

Dear Friends of Randi,

Here is another longish summer story of our first eventful visit to Skopelos....Or just skip it and look at some pictures if you prefer.

We have just made our first visit to Skopelos with our friends Clive and Christina and Etta (the dog). Kathryn and I slept on Kaliopie each night whilst C and C rented a cheap harbourside room, we also carried a tent for emergency camping. We set off via a small island, Tsgoura, off Skiathos Town where we anchored in shallow water just off the beach for lunch on board and a swim. Within minutes of arrival Kaliopie attracted several admirers and amazingly we secured a cottage booking for next season to a couple from the Isle of Wight who would like to do some sailing with us.

After a lovely afternoon we made the crossing to Skopelos and the harbour at Loutraki below the hill village of Glossa. The wind was perfect for a gentle sail all the way and Kathryn were very pleased I had not frightened her by conjuring up some gale force winds. Our best intentions to hike up the footpath to Glossa soon turned into a harbourside sundowner and evening in a taverna. Being small we can easily enter harbours gracefully under full sail creating more interest in this area so full of big white charter yachts.

The next morning we headed along the coast, calling at each harbour and anchorage along the way and to learn our way about for future reference. We had a moderately strong following wind and made some fast progress. Our evening stopover was at Agnondes a lovely little harbour. Avoiding all the bigger yachts we enjoyed our advantage

of parking (sorry, mooring up) almost inside a taverna. As chance would have it a really fabulous one. When we mention living in Pelion we normally find a mutual Greek acquaintance and thereafter get treated like long lost friends.

That evening we watched the football, Turkey v Germany (I think) and retired late to bed with the promise of an early start to beat a worryingly vague weather forecast of F 3 to 6 beaufort. On Kaliopie I enjoyed sleeping on deck every night and Kathryn preferred to retire below after a bit of star gazing to avoid some gentle snoring.... zzzzzzzzzzzzzzz

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Setting off bright and early, too early for coffee at the taverna, we found some fresh head winds and strong gusts developing. The beginning of my bad day! We pressed on intending to visit the last good shelter before heading over to Alonyssos, our planned destination. We hoped to give it a go and if the conditions were too bad to turn back. Approaching the bay of Stafilios I detected some anxiety at the prevailing conditions (it was of course hot and sunny) but the wind passing each bay was whistling out and pressing little Kaliope somewhat. So what would you do?

Well of course I said we would go into the bay at Stafilios shelter from the wind find some coffee and then make a decision. In this bay I had noted from the pilotage book there is a long beach buoyed off exclusively for swimmers, no boats allowed. But it was only 9am and the only presence were a couple of swimmers and a small fishing boat sheltering in a rocky corner of the bay. I approached the fishing boat and with gestures established I could approach the beach around the end of the marker buoys. We anchored very carefully in a rocky area away from the sunbeds (n.b. when entering a prohibited area, risk the boat slightly but do not obstruct a sun bed occupied or otherwise!) The guys went ashore and being a little precariously anchored I remained on board. Whilst the guys were away the wind shifted blowing me nearer some nasty rocks so I adjusted the anchors to hold us further off the beach.

After a longish wait (the taverna was not open) a bronzed fit looking guy approached, ah more admiring glances!!)

'Kalimera' I called out. And in Greek we had the following conversation. 'You can't park there mate it's forbidden'..... 'Well yes I know, sorry and all that, but I had a little problem with the boat so have come in here'..... 'What is the problem with the boat exactly'..... Well it's not exactly a problem with my boat, it is with my wife, she was a little frightened, it's force 6 out there'.....

'Well you can't park here it is forbidden.'..... ' Yes but I will leave very shortly and I'm only on the edge of the area and there's no one on the beach and the fisherman said it was ok...????'

'If you don't leave now I will call the port police' 'I am the life guard and it's my job to keep the beach safe' (But there was no one there of course and he was bored I assumed)

'Look just let me wait 5 minutes for my wife and friends and we'll be gone..... sorry' 'You must leave immediately or I will call the police'..... 'Oh dear, because now I have a problem with the boat the wind is difficult for me to leave on my own without some help from my crew, but here I am fine....' Then I spotted the guys returning. Phew!.....



