

THE CIRCUMNAVIGATION OF S/V KAMAL

A journey by Greg and Lauren Henry aboard their Pearson 365

Excerpted from e-mail correspondence between Randy Powers and Lauren Henry in December, 2003. It is presented on this website with the permission of Greg and Lauren Henry.

PART VI

Oman • Red Sea • Egypt • Turkey • Sardinia

Oman into the Red Sea 4/02

Of all the places we've been, none has been the subject of more speculation, discussion and apprehension than the Red Sea. Cruising boats travel in packs, often falling prey to a herd mentality. Scary stories are passed from one boat to another, feeding their sense of unease. Along with everyone else we amassed every tidbit of information on this area we could find, somewhat in the vein of know thy enemy. We were prepared for pirates, officious officials, dust storms, treacherous shoals and reefs, erratic weather patterns and winds reaching almost unimaginable speeds. In the end we encountered some of the above, but nothing that would justify the amount of time we've spent in the last few years preparing for and worrying about this part of the journey.

Our passage from Oman to Eritrea was so pleasant it was almost funny. Everyone had a theory about the best way to go about it, from the number of boats to travel with to rules regarding communications underway. Some groups were more militant than others. We sailed in a group of three in loose formation, agreeing simply to remain within of a mile of one another. Staying that close for over one week is not as easy as it sounds, especially when sailing; larger boats were often forced to slow down in order to stay with their group. In the event of an attack, the other boats were prepared to converge on the vessel in distress. Every day we heard military vessels on the radio, and one day we even had a French military plane fly over us. Other than that we saw nothing threatening, not even a fishing boat. The first few days we had to motor, but as we approached the strait of Bab el Mandeb the wind began to build. Our gps says we hit 13 kts in that stretch (to give you an idea, we average just over 5 kts) but although we were flying it was comfortable because the wind and waves were from behind us.

We spent some time in Eritrea in the port town of Massawa and the inland capital Asmara. Eritrea won its independence after a lengthy and costly war with neighboring Ethiopia. Situated 3500 ft above sea level Asmara remained untouched in the conflict, but

Massawa was ravaged, and is still riddled with bombed out buildings. Despite this the Eritrean people were incredibly friendly and accommodating.

The Red Sea is only 1200 miles from end to end, yet the recommendation is to allot six weeks or more to make the trip because conditions can change dramatically and unpredictably. Again, we've been lucky. We expected to move up the Red Sea in short day hops, anchoring each night and waiting for good weather in which to move. We did spend several days in different anchorages waiting out high winds, but in two instances we were graced with favorable weather and could travel three days at a stretch. This helped us put many miles under our keel and we practically flew north.

It hasn't been all smooth sailing, though. Our constant companion has been the ubiquitous travelers diarrhea, and we don't know of many boats lucky enough to escape untouched. Then there was the day we actually had light winds from the south, and Greg decided to fly the spinnaker. All went well until it wrapped itself around the headstay in a double-hourglass. Greg hauled me up to the top of the mast twice while we were still underway to try and free it, but by then the wind had come up (of course) and I couldn't get it down. We were lucky to reach a calm anchorage, and I went up once again. This time Ed from Cinnabar came over to help, which mostly involved yelling directions up to me. Eventually I decided to just ignore him, and he ignored me ignoring him and things went smoothly from then on; I got the spinnaker down without one rip. Finally, we encountered the crazy Red Sea weather patterns twice, each time at the tail end of our three day runs. Both times we were experiencing favorable winds which suddenly died, and within half an hour had turned on the nose and come up to over 20 kts. The first time it took us 12 hours to go the last 30 miles, and the second time we were forced to navigate several hours through reefs at 2am. Luckily both times we made it in safely.

The reward for all of this has been a stay at a marina in El Gouna, Egypt, just north of Hurgadah. It is brand new and has all the modern conveniences, from hot showers to flushing toilets, and there's even a French bakery! From here we took a three day trip to Luxor, which is where you'll find the Valley of the Kings and slightly less famous Valley of the Queens with spectacular tombs and several temples whose age and fabulous statues and walls adorned with hieroglyphics defy the imagination. We traveled by van in an armoured convoy for our protection, although it seemed to us we were simply presenting a larger target.

