, with less than a metre of water under our keel. The glass-like water of a few hours before had become distinctly lively. Time for an early exit. The DS went forward and got the anchor up and with the faintest glimmer of dawn on the eastern horizon we made our way eight miles down the Ilha Grande to what we knew would be a much more protected anchorage. The gale-force winds lasted just a few hours and everything was back to normal – no wind, a bit of cloud and warm. So we sailed back to the anchorage that only a few hours earlier had been the site of *Mina*<sup>2</sup>'s near demise. A toothless old man paddled past in a dugout canoe and sold us some delicious coconut and sugar biscuits, still warm from the oven. The DS quizzed him about the weather – what was the strong wind in the night all about – what did it portend? “You want good weather, don't you?” he asked. “Of course”, we replied. “This wind clears the air – you will now have good weather for days” he declared with the authority of decades of local knowledge.



### **The Skippers at leisure before the weather broke**

Even as he spoke the rain clouds were gathering, and within a couple of hours visibility was down to a couple of hundred metres with tropical rain which lasted the next 36 hours. We have learned that Brazilians are keen to please and will tell you what you want to hear, however far from the truth it might be.

Ever since then, the skies have never properly cleared, it has drizzled on and off and it has been positively freezing by Brazilian standards. The temperature is down to the low 20's Centigrade. Sweaters are being worn and we are on the verge of getting the duvet out of storage.



### **The cold wet weather approaches**

I mentioned in my previous blog that I was having to hand steer everywhere as a small sensor in the autopilot had packed up. This was a real bore and would become increasingly so on the longer passages to come. As luck would have it, one of the few Raymarine agents was based close by and we arranged to go in to have it replaced. The only downside was that Raymarine parts are notoriously expensive and in Brazil they are three times the price of notoriously expensive. But needs must, and having handed over a good chunk of our childrens' inheritance in cash (Raymarine in Brazil don't take credit cards?!), all is now fixed.

On Friday we went into the marina in the local town of Angra Dos Reis, a) to refill our tanks with fresh water, b) to do a massive shop at the very good supermarket within the marina, and c) to await the arrival of Christine & Fernando who were to join us from Buenos Aires for a week's cruise round the islands. Surprisingly, the marina had no water pipe on the visitors' pontoon or at the fuel point, so we have had to commission the water maker to make our own fresh water from the sea. Let's hope the makeshift pump cobbled together in Senegal last year holds out.

Christine and Fernando arrived after their three-hour taxi ride from Rio de Janeiro, Christine swathed in layers of thermals and quilted jackets against the bitter cold and we set off in the drizzle to an anchorage for the night. Every morning I look at the forecasts and every morning the longed for improvement in the weather is put off for a further 24-hours. There is a distinct possibility that Christine and Fernando will return to Buenos Aires without having seen the sun at all. Nevertheless it's great having them on board and we're all having fun.



**The DS with Christine dressed for the Arctic**

### **Republic of Ireland and *Mina2* in Financial Meltdown as Infrastructure Collapses**

**Date: 20 November 2010**

**Position: Saco de Mamanguá 23:16.03S 044:37.49**

Well, I was almost right about Christine & Fernando never seeing the sun at all. The weather remained cold (by Brazilian standards) and wet (by any standards) for the first five days of their visit, but yesterday the sun came out and Christine slowly thawed out, peeling off her clothes down to the last five layers. Nevertheless, the dramatic Brazilian coastline and islands are as differently attractive in the cloud and rain as they are in the sun and we've enjoyed some stunning anchorages.





**Christine & Fernando enjoying the first of the sun at the end of their holiday**

I know that talk in the blog about problems on the boat irritates Selina, but tough. Our autopilot packed up again. Different problem this time and altogether more serious. We managed to get the local Raymarine technicians on board who said that the computer that runs the whole thing was almost certainly knackered and possibly another critically important bit as well. Raymarine clearly know their captive audience well, and a plastic box with a couple of electronic chips with less processing power than my watch costs about the same in the UK as a reasonably priced family car – but without it we would be hand-steering 1200 miles down to Buenos Aires. But in Brazil, where there is a 90% import tax before they look at your boat and decide to add another 50% for good measure, for the price they charge I could buy a Ferrari and still have change. Which is all rather academic if there were any of the magic boxes available anywhere in the world. I called Raymarine in the UK and drew a blank. They were out of stock and wouldn't get any in before December. If there were any in Brazil, they were “down South” somewhere and would take days to be transported north. In desperation I contacted my Fairy Godmother, Ally Ford at Oyster Aftersales, aka Debbie McGee, who just happened to have the only spare one in the world sitting on her desk. So as we speak it is on its way to Lawrence to bring out with him next weekend. The next problem will be to get it fitted and calibrated – Raymarine in Brazil will only fit things if they have supplied it. Time will tell.

So having paid the equivalent of a reasonably priced family car we now have to trim our financial sails and we have introduced spending cuts more savage than those needed by Ireland. We have slashed our consumption of caipirinhas from six a day per person to just four. Incidentally, I have worked out why caipirinhas have the effect of giving one a lift like no other drink on earth. I calculated that the quantity of

alcohol in an average caipirinha is the equivalent of about five large gins. Simple really.

Though I say it myself, I had been pretty impressed by my replacement of the suede cover on my wheel and various other bits of leather work, so when my watch strap fell apart, rather than buying a new one, to save money I cut and sewed one myself from a scrap of suede I had lying around.



**Pretty fancy leatherwork**



**.... and a money-saving watch strap**

When I showed the near-perfect results to my admiring crew Fernando was waxing lyrically in Spanish to the DS and Christine about my skills. There was one word he used to describe me that I wasn't familiar with. When I later looked up the meaning of "ingreido" I was surprised to find the rough translation is "smug bastard". I must have misheard him.

The last couple of days we have been at the west end of the enormous bay where lies the once immensely wealthy town of Paraty. It made its money three hundred years ago by being at the end of the road from the gold mines, so all the wealth of Brazil passed through the town to be shipped back to Portugal. The old colonial town has been preserved in almost mint condition and is a unique monument of Brazil in her colonial heyday.



### Old Paraty

Having spent a day looking around Paraty we took *Mina*<sup>2</sup> 15 miles into Saco de Mamanguá, a deep and wide fjord. Almost no boats visit the fjord and apart from one or two smart houses, about the only life is in the small fishing village half way down. With no road access the people lead a simple, isolated, and contented life.





