

Baja Voyage (cont'd) Day 30 & 31

We had to decide if we wanted to go north to Coronado Island for one night or head back to the town and spend the time cleaning up the boat, fixing some long delayed repairs and packing in anticipation of our son's arrival in a day or so. We opted for the conservative approach and elected to return to Punta Arena anchorage. So after a quick breakfast we headed back under sail close hauled the short 4 miles to the point and its striped lighthouse.



Alice and the lighthouse at Punta Arena

After setting two anchors, I decided that I would contact our son, since by our calculations he would be in L.A. and his cell phone would work. This time I decided to row to the sandy spit and walk along it then into town and find a phone. Alice watched from the boat as I dragged the dingy up to a sand dune



The sandy spit with the rising tide

and tied it to a shrub more as an after thought, since it seemed to be well above the high tide line. The end of Punta Arena is a series of low sand dunes, but the middle is lower and had obviously been overtopped recently. Off I went on the now familiar route through the dunes to the town. On the way I saw a family under the shade of a Palapa playing cards so I asked them where I could find a phone. One guy, Sergio, insisted that he

show me where the phone was and gave me a ride into town. I couldn't

Meanwhile, as I learned later, Alice was sitting in the cockpit of the boat watching an extremely high tide come rolling in. She watched as the sandbar

bridge I had walked on started to disappear. It disappeared entirely and the water over the sand bridge got deeper and deeper. She wondered if I would be able to return to the boat and planned how she would move the boat on her own to pick me up if I was stranded.

The tide was in with a vengeance and again it was dune hopping to the spit of sand that made up Punta Arena. To my consternation the tide had fully covered up most of the sand peninsula with surf breaking over the spit in knee-deep waves. The sand dunes were now small islands with the Enosis anchored in the lee. This tide was about two or three feet higher than the last one I had seen. The quarter-mile hike through the waves was fun in a nervous sort of way. Soggy, but no worse for wear, I reached the dingy tugging at its painter and trying to uproot the partially submerged shrub I had tied it to.



The sandy spit going, going and almost gone

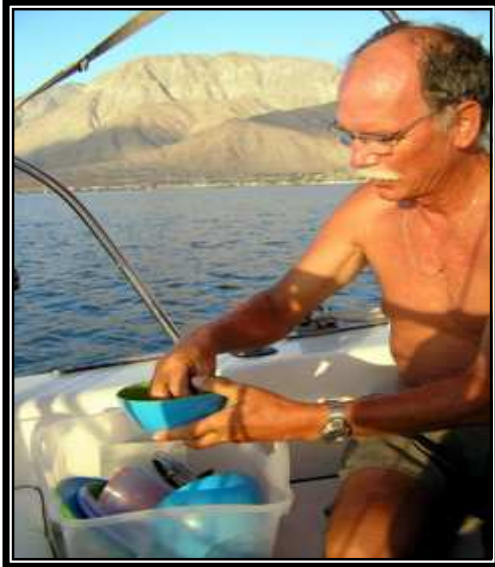
Back at the boat we went about our duties of cleaning and organizing the boat in anticipation of Nick arriving the day after tomorrow. Again, we were treated to a magnificent sunset and moonrise. That evening we watched as a lightning



Moonrise over Punta Arena

storm crossed the sea from the mainland and surged toward us. Around midnight with gusts of wind, a singular black, ominous, and low cloud raced toward us. In what seemed like a movie in fast forward time, it sailed over the boat blocking out the moon and then crashed into the 3600-foot mountain that backs the town. Briefly piling up on the mountain, it darkened and then was torn into long black streamers that flowed over the crest as the moon burst out and illuminated the dramatic scene. Like the cloud, the wind left, and

an eerie calm returned, leaving us breathless at the power and beauty of it all. Two more nights and this wonderful vacation would come to an end. However, we shared a joy in knowing that soon our son would take the boat and experience much of the beauty and adventure that we had found here in the Sea of Cortez.



Galley slave hard at work

The next morning we had an early breakfast and noticed a red Jeep driving on the now dry peninsula toward us at a high rate of speed. It slid to a stop and much to our surprise out jumped our son and his three friends. Apparently they had arrived late the previous evening and not knowing where we were, decided to camp out among the sand dunes. The next morning when they awoke and climbed the dune -- there was our boat! It was great to see our son and watch his excitement and that of his friends.

Now our son is 6'4", one of his other friends was 6'5" and the last couple was not petite either. Though roomy, we wondered where would they all fit? We spent the day on an orientation sail over to where the truck had been parked so they would know where to get it when they finished with their vacation. We also spent some time in the town at the restaurant and then returned to the comfortable anchorage at Punta Arena. The kids wanted to spend the night on the only piece of Punta Arena that wasn't overwhelmed by the high tides. They parked the Jeep on top of the dune and set up camp. By 10 pm they were on their own tiny island, playing survivor and fighting off giant flying cockroaches.



The kids find us by chance at ½ tide



The kids ready to take over; I wonder where the waterline is?

The next morning we traded spaces taking our personal gear ashore and loading up the Jeep, while the kids loaded up the boat. If I thought the boat was a bit low



A last look from the top of the dune

in the water at the start of the vacation, it defiantly was low with the four kids and their gear. We left via a plunge down the sand dune and a circuitous route through the dunes to the main highway. We tanked up and by 8 am were on our way back to the States. The trip back was just as interesting in the daylight as when I drove it a month previous in the moonlight. Actually I found myself worrying

more now that I could see some of the drop-offs and wrecked vehicles along the arroyos. By 6 pm we were in San Diego having dinner.

We intended on staying in Reno the next night but everything was full except for the cheap motels and I didn't want to pay by the hour. So on to Susanville further north where I used to have a lumberyard I was responsible for in my other life. The circus was in town and there was some special meeting of prison guards (shows what Susanville's economy is) so no luck at the inn. By now it was close to midnight so we drove through the mountains dodging deer left and right until we spotted a "Vacancy" sign in the small town of Mt. Shasta at 2 am. The next morning we woke up to an alpine scene with snow capped Mt Shasta right behind us; the smell of fir and cedar filled the air. Below us we could see an emerald green meadow full of wildflowers. Just 36 hours before we were driving through the desert of Mexico, now we were in this environment, what a contrast.

A few hours later we arrived home at last, having driven 2,500 miles and sailed over 600 miles. This had to have been one of my best sailing experiences; it tested the limits of the boat and seamanship skills of my crew, and myself, but it was an adventure I would advise almost any Rhodes owner to try!