First days in Arbatax

It has been a long time since our spring travel letter reached you. Well, that was because we had a busy time after we arrived the first of April in Arbatax, Sardinia. Now we have summer already and temperatures of 30 degrees or more! But first, our latest adventures, starting April.

The first day we were in Arbatax, a crowd was building at the other site of the harbour. As always we were very curious about what was happening over there. With camera in hand we discovered some of the local fisherman caught a shark! The local newspaper was around to make pictures as we did as well!

Before the yard in Arbatax had space and a cradle available to haul us out we had to wait in the marina for 2 weeks. During this waiting period we intended to explore the southern coast of Sardinia a little bit, but the wind Gods were against us. Depression after depression found its way to Sardinia, emptied his water bucket above our heads so we were stuck in the marina until it was hauling-out time.

Due to the many heavy rain showers we had to buy new (plastic) raincoats to stay dry as we went shopping. After Arbatax we never used them again.

Hard work but lots of fun

Thereafter the busy period at the hard started with an impressive schedule for the work on Zeezwaluw. The planning was to be on the hard for 2 weeks, but..... as so often plans and goals will change. What we were doing?
Well, besides taking out, cleaning and put back again all the 6 sea cocks, taking apart, cleaning, applied primer and anti-fouling at the folding prop before installing it again, we sanded the bottom by hand. Each of us did one side of Zeezwaluw, so work was equally divided.

We raised the waterline, as so many cruisers before us and the booth line disappeared by that, what a shame! We did some epoxy repairs and when the bottom was smooth again we put on 1 coat of primer and 3,5 coats of antifouling. The bottom was as smooth as never before!

When we were evaluating our jobs sipping a nice glass of Italian wine it appeared that we enjoyed what we were doing. For the first time in our life we could work on the boat without any travelling time wasting half your day, the yard staffs was friendly and co-operative when needed. They provided us with ladders and scaffoldings for free. Best of all, we had great fellow yachties on the yard.

In the adjacent village everything we needed was available, including a smashing roasted chicken with French fries on market day. Extending the period on the hard with another 2 weeks would only cost an extra 60 Euro, so time to do some cosmetic work as well.

**Comedy Caper**

Due to the extra two weeks we decided to paint not only the new booth line above the new waterline but also renew the other two blue lines. This became our first experience in hull painting. We went through and tried several kind of painting methods before we discovered the one with the best results to the high Dutch standard. The work method is going like this; the first person applies the paint with the roller, the second comes quickly afterwards with a "dry" brush. In the meantime the first person moves the scaffoldings on wheels a few meters forward. It looked like the ancient movies of Comedy Caper! We were and still are very proud of the result of our first paint job. After 3 coats of blue paint for every stripe, Zeezwaluw looks beautiful again! The next time on the hard we intend to paint the white parts of the hull that will be a mayor job.
Fellow “sufferers”
During the time on the hard we had lots of fun with our fellow sufferers Don and Priscilla of "Chautauqua" and Debby and Bret of "Interlude III". We could share problems and find solutions together, had nice dinners on board, BBQ’s underneath the boats and had once a dinner at a beautiful dinner table which was made out of yard scrap. So, after 4 weeks Zeezwaluw was the first boat to get launched again.
We needed a few more days in the marina to organise everything for the sailing season and to say goodbye to our friends.

Back on track to discover Sardinia
At the end of May, after almost 6 weeks we left Arbatax to start the circumnavigation of Sardinia. The weather was perfect and in light winds we sailed in day trips southward along the east coast. We went into a few almost abandoned marinas with still low prices before we sailed around the southeast cape to the south coast. We had a great sailing trip that day. Goose winged and with a clean bottom now, we reached a maximum speed of 8.2 knots and that’s a lot of fun!

On the south coast we visited Cagliari one of the largest and oldest towns of Sardinia. We managed to moor at a free of charge but very rickety quay. We spend here 3 beautiful days doing shopping and a little bit of sightseeing in the old part of the town.

We thought we had entered the archaeological museum and were happy that the tickets were only 2 euro. But … after 635 steps we discovered that we climbed the old outlook tower, maintained by the archaeological museum.
Regaining our breath again we could enjoy the stunning view but strangely we were the only visitors. In the end we detected the archaeological museum, spend a fortune for the tickets, but were happily surprised by the displayed moulding stones of the Bronze era which we never saw before.