### **Still making dugout canoes from a single tree trunk**

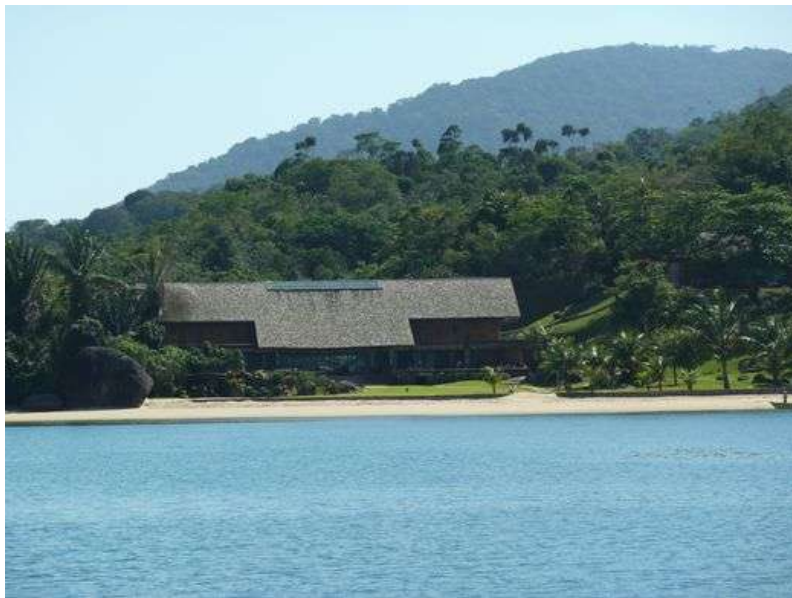
The locals were immensely friendly and keen to tell us all about their lifestyle. We asked about the totally demolished wreck of what had clearly been quite a large house on the outskirts of the village. Whilst Maria speaks passably good Portuguese, I struggle, but was getting the gist. “Ah” said one “that was a grand house built by a Korean, but Obama blew it up three weeks ago. They used 50kg of dynamite!”

I was horrified. Was there no end to the arrogant and violent foreign policy of the United States? Not satisfied with invading sovereign territories with governments they don't like, they were now blowing up the homes of Koreans in Brazil. It was outrageous. The DS calmed me down and explained it wasn't Obama but IBAMA, the Brazilian tax authority. The Korean had built the house illegally, and had ignored all fines imposed on him, so they simply blew the house up. There was an even grander house a mile down the fjord which is due to be blown up in 50 days. Well, it certainly provides a bit of entertainment (and recycled building materials) for the locals. Mind you, I hadn't got it as wrong as Christine who instead of hearing Obama had heard Osama and was imagining gangs of radical Muslims going round blowing up houses in isolated parts of rural Brazil.





**One down...**



**...and the next one to go**

## **Skippers' Entrepreneurial Endeavours – The Results**

**Date: 23 November 2010**

**Position: Paraty (still)**

Happily the last few days of Christine and Fernando's holiday were spent in scorching sunshine. At one lovely spot where we were anchored, a couple of young lads rowed up to us in a dinghy with a bucket of fresh oysters they had yanked off the mangroves up the nearby river. Maria (The Downstairs Skipper) doesn't do oysters ("They look and taste like snot") but the rest of us were up for it so we bought a couple of dozen.

They were on the small side but absolutely delicious. It transpired that it was the first time that Christine had tried oysters and she loved them.

The ongoing saga of the autohelm problem continues. The plan was that the DS and I would drift 160 miles down the coast this week to Santos, stopping off at some wonderful places along the way. Santos is the port for Sao Paulo and Richard, Tom and Lawrence were flying in next Saturday to resume the journey south.

The Raymarine technician arrived last Saturday, as arranged, and after a bit of testing said that both the main component parts needed replacing. Ally at Oyster had come up trumps being able to lay her hands on the critical components and having remotely swiped my credit card with the equivalent cost of a modest two-bedroomed flat, she was shipping them off to Lawrence to bring out with him. But once here, they have to be fitted and calibrated – a specialist job and we were uncertain whether we could find anyone in Santos to do the job. Tiago, our friendly Raymarine chap in Paraty said that he could do the job for us, but here in Paraty – not in Santos. The DS and I decided that a certainty in the wrong place was better than an improbability in the right place, so a major change of plan.

Maria and I are now staying in this area for a week. Meanwhile the Three Musketeers would be winging there way to the wrong airport, some five hours away by taxi. But as they say, if you want to give God a really good laugh, tell him what your cruising plans are.

To cap it all, ten minutes after Tiago left the boat I noticed that all the other Raymarine instruments – wind speed and direction, boat speed and, most importantly in these shallow waters, the display that tells you when you are just about to go aground – all of which had been working perfectly before Tiago came on board an hour earlier, had all packed up. The whole lot. I'm beginning to have my doubts about Tiago.

The DS started off by being a bit grumpy about the change of plan as she had been really been looking forward to our cruise south, but she then reflected that if you had to be holed up anywhere due to technical problems, there were worse places than a bay which is as close to paradise as one can get.

Meanwhile, with a bit of time on our hands and an increasing need to defray the rapidly escalating cost of this cruise, I have decided to set up an Artesano stall in the town selling bits of fancy rope and leather work – ornate keyrings made out of bits of string; elegant suede watch straps etc, and I will be taking commissions for bespoke suede wheel covers.

The DS has sportingly agreed to dig out her old fishnet stockings and whilst I'm flogging my creations on the main street, she will be trying to drum up a bit of business in the backstreets. Desperate measures for desperate times. Between you and me, I'm expecting to make rather more money out of my venture than she will, but you've got to give the old girl 10 out of 10 for trying.

## **The End of the Holiday**

**Date: 25 November 2010**

**Position: Paraty (again)**

Unable to move south because of technical problems, the Downstairs Skipper and I have enjoyed our last few days holed up in paradise. We went round to the last bay in the Baía de Ilha Grande and anchored off the deserted beach in the western corner of the Enseada do Pouso (23 deg 16.09S 044 deg 34.82W). A fishing family saw us come in and paddled over to the shack on the beach where a few tables were arranged. The bar and restaurant was open. This is the way it works here. Very few boats pass this way, let alone anchor but, if they do, a fisherman's wife will be happy to cook for you whatever they have available. In this case she produced some delicious fresh water crayfish that they caught in traps in the waterfalls behind the beach.



**Unexpected lunch of waterfall crayfish**



**Life in the Enseada do Pouso**

After lunch, wishing to avoid a roly night in the Atlantic swell which was curling round the headland, we returned to the most beautiful anchorage round the back of Ilha da Cotia in the Enseada de Paraty-Mirim (23 deg 13.619S 044 deg 38.46W) and stayed there for two days. But in the backs of our minds was the knowledge that our rare holiday together was almost at an end. After a romantic candle-lit dinner of barbecued chicken and a bottle of wine, preceded of course by our traditional sundowner of a devilishly strong Caipirinha, the DS began tidying up before she left the boat. She started with the “almost empty” bottles.



“There’s only a scrap of this Baileys. You desperately need the storage space. I’ll free it up for you” she said, emptying the contents almost to the brim of a large glass. “I’ll drink it through a straw so it lasts longer” the DS added thoughtfully. Within a nano-second, there was the sound of gurgling. The glass was empty.

“Oh, that didn’t work” she said, “The problem with drinking through a shtraw is that one feelsh compelled to shuck it”. Whereupon she dived below saying “Let’s shee what other bottlsh need tidying up.”