'It's OK' I said 'here they are we will leave. But I will only take the man from these rocks, I will come into the beach for just one minute pick up the ladies and the dog and then go.'

'No you cannot or I will report you to the harbour police, you must pick up your friends over there by the fisherman.'

This place was in the far corner with wind whistling onshore and very rocky, but it was possible so we went for it!

The pick up was perfect but very awkward. Whilst standing in the water holding the bow of the boat steady on a slippery rock with wind and waves making my nerves were a little fragile and then I stood on a sea urchin! A big black spiky thing that embeds itself in the foot and is very painful. So what did I do? We left motored out gave a cheery wave to the lifeguard (honestly!) whilst Kathryn and Christine conducted minor surgery on my foot courtesy of a very big needle. It was removed, but out at sea we had only the promise of a big swell a strong wind from directly ahead, so we turned back up the coast to find the perfect anchorage at Panormou.

Wow, what a sail we had using only our stay sail and a little engine we had great fun, but Kathryn was very anxious with wind shifts and a disturbed sea. At times we were being soaked in spray, I was rather enjoying myself, if only it hadn't been for Kathryn's discomfort. I also learned that singing Andy Williams 'Home Loving Man' doesn't help at these moments.... 'The harbour lights were calling the wind was in it's high, the captain said thank god were home we've drunk the barrel dry.... etc etc'

There is a lovely book called 'Gates of the Wind' written by an English man, Michael Carroll, who had discovered Panormou in the early 1960's and built a house on a rock promontory within the fiord like anchorage. Yachts moor in deep water and leave their dinghies on the wooden pontoon he built out side his house....



So there we were 30 minutes later entering the calm and gentle water of Panormou, my Andy Williams rendition was more successful now,..... 'so rest you southern winds and take me safely back to shore, I'm never never going to sail these southern seas no more.....'



We spotted the house built by Michael Carroll, the jetty, wow it looked perfect, perhaps we'll get lucky and can sneak in and moor there for the rest of the day and overnight... So we made our approach and then in the garden of the house, a man, watching us through binoculars and wait look, he's on his mobile phone, oh sod it, here we go again!.....

Crew instructions. 'Look guys, just take a line ashore and I'll go and have a word with the man' I hopped ashore and went over...

'Hi, I wonder is there any chance we could moor up here for a while?'
..... 'Of course you can, what a beautiful boat, I've been watching you come in beautifully and I built this jetty but it's public you can stay as long as you like'... 'Are you the gentleman who wrote 'Gates of the Wind'? 'Well yes, oh you've read it, well come on up and have a beer.'



Michael mentioned that only 'Nikos' who uses the pontoon for his rental boats might tell you it's private, but it's not, he built it and it's public....

So we had a delightful afternoon in a fabulous place. For the evening we would take the bus to Skopelos town on the other side of the island. As we left up came Niko, 'You can't park your boat there I rent it for my motor boat rentals.' 'Yes we can Niko, it's a public jetty'.... 'Oh, ok then will you be here for many days?'

We just missed the 6 o'clock bus as we approached the main road. The next and last bus to Skopelos Town was at 7pm. We weren't sure about the rules with dogs and buses but thought it was discretionary with the driver. So we asked at the tourist beach information place. The man there just shrugged and said he didn't know. Well let's not risk it we'll call a taxi. Christine called a taxi, he'd be here in 10 minutes. I explained in Greek we were at the bus station (in Panormou) If the dog was small and well behaved he'd take it. Etta is the most calm little dog you'd ever meet, even in a F6 covered in salt wind. She also likes Andy Williams.



At 7pm the next bus arrived, no taxi. We'd been chatting to a lovely family from Norway on holiday, about life and the lovely but sometimes quirky Greeks. I should never have got on the bus.

The conductor stood on the pavement and watch us climb on. He saw us pick up Etta and help her up the steps and we sat down. Etta curled up on the floor. We settled down.

The conductor got back on and spoke to the driver. The driver got off and came to the back door where we were sitting. He pointed to us and in Greek said (loudly) 'Off, off.'..... 'I'm sorry what's wrong?'..... ' Dogs are forbidden get off'..... (Although not the dogs owner I had not quite relinquished my skippers responsibility to our fine crew and my skills at charming awkward Greeks using the Greek language nearly always worked, life guards excepted!)

