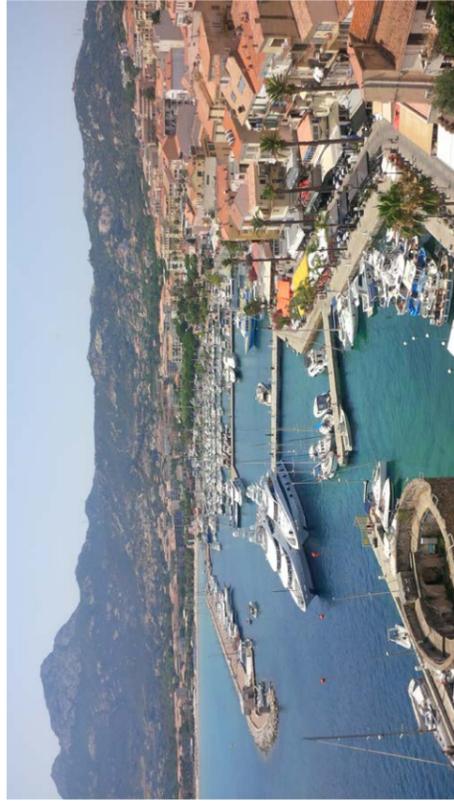




Above, the hill village of Piana on Corsica and below, the busy tourist trap of Calvi

To Corsica & Sardinia

David Innes-Wilkin describes a cruise taking in two of the loveliest islands in the western Mediterranean



David and Sarah took a four-month sabbatical in 2015, so they could sail their Moody 346 Shearwater to Sicily from Dartmouth. They returned afterwards to their work as an architect and as a teamwork mentoring coach in Bristol. Of course – there was never a cross word on Shearwater... after over 30 years of sailing together. This is their story about part of the journey by David, now 72.

We anchored outside Antibes in readiness for an early start.

The day of motoring to Corsica was on a flat mirror sea. Slipping away at 5am, we passed the mega yacht of Abramovitch, *Eclipse*, also anchored. Did she really cost \$500 million? The only quay large enough for her had been taken instead by the superyacht that used to be called *Nabila* and was the star of the James Bond film *Never Say Never Again*. (She is now named *Kingdom KR*).

Strangely there was a 0.4-knot current with us for most of the time. A lot of motor cruisers set their auto pilots to follow the same course as ourselves, 131°T, so a lookout was needed to see them both in front and behind. Suddenly we saw a lot of orcas, the whales – great excitement for us, yet such slow calm movement from them.

We awarded a piece of eight to one of

the guests sailing with us, for spotting land first, which was some 14 hours after weighing anchor. Soft clouds formed the backdrop of the port... only they were not clouds, but billows of soft blue-purple mountains rising in hazy layers behind it. Calvi is a busy tourist trap of a harbour where, arriving just before sunset, we moored with the assistance of the quayside "red-shirts". They put us stern-to at a quay with a boom-boom bar. Perhaps misjudging our ages? Oh well, just this once we did not mind the noise, for our next passage was to take in the almost deserted west coast bays.

The red-shirts put us stern-to outside a boom-boom bar – perhaps misjudging our ages?

Corsica has a history of civil war with many shootings. We awarded extra beers to the crew for each bullet hole spotted in the older walls. Three customs staff arrived next morning asking for *papiers* and *identité*. I shook hands with them and tried to eyeball the older one at the back in his dark shades, as I explained that I had mislaid my passport. The 20-year-old did my checks, luckily he is 'appy with ze *driving licence* instead. I couldn't remember when I last needed a passport.

(although things will change with Brexit). I refrained from asking about the time in 1794 that Admiral Lord Nelson took their citadel, which rises to dominate one side of the harbour. But I won a bonus beer later for spotting a cannon ball mark in the old walls. It was here that Nelson overcame the defences when he pounded the site with 2,000 shots from the guns that he had pulled up onto a nearby cliff.

In his early years Napoleon, the Corsican, did his army service at Calvi. He was very hard up and turned out to be unpopular. So unpopular that on his escape in later life when he was trying to form a new army, Calvi turned him down.

Down the coast, motor-sailing and sailing in calm light winds we anchored in many of the spectacular bays. The red rocks in their different formations carried down into the clear sea, where we sometimes snorkelled to see the same bulbous rounded shapes as were surrounding us.

We anchored at a beach called Anse de Ficajola and walked up to the village of Piana. Not for the faint hearted, a fragrant two-hour climb up a canyon of red rocks, under the fig and pine trees. A fox darted from a tree as we crossed the stream. Surrounded by a back drop of ochre mountains, we sat in the shade



Top, the lovely red rocks of Marine d'Elbo south of Calvi. Above right, Shearwater alone in the Anse de Ficajola below Piana. Bottom, the entrance to Bonifacio



of the village square for lunch. One of the "best villages" of France (according to the road signs). The local inland people have a reputation for being sullen. But after admiring their mural paintings we became very much at home, and then the Cassanova family gave us extra chilled water for the long descent. Anchorage there was in 15m deep shelving water, and only one other yacht was trying it. An improvement we had made for this trip was to put in a 60m chain with an electric windlass. The bays are quite exposed to the westerly wind and are only for fair weather stop-overs. Even with 60m of chain out we don't normally anchor overnight with less than five times the depth out.