Tomorrow, The Three Musketeers arrive – Tom, Richard and Lawrence. They will be joining me for the next three weeks whilst we dive south 1200 miles to Buenos Aires. Although travelling with just a couple of pairs of shorts, T-shirts and some sun tan cream, they will each be tipping the Heathrow scales with all the spare parts I have had sent to them. I can’t wait to see them.



**The anchorage at Paraty**



**.... a short dinghy ride from the old town**





## **New Crew and Spares Arrive – A Bit of a Disappointment**

**Date: 28 November 2010**

**Position: Paraty (for the last time)**

Lawrence, Tom and Richard had to take a five hour taxi ride from Sao Paulo up to Paraty to join the stricken *Mina2*. To make their life more simple Maria had booked the taxi to meet them. They poured themselves off the plane out into the terminal building and – no one. Frantic text messages and phone calls ensued and eventually the taxi driver was tracked down with a completely wrong name on the card he was holding up. On arrival at the marina at midday, I embraced the three reprobates with tears in my eyes, mainly because buried in their overweight luggage were all the new spares necessary to get *Mina2* back on the high seas again.

We had booked the technician to come onboard at 1500 to install the new kit – no more than a two-hour job, he had assured us. After two hours he was still buried deep in the bowels of the boat with bits of heavy engineering and complex boxes of circuitry strewn around him. After three hours he hit me with the truly devastating news that the brand new, indescribably expensive course computer – the only one available in the world - that had taken so much trouble to find, have delivered to Lawrence and then brought half way round the globe – well, it didn't work. The technician couldn't understand why I was crying with a Stanley knife in my hands and trying to slit my wrists.

However the suspect competence of the technician did yield one small reward and that was that the old course computer which he had a couple of weeks before declared dead was in fact still workable, so he cobbled it all back together with some of the other spares that had been brought out and at least we don't (until something else goes wrong) have to hand-steer 1200 miles down the coast. After four hours, having actually achieved what I could have done in ten minutes, the technician left with all that remained of the large amount of emergency cash I once carried. The DS couldn't understand why I was so depressed.

Meanwhile, the boys had decided on their accommodation (Lawrence and Richard sharing the large for'ard cabin, and Tom in the small bunk cabin) stowed their bags and had headed off to see the delights of Paraty. The DS and I joined them much, much later for a splendid last / first night celebration.

Throughout the night someone on a nearby boat seemed to be using a pneumatic drill intermittently the entire time. None of us slept well. In the morning, Lawrence staggered bleary-eyed out of the for'ard cabin, dragging his luggage with him. "It's impossible" he said "It's like trying to sleep with an amorous walrus". He de-camped to the already cramped bunk cabin to share with Tom. Richard, of course, woke totally refreshed after a comfortable night's snoring.

After breakfast I bade a tearful farewell to the DS as she left for the long journey to Buenos Aires to see her mother, whilst I was left with a bunch of drunks to negotiate the long and dangerous passages south to Uruguay. It was going to be tough and probably quite unpleasant.



**Richard, Lawrence & Tom ... it can only get worse**

### **The Journey South Begins**

**Date: 30 November 2010**

**Position: Ilha Bela 23:46.212S 045:21.216W**

The three drunks and I were to be together for just over two weeks, sailing 1,200 miles south from Bahia Ilha Grande, in between Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo, down to Uruguay where they would then get a ferry over to Buenos Aires for their flight home. I had split the trip into seven passages ranging from a nice day sail of 50 miles, up to a three day passage of 450 miles between Porto Belo and Rio Grande. I had tried to select stopovers which would be of interest to them so that they could get to see a bit of Brazil as well as get some good sailing in.

**Sunday 28 November.** But to ease them in we started off with a little trip round the bay and a lazy day at anchor, so that they could see some of the lovely places Maria and I had enjoyed. The sun was hot – unusually not a cloud in the sky – and Lawrence the Sun God got down to a serious bit of sunbathing.



**Lawrence popping up the mast to fix the deck light – nice bit of thigh**

Our first passage was an overnight sail of 70 miles from Paraty down to the island of Ilha Bela, a very pretty island with massive mountains of volcanic rock covered with the ubiquitous rain forest and palm trees. Ilha Bela is reputedly also home to the biggest colony of the dreaded borrachudo, a small insect with a big bite. You never see them coming and the first thing you notice is a pin prick of blood. Then the trouble starts. The itch is ten times as bad as a mosquito bite and they last ten times as long. We had a pleasant sail with the wind behind us and no more than the yankee (big sail at the front) wafting us along, as if we went too fast we would get there before dawn. We only had to turn the engine on for the last few hours when the wind died away. I have some fishing gear on board but can never be bothered to use it, but Tom and Lawrence got it all out and in no time we were streaming a couple of lures. In the middle of the night Lawrence hauled in the most ghastly looking thing. It had a prehistoric head with large teeth and enormous eyes. Long and wafer thin there was clearly not a lot of meat on it. None of us even liked to look at it.



**Lawrence, in typical pose, and his devil fish**

We picked up a mooring of the Yacht Clube de Ilha Bela (after some difficulty in identifying the exact location of the club) at 23° 46.212S 045° 21.216W and even though it was only 0730 we kept the age-old *Mina*<sup>2</sup> tradition of an “anchor nip”. As we sat drinking the early morning tonic, Tom yelped. There was a tell-tale pin prick of blood on his arm. The first of the borrachudos had arrived and we all dived for the cans of Deet.

We got the dinghy down and checked in at the yacht club. Security was tight and the bureaucracy bewildering. To stay one night on one of their mooring buoys, why did they need to know exactly what frequencies all my various radios transmitted on, and how many flares, lifejackets and fire extinguishers we had on board? To get our passes that would grant us entry to the yacht club, they needed an ID number. We’d left our passports on board, but they seemed happy with the number of Tom’s Esher & District Senior Citizens Bus Pass, Lawrence’s membership number of the National Farmers’ Union, Richard’s VOP\* Rail Card and the number of an out of date Visa card that I carry to hand over in case of muggings.

(\*Very Old Person’s)



Ilha Bela is a stunning island that we didn't have the time to explore. The little tourist town has nice enough but not worth blogging too much about. Quite why it is on the cruise ship itinerary is a mystery. Every morning two enormous ships disgorge their overweight punters into the town, swamping it with Kiss Me Quick hats and tattoos, lining up at the lanchonetes – the fast food snack bars – for another injection of deep fried high fat delicacies.