Now we have just under 200 miles to go until we reach the Suez Canal and plan to sail straight to Cyprus from there. Here's hoping the last few miles in Egypt are as painless as the ones before

them.

Southern Egypt 4/02

We were feeling a bit cocky, making good time with a southerly pushing us along. We were 24 hours out when we heard of northerlies several hundred miles ahead of us. We knew that meant they were coming our way, and accordingly began looking for places to duck into. Unfortunately the winds decided to hurry on down, and arrived about 12 hours too early for us. At 1:30am the wind died, then clocked abruptly to the NW and built up to around 25kts. We were still approx. 35 miles from our destination and spent the next 12 hours plowing through the steep and quickly growing waves to get there. Slow, uncomfortable process, but I think it could have been worse, we've been bashed around more than that before.

One of the boats we were with couldn't make headway and stopped at a point about 10 miles away, while we slogged on at about 3kts. In the morning when the sun came up Greg decided it was what a nuclear winter would be like; everything blotted out, the sun a hazy disc visible through the swirling dust. We'd read that Marsa Halaib was under the auspices of the Egyptian Navy and could only be entered in duress so we were worried they might kick us out. It turns out they were perfectly nice, welcoming us to Egypt (we were smart to have gotten our visas in Eritrea). They've offered us free fuel (!?), helped Cinnabar fix a problem with his engine, took our garbage (which was really growing quite nasty) and asked us if we need any food (the only fresh food I have left are some tomatoes, lettuce and three apples). There's no town here, no place to buy anything, but they are willing to give us provisions from their own stores (they've offered us 2 eggs; well, that's better than none). Even better we are pretty well protected, and now as the wind howls we are sitting relatively flat.

So now we wait for the wind to go southerly again or at least calm down enough so we can motor north. It's difficult to know when to move and when not to, because you can get caught out like we did. But I know it's hard for Ed and Greg to stop while you still have good wind because you don't know for sure when it'll turn and they want to take advantage of any opportunity to move. I think this may have taught them a little lesson, though. Plus now we're approaching an area with more good anchorages and we won't have to move in such long stretches.

The further north we go the colder it gets; soon we'll have to open up Greg's sleeping bag and use it as a comforter! It's kind of nice after the heat, we're drinking hot chocolate and eating soup. We're ahead of schedule so have the luxury of waiting for good weather. We're only allowed one month in Egypt from where we get

stamped in (not until Hagadah or thereabouts) so we don't want to be there too early and have to enter the med while it's still cold. There's a marina offering free berthing if you stay 10 days or more (it's just north of Hagadah), so we hope to take advantage of that and visit Luxor from there. Then of course we have to scurry on to get through the canal within our allotted time. Should work out ok.

So, we're fine, just a little bored, reading and making small repairs to the boat. It's not possible to keep it clean, the dust is incredible. We'll just have to wait until we leave the Red Sea to douse everything in water.

Egypt 5/02

A visit to Egypt wouldn't be complete without seeing the famous pyramids of Giza, so before heading off for the Suez Canal we traveled up to Cairo by bus. Not only did we see the pyramids and the Sphinx, but Greg was happy because we got to ride horseback in the desert surrounding the ancient site. We walked the streets of the city, wandered along the narrow alleyways of an old souk, and spent an afternoon at the famous Cairo museum where among an overwhelming number priceless and haphazardly arranged artifacts you can also see the fabulous treasures of Tuthankammon.

Back at El Gouna we had to wait almost a week until there was finally a slight break in the weather and we could depart for the Suez Canal. The canal is the last great hurdle before you can feel you are truly done with the Red Sea. The whole thing is approximately 80 miles long and sailboats our size need two days to complete the transit. Each day you are assigned a pilot to help navigate. Stories about pilot incompetence and demand for baksheesh are legendary.