So I reasoned with him,..... 'I'm sorry we are just tourists here, we waited for a taxi, we just want to visit beautiful Skopelos Town, we are tired, you can carry dogs if you want' The hot, sweaty, unshaven (and downright ugly) driver said 'GET OFF!'. So we did and I continued to reason with him, plead to his better nature, ever the optimist! Clearly this was one battle I could not win, but I have to admit to being very very fed up, hot, angry and frankly unwilling to let this one go without at least a swipe at his manly dignity, so I tried the M word.

The M word in Greek is one you hear all the time, It is not elegant, it is rather coarse. Friends use it jokingly with each other or you can refer to a 3rd party as being somewhat M***** if they have been cheating, unhelpful etc. In English it is akin to a word that would rhyme with anchor..... So as I went to finally walk away from the bus I said , 'eimai polly lipimenos yiati dhen boroume na parme mazi mes to leforio sou.... (I am very sad because we cannot travel on your bus) kai esay, esay MAL-AKKAS.....

Now this made me feel momentarily very good but the reaction was incredible..... First his very very red face got much much redder. I actually think I saw steam coming from his ears and both nostrils, then he got a little bit taller and considerably wider.. his eyes had a stare of disbelief.... and only then did he attempt a fist fight in the road (and was shouting quite a bit in Greek that I couldn't translate!

I made a tactical withdrawal. I walked calmly away hoping he wouldn't launch a full on assault on a retreating enemy.... I was fortunately correct, so I waited (hid) on the beach, heard a few doors slam and the eventually bus chug off up the hill.

We regrouped. I said 'sorry guys, I am so fed up I'm going back to the boat to read and have an early night I've had a bad day.'

Clive and Christine were amazed, A - to see me lose my temper B - to see this sense of despair and despondency, thoroughly beaten!

But the crew rallied round and said we would try the taxi again. This time he turned up. Christine said he'd taken a long time. The driver said 'why did the man say in Greek you were at Staflios bus stop' I explained I had said we were at the Panormou leoforeo stathmos (bus station) but I apologised if I had confused him. Why you speak Greek to me, you should speak English, your Greek is no good, my English is good and I speak German... I said nothing, just sulked a bit in the front seat of the taxi. I was thinking it may have been a force 6 out there but it is easier by

sea! We approached Skopelos Town and there was a police car, blue lights flashing, it had pulled over a taxi. 'I hate police he said' Me chirping up said (in English) 'when I was in England I was a policeman'

'Well my friend I hate you too and I should ask you to get out of my taxi right now. ' Flippin' heck I thought now we've got a taxi driver whose a flippin' comedian and I'm his fall guy, great idea this taxi.....

And so we arrived at Skopelos town. beautiful in the late evening sunshine. I'll drop you here by the harbour. 'Oh great I said we're outside the bus station.... I don't believe it, there's the bus driver!!.



As we got out the (ugly, fat) bus driver started a wobbling charge along the pavement shouting at us (well me probably) so I redeployed the successful tactic of an honourable retreat. Head down I didn't look back, I walked steadily along the pavement away from the commotion, I was aware my crew were not with me but I was off duty now. 100 meters ahead the port police office. So I pressed on there, sanctuary? Only when I enquired from the (hopefully) very nice Port Police man for tomorrow's weather forecast would I look back. Clive could handle the situation at the frontline he was once, after all, a Royal Marine. So when I looked back there was Kathryn, Christine, Clive and Etta the dog getting a grilling by the Policeman.



Our friend the bus driver had called the police and now Clive with Etta in tow was getting the third degree. And so my bad day had ended, I perused the weather forecast and let Clive sort it out. Which he did.....

The rest of the trip was fabulous, but this is what happened on my bad day. Skopelos is really beautiful and when we related this story to other local Greeks over the next couple of

days they were quite apologetic, 'but everywhere has people like this, they are just a bit 'mallakas' !!!

Sorry to have gone on a bit, but it is good therapy for me and might make you laugh!

Best wishes

Chris and Kathryn