### **Lawrence Is Incredibly Old Today**

**Date: 4 December 2010**

**Position: Porto Belo 27:08.692S 048:32.094W**

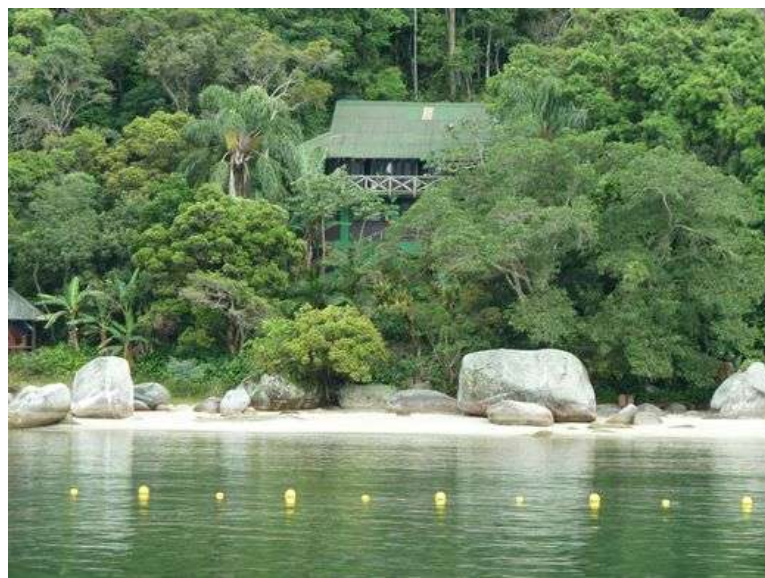
Our visit to São Francisco do Sul was a pit-stop and after our leisurely lunch and a walk round the wet town we motored back out of the river and sailed overnight to Porto Belo 70 miles south. Just after dawn as we were motoring in windless conditions, I was awoken by the sounds of panic on deck.

“No - turn left. He's indicating us to turn left”.

“We can't turn left or we'll run into his net!”

I was on deck in half a second to see a small fishing boat about 50 metres away with a man jumping up and down and frantically waving his arms. He had a long net out of the back of the boat and had been slowly motoring in a large circle, closing the net and trapping the fish. The Drunks had successfully navigated us right in to the middle of his net circle. This would be the fisherman's biggest catch ever. Getting a fishing net caught round your prop is one of the worst nightmares of sailors. You have to spend hours diving down with a knife between your teeth to cut it all away before handing large sums of money to the fisherman as compensation for ruining his sole means of making a living. Eventually we found a small gap between the fishing boat and the end of his net and shot out to freedom, much to everyone's relief.

We arrived in Porto Belo at 0645, a delightful bay with a number of beautiful anchorages, in one of which we anchored for a lazy day.



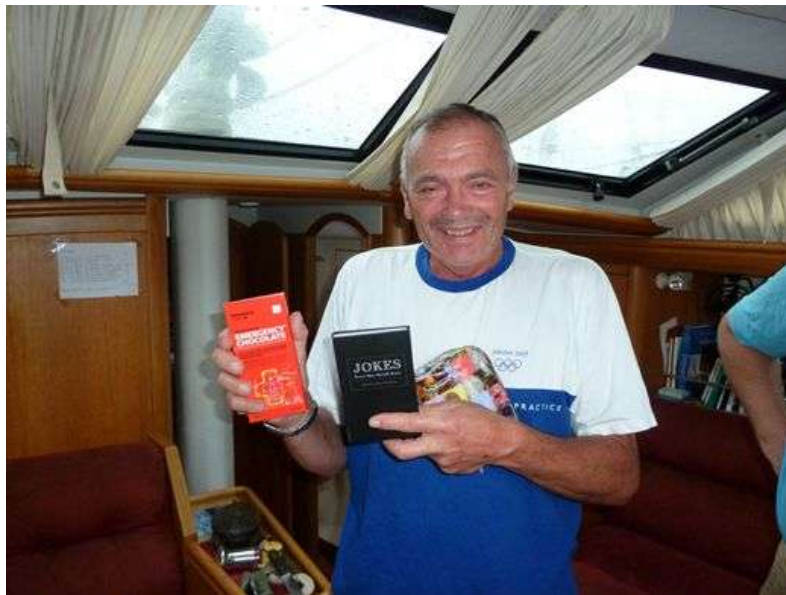
**An anchorage in Porto Belo**

Tom and Lawrence have been sharing the bunk cabin and Tom, who is fastidious in matters of personal hygiene, had his day spoilt by discovering that he and Lawrence had identical underpants and had inadvertently been sharing a pair.

Meanwhile Lawrence has been in a state of excitement. Today is his 68<sup>th</sup> birthday.

What a fuss.

We had to start last night at 2200 (midnight UK time) by singing Happy Birthday several times, followed by For He's A Jolly Good Fellow and drinking toast after toast to his health and happiness. This morning he was up early, bouncing around like Tigger. Richard, in his usual grumpy mood after being woken prematurely said "If he's a sixty-eight year old, why does he behave like a six-to-eight year old?". There was great excitement when it was time to open the presents and cards that he had brought out from the UK. We were all quite impressed that he had three cards until we discovered all three were from Carrie his wife and Keely his daughter. So Lawrence not only has no friends on board, but clearly has no friends at home either.



**Happy Larry with his birthday presents**

We were scheduled to leave for the long three-day 450 mile leg down to Rio Grande at midday today. But late morning the skies opened and it is chucking it down in biblical proportions. Visibility is down to less than a mile and lightning and thunder crash and crackle overhead. Leaving now would be sheer misery and as it doesn't look like it's going to let up anytime soon, we've decided to hunker down and leave at first light tomorrow.

**Drunks Sober Up – Cold Turkey and Fish for Lunch**

**Date: 6 December 2010**

**Position: South Atlantic 29:00.0S 048:47.0W**

After the deluge, we set sail at first light yesterday morning for the long 450 mile passage south to Rio Grande. This isn't just because we like a long passage, but down this stretch of coast there are no safe havens at all, so if you get caught out in thick weather – probably blowing you onto the inhospitable shore – you're stuffed. The four day forecast was that for the first 18 hours we would be beating into a moderate wind, and thereafter we would have the wind directly behind us – not the perfect point of sail. But whilst not ideal, it wasn't threatening.

After six hours of motoring, the wind filled in from the SSE as promised and we had to sail at right angles to our destination, out to sea. We were expecting around 20 knots of wind. We got it and it was quite pleasant. The wind picked up to 25 knots and it started getting a little wet and lumpy. The sky all around us turned grey, then black. The wind continued to strengthen and the sea to get higher. By this time we were more than 30 miles offshore. We reefed right down until a full gale was shrieking through the rigging, spray whipping horizontally across the deck. The wind speed over the deck was 50 miles per hour. One thing that *Mina2* is good at is shouldering her way into strong winds and big seas, but for all of us it was distinctly uncomfortable. I was becoming a tad nervous. This hadn't been forecast at all. What if it stayed like this? What if it got even worse? But we toughed it out and after a few hours the wind began to abate slowly.

A consequence of the unexpected conditions is that none of the Drunks has felt inclined to drink any alcohol for 24 hours and they are now showing signs of withdrawal symptoms - crashing headaches, vomiting, and the shakes. It's a pathetic sight, but they are paying the price for their sins. The vomiting was actually suffered by only one of the Drunks, and that may have had more to do with the sea conditions. But no names, no pack drill, not least because I've been paid quite a lot of money by Richard not to expose the sufferer's identity in the blog.

This morning, conditions could not be more different. The wind has eased, the waves subdued, the sun is shining and the wind has backed round to the east allowing us to romp merrily along on a beam reach. Perfect conditions – for the moment.