To try to head off any problems we had our gift in a sealed envelope which we showed our pilot when he arrived. We told him that any baksheesh we had to give out during the course of the day would come out of that envelope, and at the end of the day he would get what was left. Boats are often told they have to make periodic stops to hand over paperwork, but this is just a ruse used to line the pockets of their friends. The first day went smoothly, and Moneer was a perfect gentleman. Before continuing on we ended up spending several days in Ismalia, a town situated in the middle of the canal. Our second pilot didn't turn out to be quite as nice as our first. Everything began well enough, and Greg and Mohammed spent much of the time in conversation. Mohammed confided that the man he'd piloted for the day before, who happened to be our friend on LOasis, was a bad man although he didn't elaborate on why that was. We gave him a pack of

cigarettes, a jacket when he grew cold, and I supplied him with endless mugs of tea, which Egyptians drink like water. But his demeanor changed abruptly when Greg foolishly passed over our envelope before the pilot boat arrived to pick him up. He immediately tore it open and as soon as he saw how much was inside launched into a passionate and indignant tirade about the injustice of our gift.

This went on for a while, until Greg appeased him with another pack of cigarettes. The pilot boat finally arrived and were happy with their own gift of Marlboros. By this time we'd been in Egypt long enough to know that however much you give it will invariably be seen as an affront, and they'll press upon you for more, more, more. Even the canal agents, who were supposed to be working on our behalf, were guilty of overcharging, adding dubious fees to their bills and inflating official canal fees (often by more than \$100, all of which would go into their pockets). At the same time, though, I don't want to leave the impression that we didn't like Egypt, or that all Egyptians acted this way. In our experience the people who didn't deal with tourists on a day to day basis could be incredibly nice; we met one man while trying to find our way to the pyramids using public transportation who got us on the right bus, got off with us at our stop and made sure we were safely ensconced on our horses backs before heading off to work.

Many people we talked to were also concerned with how we saw Egypt before arriving, and what Americans back in the states know about their country. I think the differences in perception are cultural; they don't see the attentions bestowed on us as harassment, nor do they see the demands for baksheesh as corruption. However we do, and for many of us it meant we were constantly on our guard, and made it difficult for us to enjoy Egypt without reservation. One reason we appreciated Ismalia so much was because it does not get a lot of visitors and we were able to walk around virtually unseen and unmolested.

We were one day into our sail to Cyprus when Cinnabar told us that Mohammed had subsequently piloted for our friends on Zig Zag and told Odo Kamal bad man, bad man!

So it wasn't with heavy hearts that we watched Egypt fade away behind us. In two days we arrived in Larnaca, Cyprus. It was only a distance of 200 miles, but it was as if we'd arrived in another world. We finally washed off all the Red Sea dust for good, I discovered I could walk wherever I want wearing whatever I want, the stores are stocked with all sorts of good food, flowers are blooming and the streets are lined with trees! We happened to arrive during the Greek Orthodox Easter so the town is abound with celebrations and festivities. We will be taking two days to drive around the island and after that will head off for Turkey.

Turkey 6/02

(Written by Lauren's dad Bruce)

We were at once charmed, amazed, pleased, confounded, frustrated and, most of all, intrigued by Turkey. It is not, as many people think, a Moslem fundamentalist society. It is thoroughly secular from its Western outlook to its dress. There are no veils, head to toe burkaks, fez or other leftovers from the older customs swept aside after the Turkish revolution led by Kemal Attaturk seventy years ago. Since then, a strong middle class has grown to help push the economy forward toward Western Europe and membership in NATO. All this is seen in the major cities such as Istanbul, Ankara (the capital) and Izmir. The agrarian countryside is more conservative but even here all education is secular. Our strongest impression is how friendly, warm and accommodating we found the Turkish people to be.

We flew into Istanbul and met Lauren and Greg at the airport who look healthy, happy and very tanned. With a guide, we toured the city for three days visiting the Topkapi and Dolmache Palaces and Haja Sophia mosque (all now museums) the Blue Mosque as well as the Grand Bazaar and the Spice Market. In the middle of all this toing and froing, the city exploded when Turkey defeated Senegal to reach the World Cup semi-finals. The streets were filled with delirious fans waving flags and honking their car horns. (The scene was repeated a week later when we were in Kusadasi, a seaside resort, when Turkey took third place by beating South Korea in the consolation round after losing to the eventual winner, Brazil.)