Many knots to handle
Sailing along the south coast of the island is somewhat tricky since the wind funnels through the Sardinian Strait, which runs, between Sardinia, Sicily and Tunisia, very often up to 7-8 Bft.

We managed to sail during light winds along this part of the island. Only around the capes the wind picked up to a nice 6 Bft. At the west coast we hopped from one beautiful anchorage to another, all of them in huge bays and mostly were the only boat.

This was due to the fact that it was early June, still out of season in this part of the Med.

One day we ended up in a tiny fishing harbour at 10 o’clock p.m. just before sunset and after quite an adventure! We were peaceful at anchor in front of this fishing harbour and had just enjoyed a nice meal. Suddenly the wind picked up. From a nice offshore 3 Bft it changed direction into an onshore wind of 6-7 Bft. The big waves rolling into the anchorage made it a little unpleasant after a while. Unfortunately we started to drag and pulling the anchor, we were surprised to see an endless chain of empty crab cages hanging off the anchor. A line of one of the cages was hooked around our anchor, no fun in gusts of 7 Bft!

After a while we managed to untangle it and free the anchor. The anchorage was tiny and we did not know where and how many crab cages would be on the bottom. Therefore we went to the last free spot in the fishing harbour and moored safely at the quayside behind the huge wall. Here we enjoyed a peaceful night while outside the wind was still blowing at gale force! The next morning it was still blowing gale force and fishing ships entered the harbour for shelter.

Of course we were in the wrong place at the quayside. They asked us very friendly to moor alongside a special ship (a kind of water surface cleaning ship) that wasn’t leaving. Due to the strong wind blowing offshore they helped us mooring alongside this special ship. We stayed that day in-between a lot of huge fishing ships that were all moored in packs of 3. Everyone was waiting until the wind would die! The next day the wind was back to normal and we left this friendly fishing harbour.

Peaceful anchorages and big shopping
The next few days we found our self-confidence in anchoring again after a few save anchorages before we finally ended up in the marina at Alghero. There we experienced that the marina fees were already in high season mode, 40 euros a night!

When we hesitated to agree they quickly dropped the price to 30 euros so we agreed at that price, although it was a lot more than we had in mind.

But Alghero has the supermarket Eurospin (like Lidl) is near the marina and it’s very convenient when you want to stock up large and heavy stuff for a long period.
After the shopping we left the marina and sailed to Porte Conte the large bay 7 miles north of Alghero. This lovely bay was the first one we visited last autumn when we sailed from the Balearics to Sardinia. Here we stowed all the shopping’s and had a few lazy days.

A few miles more and bumping into new and old friends

With a beautiful weather forecast of westerlies 4-5 Bft we left Porto Conte to sail north to the Fornelli Passage. The wind picked up gradually and when we had almost reached the narrow and shallow passage the wind was blowing a W 6 Bft while the waves grew higher and higher. The direction of the waves was into the passage and for safety reasons we decided to sail around the northern cape of the island instead of through the Fornelli passage although it was 30 miles longer! So after a sailing trip of 70 miles instead of 40 we ended up in Stintino at 9 o’clock p.m.

The next few days the wind kept blowing a 6-7 Bft from the west and we stayed put. We met Kim and Cheryl of "SY Chemini" and after a few days, the "Maid" with Heidrun and Richard came in after an eventful sailing trip through the Fornelli passage. Having a couple of nice days together with old and new friends was great!

In Castelsardo we met Jo and Tim of "Rose Rambler" again. We had a nice dinner on board of RR in-between all the jobs that were still going on.

The "Maid" arrived as well the day before we left.

From Castelsardo we sailed to Cabo Testa and anchored north of the peninsula for the night before we sailed to the Maddelena Islands.
Excellent holding

Early in the morning when we were tried to raise the anchor, it was stuck and we couldn’t get it out. The victim for a cold swim was Riens (as always) and he discovered that one of the blades of our Bruce anchor was nicely and firm settled in-between two huge stones, the only ones in the huge sand bottomed bay. We were unable to pull her out until Riens had a brilliant idea! He fixed a rope onto our dinghy anchor, fished with that to drag our Bruce anchor free from the stones, hooray!