The cherry on the cake was that 20 minutes ago we caught a large plump dorado (I think) which will probably do us for about three meals, starting at lunch time. We've also seen three sharks' fins slicing through the water. Lawrence wants to catch one. Bless.



### **Lunch for four and more**

I've appointed Richard as Entertainments Officer. Due to a deep-seated insecurity he likes titles and has taken his responsibilities seriously. At home he's very keen on Am Dram (or, in his case, Ham Dram) and he's brought along the score and libretto of HMS Pinafore. I was lucky enough to be given the role of the Captain of the ship, Captain Corcoran. At rehearsals all the crew sing jolly songs about what a good captain I am, and giving me three cheers and stuff. It's brilliant It's the only time I'm treated with any respect on board. Shame it's all play-acting.

The problem is that just because, between them, the Drunks have more than 100 years offshore experience and over 60 years of yacht ownership, they think they can sail. They strut around like they own the boat, helping themselves to my booze and when they're not completely ignoring me they're countermanding my every decision. Richard is particularly bad. He's already Entertainments Officer and Shitmeister (he's responsible for opening and closing the holding tank), but he objected to the title of Watch Keeper and insisted everyone called him Watch Leader (despite the fact that with a one-man watch system there's no one to lead). Two days into the cruise and he'd promoted himself to Watch Captain and today he's throwing his not inconsiderable weight around, taken to wearing my smart naval cap with "Cape Horn & Patagonia" in gold letters on it, and calling himself Admiral of The Watch for God's sake.





### **The Admiral of The Watch**

One of the things that really irritates me are the constant inane questions from the Drunks, always delivered in a pathetic whine.

“Ti-im, where’s the corkscrew?”

“Ti-im, how do I open this bottle of cachaça?”

“Ti-im, there don’t appear to be any cans of beer in the fridge.”

“Ti-im, I’ve forgotten how to tie my shoelaces”

I mean, do I have to do EVERY bloody thing on this boat. So I’ve taken to locking myself in my cabin and ignoring them. However, even with their befuddled brains they’ve worked out a way of tricking me. All they do is stand in the cockpit and in a stage whisper say something like “Holy Shit – what’s that?” or “That’s big – and it’s coming straight for us.” Within a nanosecond I pop up through the companionway like a Jack-In A-Box. Bastards.

### **+++STOP PRESS+++MINA2 IN RACE AGAINST TIME TO AVOID KILLER STORM+++**

**Date: 7 December 2010**

**Position: South Atlantic 31:00.0S 049:52.3W**

We were about 100 miles into the 450 mile passage – the one with no safe havens on the way. Nowhere to go if there was unexpected trouble.

Having already had the gale force winds mentioned in the previous blog, I picked up the latest forecast by satellite email and all of a sudden very strong southerly winds were being forecast to reach Rio Grande on Wednesday morning. These southerlies sweep up from Argentina and are often preceded by the legendary Pampeiro; the killer wind. This coast line and the River Plate are strewn with wrecks, victims of the Pampeiro. Darwin and Fitzroy’s Beagle was very nearly dashed on the shore off Maldonado just 300 miles down the coast. The Pampeiro is heralded by a cigar-shaped cloud below which are screaming winds of up to 100 miles per hour. Get caught in that and all you pray for is that you survive.

When we received this news, we had reached the point of no return – there was no way we could fight our way back 100 miles against the strong winds and waves. So we are now rushing at the maximum possible speed with the strong wind right behind us in a desperate dash to get into Rio Grande before the front arrives. The boat is slewing around pushed by the waves before surfing down the fronts of the waves at terrific speeds. We are rolling heavily and no one can sleep.

We now have about 125 miles to go, and we hope to get in in the early hours of tomorrow morning. If the Pampeiro beats us to it, the entrance to the Rio Grande will be too dangerous to attempt and we'll be left to face the storm.

Cross your fingers for us. We'll try and keep you posted.

### **Safe Haven in Rio Grande**

**Date: 7 December 2010**

**Position: Rio Grande 32:01.523S 052:06.354W**

Well, it was certainly a lively passage from Porto Belo to Rio Grande. Over the 2 days and 22 hours we were screaming along for most of the time at 8 knots or more in big seas. Apart from the ghastly first night when we were beating into a gale in heavy pounding seas, we had the wind from our side or behind us, so it wasn't too wet. There were some scary moments (like when I found I couldn't reef the mainsail and had to spend 40 minutes being thrown about on the foredeck, at night, to sort it out), but on reflection it was on balance an epic harum-scarum roller-coaster ride. Great fun.

Thank God we did have winds strong enough to speed us here, otherwise we would have been caught out in the strong southerly winds that started the moment we arrived in Rio Grande, and that would have been a deeply unpleasant experience. But the downside was that we had to make our entrance into the large complex harbour at night which I always avoid when I can. The anchorage near the yacht club is at the far end of the harbour, 14 miles from the entrance, and we were punching a strong ebb tide, so whilst we entered the harbour at 0030 (half past midnight) it wasn't until 0415 that we tied up alongside the pontoon of the Oceanographic Museum.

We stopped at Rio Grande for two reasons: it was the only safe haven in 700 miles of coast, and secondly to go through the tortuous bureaucracy of clearing us and the boat out of Brazil. After just three hours sleep (making, for me, a total of about five hours sleep in two days) we all went off to the Policia Federal to have our passports stamped. The other two offices we had to visit were at the other end of the small town. "Don't bother with a taxi", said the friendly passport officer, "it's only about ten minutes walk away". In the blazing heat, off we set and a full 40 minutes later we arrived at the customs office to be told that the officer dealing with yachts had just gone out for an hour. It took a total of three hours to have our papers processed for the boat before we were able to head off for the third office. The total exercise took more than five hours.

Exhausted we returned to the yacht club and had the last of our Brazilian caipirinhas overlooking the bikini-clad sunbathers around the pool. This was supposed to be a pitstop and we were scheduled to leave that evening for La Paloma in Uruguay just

over 200 miles away. However, because of the very strong and still southerly winds, and to catch up on much needed sleep, we decided to leave the following afternoon (Thursday), miss out on La Paloma and head straight for Punta Del Este, the St Tropez of South America.

I'm afraid I have to report some trouble with the crew. The Drunks, who had been comparatively abstemious due to the lively conditions and whose withdrawal symptoms were making them extremely testy, came to me as a body. They pushed Tom forward as spokesperson - he's the only one who has had any real education - who touched his forelock with what I thought was a rather insolent sneer on his face. He told me that they were all fed up with the amount of work they were expected to do off-watch, and that all their shore leave had been taken up trailing round with me to dreary offices, when they had been hoping to go to The Pink Pussycat Club. Apparently they were under the impression that this was some sort of a holiday. I had to remind them that this was a serious expedition boat and it was not a cruise laid on for their enjoyment. However, I mollified them by issuing each of them with a clean drying-up cloth. I don't expect any more problems.