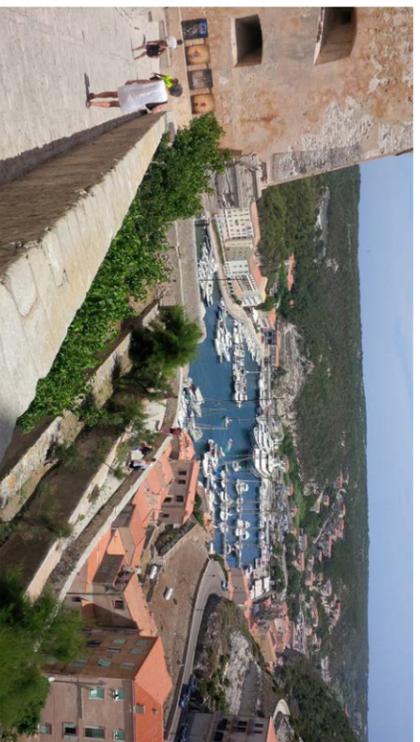
The ports of Ajaccio and then of Bonifacio allowed us to obtain water and food, and to see the high citadel walls circling the medieval town areas. We named Bonifacio "the city of no surrender." You could not make up the story of the women who held out against the King of Aragon in 1420. They dressed in the armour of the dead and marched along the top of the citadel walls in order to

fool the attackers. These walls and the gated entrance are the most formidable that I have ever seen. After taking in the history, we mastered the art of following suited workers into their local eateries, well away from the tourist hot spots. Excellent mussels and other seafoods were on offer.

Now the year of preparations in England to make *Shearwater* so well equipped began to show more benefits. The improvements allowed us to stay for many days in the Maddalena islands. We had added 200 amps of solar power on flexible deck units. These were enough to run the fridge, and thus allowed longer between port visits for stocking up with food. No need for running the engine in quiet bays. Secondly we had a tall drinking water tank made to fit into a wardrobe. The 70 litres lasted four of us for more than a week. We more than doubled the boat's general water storage with a shaped flexible double-skinned tank under the starboard forepeak bunk.

(We don't always fill this with the quarter of a tonne of extra weight so we can stay lighter for passages!) Moody boats all





Above left, Sarah enjoys one of the pleasures of the Med – cockpit dining. Above right, Bonifacio seen from the citadel. Left, one of the eco-homes built into the rocks of Maddalena. Bottom, David happy that the water is deep enough in an anchorage

lean to port, so this helps a bit.



Protected from development and from pollution, the Maddalena bays were also sheltered from swells. Beaches were a mixture of deserted havens or those which had coffee kiosks. Sometimes it was hard to spot the few eco houses disguised as piles of rocks on the shore, amongst the scrubby holly leaves of the maquis.

Getting the permit required a long, dusty walk to the Parca Guardia office. And then being passed from one door to another, by charming Italians, who sometimes had a mobile caught on one shoulder for simultaneously chatting and dealing with us. Lunch time? 12.30 to 3pm. But they still dealt with us in lunch time and we paid the €32 for a pass lasting a few days. Then a great pleasure, our first real Italian coffee in the town square. A square without road markings, traffic meandering across it between the pedestrians – how Italian. One lady had a live parrot on her shoulder.

A smart grey RIB with a white biniini motored up to our anchorage the next day. Two young Italian women in bright red shorts and matching lipstick asked for the *permesso di soggiorno*. They worked their way round the 50 boats which had all gathered there to enjoy the calm, shallow and clear bay. Italians seem to jump in the water and carry on chatting in groups. No need to thrash about swimming – it is so warm.

Back to a busy port, we sailed downwind

for Sardinia to Olbia in gentry rolling seas. At a disused concrete town quay we tied up with no charges (or services), for a couple of nights. The old shopping areas were quite lively with strolling locals as evening fell, and Sarah liked the mojito from a street vendor. It was made from white rum, lemon juice, sugar, mint, ice, and soda water. We got a new crew member here in the middle of the night, after he searched for over an hour to find us. Next day, near the harbour entrance, we visited the marina for long enough to get free water. Then, sailing in light headwinds to the north east corner, we visited the Costa Smeralda.

The Costa Smeralda has Europe's most expensive property. We sailed past it to find a bay with the same clear water... and free anchorage

Back in 1962, a flamboyant millionaire, the Aga Khan, established the resort which now has the most expensive property in Europe. In the harbour of Porto Cervo can be seen a selection from the world's top 100 superyachts. We sailed past it northwards in light airs to find a large bay, Cugnana, with the same completely clear water, and yet free anchorage. Seemingly it was only discovered by a few other yachts, and we went further into the shallows at 1.8m, to anchor for several days. There was a low-lying wooded landscape with occasional quays or cafes, where we became regulars and tried to read the Italian newspapers.

Here we passed a sailing ketch which was the largest in the world when she was built. *Vertigo* is 67m long with a 5m deep fixed keel. Below that drops another 4m of keel which is partly retractable. She carries over 5,000 sq ft of sail, and starts to reef if the wind increases to more than 10 knots. The design specification was in fact to sail nicely in the light airs of the Mediterranean.

Watching the weather forecast we realised that our next leg of more than 130 miles to the east would need to be done overnight. There was disturbed weather to the north with another strong wind coming. So at one hour's notice we set full sail, reaching with a northerly breeze in calm seas, heading eastwards for the island of Ponza across the Tyrrhenian sea.



David Innes-Wilkin and Sarah Akroyd are from Bristol, and kept *Shearwater*, their Moody 346, in Dartmouth from 2002. They spent two years improving her and in 2015 took her through the French canals and into the Med. *Shearwater* is currently in Greece.