From Istanbul we completely changed scenes by flying to Anatolya in the central part of the country to visit Capadoccia, a region crossed for thousands of years by spice traders following the silk trail from the east. Located about four hours drive south of Ankara, geology has played a tremendous part in its long history. It has a fantastic landscape created by the differential erosion of the soft volcanic rock. Successive civilizations made their homes there digging caves in the hilly areas and underground cities on the plains. Our guide, Remzi Kaya and his son Fatih, showed us many examples of both including the underground Cave of Derinkuya, which consisted of eight levels and could house up to 10,000 people. However, it's not an apartment house and we went through narrow tunnels bending way down to reach many of the levels. The region also served as the center of monastic Christianity for a thousand years from the middle of the first millennium to the conquests of the Ottoman Turks in the fifteenth century. Many valleys are dotted with churches hewn out of the cliffs decorated with frescoes depicting New Testament scenes.

Our hotel in the town of Urgup was also in a cool cave dug into the

face of a cliff. It was redone to include a modern bathroom and was quite pleasant. The hotel served breakfast and dinner on top of the cliff where we had a breathtaking view of the countryside including the many hot air balloons taking tourists on early morning flights.

One of our most unforgettable moments in Capadocia was visiting a recently discovered Roman era town. It hasn't been opened to the public yet but the archeologist is a friend of Remzi so was able to see the project in the very early stages of the dig. He explained the painstaking process of uncovering the ruin, recreating the structures, negotiating with local farmers for their land and the Minister of Tourism for funds to continue the dig and develop the site as a tourist attraction. It now includes a large residence with an almost complete mosaic floor and the town baths. Listening to him describe the project, we were very excited knowing it will probably take the rest of his professional life to fully clear the site.

One evening we visited a caravan serai or way station on the caravan route. This one was built in 1259 and was an impressive stone structure. We sat for an hour to watch a performance of whirling dervishes, a Moslem sect who believe by whirling they grow closer to G-d.

Our final week was spent on the Aegean coast in Kusadasi where Lauren and Greg docked Kamal in a local marina. We used Kusadasi as a base for day trips to the nearby archeological sites on the coast. Probably the most well known, Ephesus, is the most complete and winds up a hill for about a quarter of a mile. Also on our itinerary were Didyma with its Temple of Apollo and Priene, a city located on a promontory with a modern street grid pattern still evident featuring the Temple of Athena. In between, we spent a night in Bodrum, down the coast from Kusadasi, and took a day trip to the Greek island of Rhodes to see the imposing castle erected by the crusader order of the Knights of Saint John.

The return trip back was an adventure in itself taking five and a half hours or twice as long as the trip out. The old Russian hydrofoil blew one of its two engines, the generator was shut off (no lights), there were no food or drinks on board and, in what at times seems typical Turkish style, no one to tell us what was going on. Of course, Greg started to investigate the engine room but even he would not enter as the room was filled with oil. We finally arrived about 11pm and had to wait half an hour until the immigration officer could be roused from her home. Needless to say we ended up staying overnight again in Bodrum.

We celebrated 4th of July at a party hosted by the marina in Kusadasi with hamburgers, hot dogs and fireworks where we met several of Lauren and Greg's sailing friends.

Overall, the Turkish food is wonderful lots of messas or great appetizer type salads, especially all the yogurt dishes and chicken, lamb, rice, etc. There isn't a lot of variety though and you end up eating the same thing for lunch and dinner, but you cant complain, as dinners for four cost only about \$20. The fresh vegetables and fruits are beautiful and the tomatoes are some of the best we ever had. One has to mention the wonderful olives served at every meal.

Shopping is a new experience. You can't just go in and place your money down. Bargaining with the merchant is expected and part of the pleasure. You are first offered tea, which the Turks drink all day. Don't be in a hurry because what should take 5 minutes can take an hour, especially when purchasing larger items likes rugs. It's not Fifth Avenue but lots of fun and its unavoidable anyway.

Sardinia 8/02

(Written by Lauren's High School friend Oona)

In most lives, weather is a peripheral experience that might require the carrying of an umbrella, an additional sweater, or regular doses of sun block. Weather reports are hastily overheard during breakfast or read during commutes, but such are most existences that if one forgets to tune in to a forecast or neglects the neat type in the corner of a paper, it won't matter much: maybe one will get wet, or feel a chill, or shed a jacket, but life will carry on.

