

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year from the Sunflower sailors in South Africa!!

We hope you had a great 2012 and are enjoying the holidays with friends and family.

We are in Richard's Bay, South Africa enjoying life at Tuzi Gazi marina and exploring SE Africa by rental car. Our 2012 cruising year was one of the most challenging, yet rewarding of our 10 year, on-going circumnavigation. We sailed 6338 miles to get here and spent 55 days at sea. Our first attempt to cross the Indian Ocean via the northern route, ended in March, after two days at sea, when the engine shaft coupling failed. The repairs delayed our departure past the end of the NE monsoon, which is necessary to sail west across the Northern Indian Ocean. To avoid another year's delay, we decided to motor-sail South, against the SE trade winds, through Malaysia and Indonesia, into the Southern Hemisphere, where we could cross the Southern Indian Ocean with dependable SE trade winds. Motoring into a headwind for days was no fun, and the Southern Indian Ocean was a rough piece of water, but we were more than compensated by the highlights of our season in Krakatoa, Chagos, Madagascar, and South Africa. A few pictures of these highlights are attached. (Don't use the slideshow button in Yahoo. It clips the titles at the bottom. Just click the first picture and use the right arrow key.)

After engine repairs were completed in April, we stored Sunflower at Rebak Marina and then made a short visit home because our planned cruise to the Caribbean would take almost a year. When we returned, we topped off our provisions and said goodbye to our old friends at Rebak.

On the 1st of August we headed south into the Melaka Strait. Our first stop was Admiral Marina where we had a nice day re-visiting our favorite spots in Melaka. Three day-hops later we arrived at Nongsa Point Marina in Indonesia. It has a very good restaurant, pool, and fairly convenient shopping. From there we took a ferry to Singapore for an enjoyable day of electronics shopping and sightseeing. At this point, our plans synchronized with Barry and Mags, on JJ Moon, so we planned to buddy boat though Indonesia to Krakatoa.

On 19 August we departed the last marina slip we would know until November, and resumed motoring into the SE trade winds. Arnold, our newly repaired engine, did a wonderful job, but it was very frustrating not to sail. Belitung, our next major stop, was memorable because of Harun Cahyadi, who helped with the formalities of checking out, tours, supplies, fuel, and even a barbecue. His uncle owns the land where we came ashore, and there was a lovely pool. It was a nice stop, although the anchorage was a bit rolly!

Our last and most memorable stop in Indonesia was Krakatoa, where we watched the volcano explode for more than 24 hours. When we first arrived, there were a few lava bombs flying and puffs of smoke. We walked toward the top with Mags from JJMoon; Dave went higher, to the East ridge. The next morning, Barry and Mags left for Cocos Keeling and we moved to another anchorage (off Rakata), two miles upwind, with an unobstructed view of Baby Krakatoa. The following morning we were awakened by rolling of the boat and a great rumbling sound. Baby Krak was smoking continuously and belching lots of rocks. The explosions intensified all morning. About 2pm, the park rangers left Baby Krak and came to our anchorage where their guest began taking pictures from the beach. We prepared Sunflower for immediate departure, if needed. The explosions built to a continuous crackling roar, sounding like a Saturn 5 rocket lifting off from Cape Kennedy. It was frightening. As night came the flames were shooting higher and higher, with occasional lightning in the smoke column. The anchorage was very rolly, and we are sure it was caused by the explosions in the volcano. Dolphins were squeaking under the boat and blowing beside us—we think they were trying to warn us. The roar built steadily all night. It was difficult to sleep so we got up several times to check its progress and take pictures. At mid-morning, the next day, things began to calm down, and sight-seeing boats began to arrive from the mainland. By noon it was pretty quiet—just a bit more smoke than when we first arrived. The shape of the cone had changed dramatically, and there were huge steam plumes where the lava was flowing into the sea.

The next day, 4 September, we left for Chagos expecting a 12-day trip. Instead, the trip took 15 days, with very frustrating weather as we

approached the latitude of Chagos at 5 20'S, 072 15'E. Tropical conditions (the ITCZ) had descended over Chagos and replaced our SE trade winds with rain squalls and head winds. So our usual 140-170nm/days were replaced with 100 or less. We finally arrived in Salomon Atoll, Chagos BIOT on 19 Sep. and anchored near Takamaka Island. The unusual NW winds caused that anchorage to be rolly so we moved to the SW end of the atoll and took an old mooring that proved to be very secure. There we met Mark and Maria aboard Mare Liberum, who introduced us to Boddam Island. After they left, we had the entire atoll to ourselves. The snorkeling and sunsets were spectacular. But it seemed that 2 out of 3 days were rainy and windy so we wished we had come earlier, before the ITCZ had moved south. The authorities came by once a week to check that all was ok, and ask about any illegal fishing boats. On 5 Oct. , Scott and Nikki arrived on Beach House and we helped them pick up a mooring. We spent the rest of our time there snorkeling and doing some activities with Beach House. Mauritius had been our next planned stop, but after our experience with Indian Ocean seas we decided that Madagascar would be easier than a near-beat to Mauritius, and more interesting.

Our departure was delayed, however, by a low that was causing too much weather for a comfortable departure. Over several days that low circled us, deepened, and moved southwest to build in strength and become the first cyclone of the year. This caused more delay because we needed to wait for the cyclone to clear our path before we could proceed.

Finally, after waiting about 10 days for Cyclone Anais to clear our course, we left Chagos on 17 October. Beach House had left the day before, but stopped in the Peros Bhanos atoll because there was no wind. Nine days later, we sailed into Andronoamby bay on the NW end of Madagascar. We witnessed a beautiful sunset over land that reminded us of the dry hills of California. There were numerous baobab trees. It was magical, and nice to be there!!

Our Madagascar and S. Africa adventures deserve their own emails and pictures at a later date. We had a wonderful time in both places. The plan for 2013: We will leave Richard's Bay in early Jan., spend some time in Simon's Town and Cape Town, and tour the area with

friends from Michigan, Jim and Flo. We will leave S. Africa for the Caribbean in early March with stops in Namibia, St. Helena, Ascension, and possibly Fortaleza.

Here are some pictures of the highlights of our cruise to South Africa:
<http://www.sme62.org/photoGallery-121226.php>

Have a very joyful Christmas and a wonderful New Year--Dave and Kathie