Finally at 11, we sailed, to be honest; we motored to one of the Northern Maddelena Islands to see Pink Beach, where the sand should be real pink! From a distance we could see a lot of masts and a closer in we saw that the anchorage was packed with all kinds of boats (tripper boats, sailing and motorboats and even a lot of fast dinghies). Couldn’t find a save spot to anchor. Haven’t seen Pink Beach but we will believe what the pilot book says and sailed to another sandy anchorage to spend the night.

Quick visit to Corsica and mainland Italy

From Maddelena Islands we sailed to Porto Vecchio at Corsica. To meet some of our family who were on holiday nearby we sailed to Livorno at mainland Italy. We stayed for 4 days in the marina, because that is convenient for non-boaters if they are visiting, but it was a little agonising! They asked 55 euros a night what we after some bargaining luckily could reduce to 45! But we have had 4 beautiful days with family and sightseeing in Livorno’ nice old town.

Beautiful Elba

After the mainland we went quickly to the island Elba, what a lovely pearl she is.

We stayed almost 10 days at anchor in the Bay of Porto Ferraio. This is a very large and sheltered bay at the north side of the island. At the anchorage were a lot of ships and you could see that the summer holidays have started.

Almost all the sailing boats were rented by "learning sailors", who did some strange anchor manoeuvring now and then. One couple drifted backwards through the bay with a dragging anchor because "the remote control of the anchor winch didn’t work". After they dug up our anchor we suggested them to operate the winch manually but that raised only a distant blank stare and slowly they vanished in the distance.
Napoleon’s residencies
The town Porto Ferraio is old and it was Napoleon’s home for 1 year. The museum was closed at the time we went. Later on, when we stayed at anchor in Porte Azzuro (east coast) we went by car with Heidrun and Richard to the summer residence of Napoleon. This house lays a few miles land inward and they have made a museum out of it. The furniture and other things in the house are not the originals used by Napoleon but it’s similar to his. The originals were destroyed when he escaped from Elba. The residence is quite small and not as glamorous as we expected, but a nasty little man in exile doesn’t need a big house is it?

In P. Ferraio we dragged 3 times and in P. Azzuro 4 times, luckily during the day. The last time in P. Azzuro we dragged at 7 o’clock in the evening and decided that we had had enough. We left for an anchorage at the south coast and motored to it during the evening and we enjoyed a beautiful sunset at an oily sea. At Porte Stella the anchor hit sand the first time and at 10 o’clock we were settled for the night again. After two nights in this beautiful anchorage we sailed again to Porto Vecchio at the SE coast of Corsica.

Corsica again
There we are now already for 4 days, swinging at anchor in front of the town! The town is an old fortress, with still the original walls around it, on top of the mountain and very beautiful.
Beautiful Sardinia, Elba and French Corsica

It has all narrow streets, lots of little shops and restaurants where ever you go. Even a big French supermarket of course with all the delicious French food is in walking distance.

Yesterday was a troublesome day due to a nasty gale (W 7-8 Bft) blowing through the Bonifatius Strait. At the anchorage we were perfectly protected against the waves but we suffered a nice 7 Bft out of a blue sky. At that time a lot of boats were at anchor and during the day most of them vanished into the probably expensive marina of Porto Vecchio.

Our anchor held perfectly but we were a little nervous because of our "dragging experiences" at Elba. At eleven at night the wind died suddenly and there was no wind at all anymore, so we slept the sleep of the innocent.

Future plans ……
The plans for near future are: sailing south along Sardinia to the west and south coast of Sicily before we jump to Malta. After Malta we will sail around the heel of Italy and then north to Venice. Where we will winter is still a question without an answer, but there will be space somewhere when we decide its wintering time again.
So we will leave you for now, wish you all a beautiful summer, lots of fun, new places to explore but most and for all fair winds and following seas.

Riens and Ineke Elswijk at “SY Zeezwaluw”

Note: We have two Italian birds (male & female) now the others died peaceful last winter. These two are very lively and very in love with each other. But how to make a nest, they don’t know yet! Probably we won’t tell them either how to do it. We are not familiar with bringing up little ones!

To be continued in: "More Italian Islands".

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