### **Close Encounters**

**Date: 10 December 2010: 1745 UTC**

**Position: Off Uruguay 32:01.523S 052:06.354W**

We had been made exceedingly welcome by the Oceanographic Museum in Rio Grande on whose pontoon we had tied up for 36 hours (the yacht club marina was not deep enough for us). Water, and electricity had we wanted it, and all for no charge. Yesterday afternoon at 1700 we slipped our lines and motored down the enormous harbour, seeing it all for the first time as our entry had been made in inky darkness. This was to be our last long passage of 250 miles southwest to Punta Del Este in Uruguay. The forecast was for more moderate to fresh winds from the northeast.

It was a beautiful evening gently sailing down the coast with the sun setting on our starboard bow. The sky was crystal clear and the display of stars – including an unusually high number of shooting stars – was magnificent. Well after dark, all of a sudden the horizon ahead of us started filling with bright lights. Our radar screen resembled a Space Invaders game. We had hit the fishing fleet and there were dozens of them. Even with the radar it is difficult to gauge distances in the dark as we twisted and turned slaloming through them. Things were not helped by the fact that as we entered the fleet the wind increased from a benign 17 knots to a very powerful 34 knots in the space of three minutes. We had all our sails out and had to concentrate so hard on avoiding the fishing boats that we had no time to shorten sail. So far an hour we were screaming through the fleet at speeds over 9 knots, on the verge of being out of control.

We got through the fleet and reefed the yankee and poled it out and reefed and goose-winged the mainsail. A couple of hours later we saw another very bright light on the horizon well to the left of us. “Don't worry” I said, “It'll be another fishing boat and at that angle it won't be a problem” (fishing boats always go very slowly). How wrong can you be. Within minutes it was clear that this bright light was moving towards us very fast. We have a clever bit of kit on board that was very helpful. On a screen we could see that the fast moving leviathan would hit us within five minutes.

Given our sail configuration we would not be able to react quickly enough to get out of their way. The kit also gave me the name of the vessel. It was my old friend *MSC Musica*, a rather upmarket cruise ship that I had come across many times at sea and in harbours throughout the Atlantic and the Mediterranean. We now had four minutes to impact. I called them on VHF radio. No response. The profile was much larger now and we could clearly see their large bow wave. Three minutes to impact, I called them again. This time the radio crackled back “Mina2 this is MSC Musica, go ahead, over”. I explained that I was the tiny pinprick of light two miles dead ahead of him, and I had neither the time nor ability to get out of their way. “I see you and understand the situation. I am altering course to starboard now. I will pass you red to red, port to port”. A wave of relief came over me. His bow slowly turned away from us. I thanked the captain who wished us all a good cruise. The incident was over as he rushed past us less than half a mile away. It would have been ironic to have seen and admired the ship so many times before, and then to be run down by her.

I awoke this morning to the comforting sound of the decks above me being swabbed and the smell of my breakfast being cooked in the galley. As I climbed the companionway into the cockpit I saw the strangest thing: hanging by the neck from the grab handle of the sprayhood was an effigy of someone called Capt Bligh – and the rope had been fashioned from the four clean drying-up cloths I had given the crew yesterday, which had been torn into strips and carefully braided. Very peculiar. I can only assume they’ve been on the sauce again.

I must get the crew to clean out the fridge again. There must be something in there tainting the food. My breakfast tasted very odd this morning.

### **Near Collision with Large Planet**

**Date: 11 December 2010**

**Position: Punta del Este 34:57.7S 054:57.0W**

Punta del Este in Uruguay is the Nice of the South American Riviera. It is on a small peninsula on one side of which are the surfing waves of the South Atlantic and on the other the placid waters of the River Plate. Both sides are fringed with spectacular beaches of clean white sand stretching for several miles. Between Christmas and mid-February it is crammed with the glamorous and wealthy set of Argentina and Brazil and it was here that the Downstairs Skipper and I came with the DS’s parents and our children on holidays on several occasions some years ago. I would never have dreamt in a million years that, one day, I would sail my own yacht into the picturesque harbour, but today that is what happened.

We had had a great sail round the coast of Brazil into Uruguay, most of the time with strong winds from behind, and having to motor for only the last five hours when the wind finally died. In the two weeks since Richard, Lawrence and Tom joined me for the big push south, I have been surprised at the relative strength of winds that have meant that we have enjoyed great sailing for more than 1,000 miles, and very little motoring. We’ve all had a great time.



Another thing that has surprised me is how cold it has been. I appreciate that I will get little sympathy from most of our faithful readers as they chip the ice from their frozen water pipes and scrape the frost from the inside of their windows, but it has been freezing by our now spoilt standards. I never thought I would be sailing off the coast of Brazil in T-shirt, fleece, heavy weather jacket, a woolly hat and still be shivering. At one point I nearly got the ski gloves out. One of the reasons for this is that the sea temperature has plummeted. Further north we were used to water temperatures of between 28°C and 30°C – almost bath temperature – but down here the sea temperature is a chilly 19°C. At this rate we'll be bumping into ice flows by the time we get to Buenos Aires.

Also, as one travels south from the tropics to the temperate zones one notices changes in the flora and fauna. Two weeks ago the high mountains that spilled into the sea were covered with tropical rain forest from which came the sounds of parrots and monkeys, and the beaches were fringed with palm trees. In the sky above circled magnificent frigate birds and vultures. As we have moved south they have been replaced by petrels of every variety that swoop over and round the waves, their wingtips almost touching the water. The landscape along the southern Brazilian and Uruguayan coast is as flat as Suffolk. Some contrast.

As the whole coast is a major shipping route we have had lots of ships and fishing boats to contend with which has kept us busy and honed our seamanship skills. Last night, Richard took his position as Admiral of The Watch and was busy taking bearings of passing ships to see if any were on a collision course with us. Suddenly a new bright light of a ship popped up over the horizon behind us. It got bigger and brighter so was obviously approaching fast. Despite Richard punching buttons at random as he went into panic mode, nothing appeared on the radar. It was a complete mystery until he realised it was not a ship's light, but Venus rising majestically in the East, extraordinarily bright and the size of a golfball!

### **Dramatic Failure – Crew Abandon Ship**

**Date: 12 December 2010**

**Position: Punta del Este 34:57.7S 054:57.0W**

Last night was to be the Grand Performance of HMS Pinafore in which I was to take the leading role of the popular, courageous Capt Corcoran. The cameras had been set up for a recording in Technicolour HD Video. The crew (or most of them) and I had spent hours getting into our costumes, putting on the stage make-up and perfecting the sound systems for the recorded music. The hour came. The hour went. Where the hell was Richard, the self-appointed impresario / producer / director? Eventually I found him. He had managed (miraculously, given his girth) to wedge himself into the anchor locker into a foetal position, clasping my very last bottle of cachaça, sucking his thumb, and mumbling incomprehensibly, his eyes wide and frightened. Without him, the whole performance was off. It was a dramatic failure.

I decided enough was enough. The Drunks had to go. They had drunk me out of boat and home; they were idle and insolent and this was the final straw. So this morning I woke up to read The Riot Act and throw them off.