In most lives.

Living in Ireland, Donal and I are used to Weather in a different way. Weather is a persona here with the traits of a trickster, and unlucky forecasters are left to the thankless task of attempting to grant hope to a population that has been, this summer, wearied with rain. The forecaster, in Ireland, is a wordsmith of the highest caliber, his or her job entailing the manipulation of words like cloudy, drizzle, misty and possible showers into the most encouraging arrangement: Despite morning mist and a hint of drizzle, the cloud cover will be light and thus there is only a slight chance of showers.

Leaving Ireland to meet Lauren and Greg (and Seidon) in Sardinia, Donal and I had every confidence that Weather was remaining at home; little did we know that not only was Weather a fixture with her own berth on every boat, she had a partner, Wind.

In Ireland we are obsessed by sun: when it comes out, it is an absolutely acceptable moment to drop everything and get outside,

eat ice cream and expose too pale skin, bosses will understand because, well, they're likely to have done the same. So imagine our shock, on meeting Lauren and Greg and Seidon on a scorcher of a Sardinian Thursday, at hearing that not only was this Weather not good, it was bad: the Wind, in the guise this time of one French Mistral, was en route and apparently intent on protecting the western Mediterranean from an onslaught of cruisers.

I had immediate visions of Greg and Lauren working on a modern version of Herodotus, a history of histories, complete with the romantic winds of the world. Only when Donal and I were sandblasted on a nearby beach (Lauren and Greg, the wind educated, remained with Kamal and Seidon) did I understand that this romance could be a bitter one, with an angry lover shouting tirades from across the sea.

This is what I have learned: if we seem to care a lot about weather in Ireland, it is nothing to the relationship between cruisers and the Wind. Weather reports over breakfast? Try setting your alarm for 5:55 every morning for a weather report, setting it again to remind you of various satellite reports coming through at different times of the day, and then settling down to an analysis of them. And it doesn't finish there: then you have to compare notes with other boats and discuss the possibilities of moving, of safe anchorage, moorings, marinas. Your day, quite literally, revolves around the weather.

In the ten days we spent on Kamal, my ideas of Lauren and Greg's adventures changed completely. As a non-sailor, I had imagined, of course, colorful, billowing sails (Lauren's archenemy The Spinnaker), gentle breezes (my imagination did not extend to the measurement of knots), brilliantly clear water and idyllic swims. As a non-sailor and a faint hearted one at that, I had also imagined a terrifying existence of dark nights and high seas worthy of Wuthering Heights or a Miltonic war in the heavens. It is all that I did not, could not, imagine that I have decided to write of here: the realities of life on a boat.

I used to wonder what Greg and Lauren did during their days: I'd read their reports, received email, even talked on the phone to Lauren at various points. I read a lot, she'd tell me. And yes, they do read a lot: not only books, but charts, forecasts, guides to anchorages, guides to countries, the sky, the expanse of sea. The analyses needed to embark on even a short journey are mind-boggling.

And then there are the daily tasks that replace those of Life On Land: Lauren heading down below to make water while the boat is moving, Greg hosing down the decks, Lauren and Greg (and sometimes even Donal) hosing down Seidon, walking Seidon around the deck (the hilarity of these adventures cannot be

described: a sliding puppy is always laugh inducing), radioing other boats (Skimmer, Skimmer, Kamal?) for word of weather or plans for dinner, lunch, sailing.

We, too, slipped into the routine, with two major differences. The first: as soon as we woke Donal and I leapt up the ladder to see the sun while Lauren and Greg, who have lived three years of summer now, stayed below with their breakfasts. The second: when there was boat work to be done, anything involving ropes or knots or steering wheels or those cushion things that hang on the side of the boat, I was not a part of it (for obvious reasons!). And it was strange to sit and watch, not only because one feels completely useless, but also because you realize how second nature all of this now is for Lauren and Greg, and you wonder How That Happens.

The mistral continued to blow while I mused about these things. There was a mad dash from Olbia to the Golfo di Marinella, and after the excitement of getting there and seeing the clear water of my imaginings, I realized I could not possibly get in: the mistral had made sure of that. Being anchored in one place for three days was a fascinating experience: one was, first of all, forced to relax. And then there was the absolutely enthralling game of spying on neighboring boats. For half a day the wind would blow in one direction, ferociously, and I would stare at a boat similar to Kamal; then the wind would shift and I would stare, wide eyed, at a creature of a speed boat that we took to calling the batmobile, complete with a spaceship hatch that opened to reveal a treadmill! Yes, seriously, a treadmill! To watch a man jogging in place at the prow of his boat is true sport.

These entertainments were only the beginning. According to Lauren and Greg, the Med is the craziest place they have been, the equivalent of the FDR during rush hour. And such a rush hour! Ten million dollar boats race past each other, one more outrageous than the next: whirling satellite dishes, helicopters, dozens of deckhands draped over edges with buckets and mops. Who are these people? From Kamal, they remained unseen, conspicuously unidentifiable.

It was not until we anchored in Porto Cervo, the village that the Aga Khan built about 15 years ago, that we could see the people. Ashore with Lauren and Greg (Seidon was asleep below), as well as Charlotte and Hayward from Skimmer, we were agog at the spectacle. As Charlotte remarked, these Italians really know how to dress when they bother to put some clothes on. Hundreds upon hundreds of would be starlets and their beaux, all tanned and dressed in the couture designs of Milan, strolled the seafront, sipping umbrellaed drinks and jabbering away on miniscule mobile phones, while spot lights lit the night sky. This was Disney for adults, and very wealthy ones at that.

Porto Cervo marked a certain gape in the reality of the holiday: afterwards, I was doubly content to sit in good old shorts and a t-shirt and talk endlessly with Lauren. (That is, of course, what we did most!) While Porto Cervo was a good night out, it was a night at the movies, a Broadway musical: you half expected the milling masses to burst into song and choreographed dance.

Realities are at once more mundane than such dancing, and far more satisfying. To see where Lauren and Greg live, see the smallest details of their lives, these things matter more than my imaginings. That mugs on boats tend to come with lids, that doors need to be hooked and bungee corded so that they don't rattle, that fruit sways in a mini hammock of its own, that the stove sways by unseen means, that there are ways and means of flushing a toilet beyond a thoughtless tip of a handle, that sinks don't empty of their own gravitational accord these are the details of daily life that I never guessed at.

Some of my pre-Sardinia ideas remained intact: there is near constant sunshine around Kamal, and the waters are idyllic (although having learned the marvels of boats septic systems I'll never swim in a harbor again!), and there are vistas every blink of an eye. It is incredible how quickly the eye adjusts to watching horizons drift past, change, return; to seeing houses as something strange and far off and unmoving; to voices trapped on a breath of wind and lifted from shore to ear; to watching, simply watching everything, particularly the ghost of wind gliding over water.

By the end of our time with Lauren and Greg, Donal was ready to sell our house and take to the seas, or at least offer himself as crew to the nearest boat. I, too, was taken with the idyll of our holiday, and filled with admiration for what Lauren and Greg, and now Seidon, continue to do, particularly because it is something I would never be able to do. While sailing (or motoring!) in the Med was one of the most delightful holidays I have ever had, I lack what I think must be a tireless sense of goal: the goal to go onwards, to move elsewhere, all for the larger goal of inching back homeward, to have completed this extraordinary journey and to hold it in your mind like a private map.

For those of you who want more Fact to this report: Lauren and Greg are both well and enjoying being puppy parents; like any new parents they talk about their charges eating habits and sleeping routines (and bowel movements too, I regret to say!!!). Seidon is absolutely adorable and grew while we were there, and probably unlearned a tiny bit of the very good behavior Greg had already taught him by playing with Donal! Seidon loves the look of the water, but the feel is something else entirely, but no doubt once he is bigger than the waves, those webbed feet will get a lot more use.

In the end, the Weather was good to us: Lauren and Greg were to depart Sardinia for their journey towards Spain on a Friday; Lauren and I made sad faces to each other all day Thursday, and were given a reprieve: satellites, emails, radio forecasters and fellow cruisers all agreed that Saturday was a better day to leave. Wind and Weather conspired, and gave us an extra day.

(Back at home, Donal continues to relive his steering moments, and we've been granted some glorious Sardinian sunshine, right here in Ireland.)