It didn't surprise me that they weren't already on deck polishing the stainless steel as instructed – often they disobeyed my orders and stayed lounging in bed until well after 0700. So I went forward to the crews' quarters and was amazed to find absolutely nothing. The Drunks had done a runner – they had abandoned ship. The only thing that I found (apart from Lawrence's cashmere Guchi thong and suntan cream found on the poop deck) was that the walls of their quarters had been covered with graffiti. They had scored the bulkheads with knives with a series of six vertical scars crossed through with a diagonal, almost as if they had been counting off the days of the week, and there were also some pretty offensive remarks about me that had been spray-painted over the top. That's gratitude for you. Good riddance to them.

But it has left me in a bit of a pickle – I am now stuck in Punta del Este. The only things to recommend the place are the surfeit of excellent bars and restaurants, the endless sandy white beaches and the beautiful women who parade up and down them wearing almost nothing at all. God knows what I'm going to do with myself, sitting alone on my luxury yacht.

However, the Downstairs Skipper is coming to the rescue. No sooner had I mentioned my plight to her (she is in Buenos Aires just across the River Plate) than she said she was dropping everything and would rush over at the first opportunity which I hope will be Wednesday. She's a gem, the DS.

## **Mina2 Retires From Bluewater Cruising**

**Date: 20 December 2010**

**Position: Colonia del Sacramento 34:28S 057:51.26W**

I don't know what it is about luxury ocean-going yachts and their devil-may-care owners, but they seem to attract beautiful women like flies. I had work to do and their constant demands were a damned inconvenience. Thank God the Downstairs Skipper rushed over from Buenos Aires on hearing that I had been abandoned by the Drunks. By the time she arrived I was beating the nymphs off the foredeck, left and right, with my boathook. The DS had an effect similar to a very strong insect repellent. The moment she stepped on board, the beautiful women in their flimsy attire seemed to evaporate leaving me, at last, in peace. What a relief.

The DS was in a state of excitement. Punta Del Este was where, she told me, she had spent the only happy days of her life, and she enjoyed 36 hours of nostalgic reminiscence before we cast off and sailed 60 miles down the coast to Montevideo.



### **The DS relives memories of the days when she was happy**

The Uruguayan Coastguard is almost nanny-like. As we left, we went through the obligatory process of reporting our departure, giving our next port of call and an approximate time of arrival. They then radio that information to your next port and they do not rest easily until you have radioed in your safe arrival. And at the merest suggestion of a strong breeze, they will close a port, forbidding anyone to exit, until there is almost a flat calm. The fact that we had sailed *Mina2* half way round the world through tempests and dangerous seas to get here didn't exempt us.

I love Uruguay and the Uruguayans, and it was an enormous pleasure to be here. Brazil is fascinating, and the coast is beautiful and dramatic. The culture is vibrant, and the food and the music are excellent and different. The vast majority of Brazilians are happy fun-loving people but there is a proportion of the population that is not. Crime rates are amongst the highest in the world, and there is an edginess, particularly in the towns. One has to be constantly aware. One avoids walking around with cameras, watches or jewellery. We have met numerous fellow-mariners who have been attacked in the streets; threatened with knives, enormous machetes or even guns.

Uruguay, in stark contrast, has a very low crime rate. All the people from the moment one arrives are incredibly friendly, including the officials that one has to visit in order to clear ourselves and the boat into the country. One never feels threatened and once again we are back in our comfort zone. The countryside is also in stark contrast to that of Brazil. Gone are the steep jungle clad mountains diving into the sea. Instead we

have soft low undulating hills fringed with sandy beaches. Yes, less dramatic, but in its own way equally beautiful.



**A Sealion enjoys the facilities of the Yate Clube de Punta Del Este  
which is more than we were allowed**

***Mina2 Sails The DS Into Her Home Town – Mission Accomplished***

**Date: 21 December 2010**

**Position: Buenos Aires 34:36.75S 058:21.75W**

If anyone suggested to me 20 years ago that one day I would sail from my home city of London to Maria's home city of Buenos Aires, I would never have believed it possible. Today, we completed that journey.

Our great friends, Christine and Fernando wrenched themselves away from all the Christmas preparations at home in Buenos Aires and took the ferry over to Colonia to join us for the final leg of our long adventure. Christine and Maria have known each other since birth and are more than just best friends – they are more like sisters.



**Old Colonia del Sacramento**

We cast off at 1300 for the 27 mile passage across the River Plate. The wind was light, the brown river water flat, and we sailed gently and slowly across. Very tranquil.



We crossed the dredged shipping channel that marks the boundary between Uruguay and Argentina and with great ceremony it was The Downstairs Skipper who lowered the Uruguayan courtesy flag from the cross trees and hoisted in its place the Argentine flag.



**The DS hoists her national flag as we sail into Argentina**



### **The skyline of Buenos Aires fills the horizon**

Yachts in South America do not make a great show of their national flag. No large ensign flowing from a wooden staff, most make do with a tiny, faded and flimsy flag roughly tied to their backstay. It had been suggested to me that given the tension between Argentina and Britain over the Falklands that I replace my five foot long British ensign with a pocket handkerchief sized one. Whilst I may do that later, I was not prepared to compromise my standards for my initial entry into the country. Indeed I reacted against the very thought of diluting my national pride by cranking the gramophone up to max vol and, whilst sailing into Argentine waters, playing some rousing renditions of Land of Hope & Glory, Rule Britannia and finishing with the National Anthem.

This might be considered somewhat provocative with Fernando on board. Fernando is a passionate Argentine nationalist who had already been through all my pilot books and charts, roughly scoring out any mention of the Falklands and replacing the offending word with “Islas Malvinas”. But, bless him, he clearly understood the importance of the moment to me and he uttered not one word in protest.



**Staunch Argentine Fernando – not a word of protest**

Through friends we had made arrangements to stay for a week at the Yacht Club Argentino in their splendid headquarters marina conveniently placed in the centre of the city, and at 1730 we tied up and opened a bottle of champagne. A truly emotional moment for both the DS and me and, blog flippancy aside, even typing this now I have a lump in my throat and an emotional tear in my eye.



### **A bottle of bubbly in the Yacht Club to celebrate Mission Accomplished**

So this year's cruise is effectively at an end. We will be spending Christmas and the New Year with Maria's mother and Maria's many friends here. We'll be doing a bit of entertaining on the boat, and when Selina and Peter fly out to join us in January there may be an excursion or two across the river to Colonia.

In February I will be flying down to Ushuaia in Tierra del Fuego and sailing on the professional expedition boat *Pelagic Australis* over to Antarctica as a recce to see whether *Mina2* would be up to making the same adventurous trip next year.

Meanwhile, we've heard that it's been a bit chilly in the UK of late. Well, don't expect any sympathy from us. Buenos Aires at this time of year is hot, but right now we are experiencing a heat wave. Yesterday the temperature was 37°C and the humidity about 90%. It's murder. Because everyone is turning on their air conditioning there are power cuts all over the city and to cap it all the banks have run out of cash. But we've brought plenty of cachaça over from Brazil, the fridge on the boat has ice and its power source is independent of the national grid, so perhaps we'll survive. So from both Skippers of *Mina2*, we would like to wish all four of our readers a very Happy Christmas and a prosperous and adventurous 2011.

### **Enjoying a lazy time in Buenos Aires with Selina and Peter**

**Date:** 8 January 2011

**Position:** Buenos Aires (still)

Having achieved one of our lifetime ambitions of sailing our own boat *Mina2* into the Downstairs Sipper's (sic) home town of Buenos Aires, I'm afraid we've done remarkably little sailing. Instead our life has been taken over by a social whirl. After



spending a week as a guest of Yacht Club Argentino in the centre of the city, where we actually spent little time as we were celebrating a quiet Christmas staying with the DS's mother, we relocated into the northern leafy suburbs as a guest of the DS's own yacht club, Club Nautico San Isidro which is a highly exclusive cross between The Royal Yacht Squadron and the Hurlingham Club. An oasis of sophisticated hedonism set on a large island in what is the equivalent of Wimbledon on the outskirts of Buenos Aires, the CNSI has in immaculate 18-hole golf course surrounded by three swimming pools, five restaurants and numerous tennis courts. Surrounding the island are the moorings of the members' yachts. We were told that because there is no room, they are not able to welcome foreign yachts in the normal way but, through the DS's many influential friends in the club (and particularly Fernando and Charlie), space has been found for us. We are privileged to be their guests, and it has been wonderful being able to moor here, with a constant stream of friends coming on board.

However I had been advised that such is the sensitivity of the Falklands / Malvinas issue in the eyes of the Argentines that, even here, we should try not to flaunt our Britishness. So since we have been in Argentina, rather than flying the normal Red Ensign we have been flying our Blue Ensign (allowed as a member of the Royal Cruising Club) and a very small one at that, and the ploy has worked. Everyone has assumed we are Australian and so far no graffiti has been spray-painted over our pristine hull.

The New Year's Eve party at the CNSI is renowned and after a picnic dinner on the lawns in front of the club house with loads of friends, and a memorable fireworks display we spent the rest of the night boogying away before walking round to *Mina2* to sleep it off.



**New Year's Eve at the Nautico**

After the New Year we were joined by our children, Selina and Peter, who flew in from a bitterly cold UK for a couple of weeks of sun and fun. We've all been here loads of times but it was Peter who said that never had he actually, properly, seen the city of Buenos Aires so one day we became tourists – hopped onto an open-topped bus and plugged in the commentary headphones for an interesting tour round the city.



**The tourists set off**



**Buenos Aires old and new**

### **A trip to Riachuelo in Uruguay**

**Date: 18 January 2011**

**Position: Riachuelo, Uruguay 34:27S 057:43.5W**

Next up was a trip across the River Plate to Uruguay and the fabulously tranquil Riachuelo. As a family we have spent many wonderful holidays here with greatest of friends Christine and Fernando Muller and their children, Maria, Sofia and Ferdi (who are like cousins to our two). However to get there we had to overcome two obstacles. The River Plate was not designed for large deep-keeled yachts. At best the river is 5

metres deep and most of it is a lot less than the 2.2 metres that we draw, and therefore out of bounds for us. Riachuelo is about 25 miles from our mooring as the crow flies, but because of our deep draft the journey for us was about 55 miles as we had to make a long detour through the dredged channels of the delta to avoid the shallow water – no great sacrifice as the route is a charming meander through narrow waterways lined with rich vegetation, on the banks of which are an incongruous mix of luxurious weekend homes and the very basic homes built on stilts by locals who eke out a living by catching fish or cutting reeds from the banks.



**House on stilts in the delta**

The other obstacle was the dreaded bureaucracy. Being a foreign boat with foreign skipper and crew, before we left Argentina for Uruguay we had to check out with Immigration, Customs and the Coast Guard. When entering Uruguay we had to stop off in Colonia to check in with Immigration and the Coast Guard. Because of the opening hours of these offices we had to stay in Colonia overnight. The following day we moved on to Riachuelo where we had to check in with the Coast Guard there. All of this had to be repeated in reverse when we returned so, for a quick few days 25 miles across the river, we had to make 12 visits to different offices all in different places. And they all require three or four photocopies of each and every document and none of them have photocopiers so you have to spend what little is left of your time scouring the local town for a photocopying place. So popping over to Uruguay isn't something we do lightly. But it was worth it. We were joined by the Mullers on their yacht *Windsong* and spent a wonderful few days just chilling, going for walks and taking advantage of the wonderful unspoilt sandy beaches they have in Uruguay.





**Karaoke time for Sel whilst Pete goes native drinking mate**



**Little Olivia with her parents Sofia and Gaston**





**Tea time on *Mina2* , after which Olivia has a siesta in our cabin**



***Mina2* and *Windsong* together at last**



### **The DS hiding from the fierce sun on her way to the deserted beach**

But lest we got complacent the powers that be decided to sharpen us up by throwing a pampero at us. I've written about the dreaded pampero before. It is the very sudden and very violent wind that comes screaming in from the southwest, its advance forecast by the classic horizontal cigar shaped cloud which rolls in front of it, boiling like a cauldron. Then the wind hits you like a mallet. Luckily this one had been well forecast so we had put out our storm moorings of two anchors on one side and three heavy ropes attached to the stoutest trees we could find on the other side. Others weren't so lucky. A neighbouring boat dragged his anchor and was dashed onto the river bank where he stayed high and dry for several hours heeled over at what must have been a rather uncomfortable angle. We recorded 58 knots of wind at the height of the storm. But whilst violent, pamperos often don't last for long and a couple of hours later we were back in the cockpit sinking the first of several evening cocktails.





**The pampero rolls in ... one boat gets dashed ashore ...**



**... and we record more than 58 knots of wind**

On our return we went through the same laborious bureaucratic procedure. If anyone is reading this blog because they want to find out how long a foreign boat is allowed to stay in Argentina, I have to confess that I don't know – but there again nor does the Argentine Aduana (Customs). We have received definitive answers from no fewer than four sources – and they are all different. The Aduana downtown says we can stay for eight months but then we cannot return for the following twelve months. The Aduana further up the river (same organisation – different branch office) says we can stay only three months but all you have to do is to pop over to Uruguay for the day and return and you can get another three months and you can do this indefinitely. The other two authoritatively gave us rulings which fell between the two, so God only knows.

Selina and Peter have now returned to London and I am preparing for my trip to Antarctica on Skip Novak's *Pelagic Australis*. I leave Buenos Aires on Tuesday 8 February and *Pelagic* and I cast off from Puerto Williams on the afternoon of Thursday 10 February, round Cape Horn and south into the infamous Drake Passage – the windiest and roughest seas in the world. I hope to be blogging as I go so stay

tuned in. You can see a synopsis of our trip by going to [www.pelagic.co.uk](http://www.pelagic.co.uk) and you can also follow our exact position at <http://www.pelagic.co.uk/about/tracker.htm> .

Hope to be in touch again soon, but if you don't hear from me, fret not. It will probably be only that the technology has failed and not the boat!



**Maria's mum (97 ½) visits *Mina2***