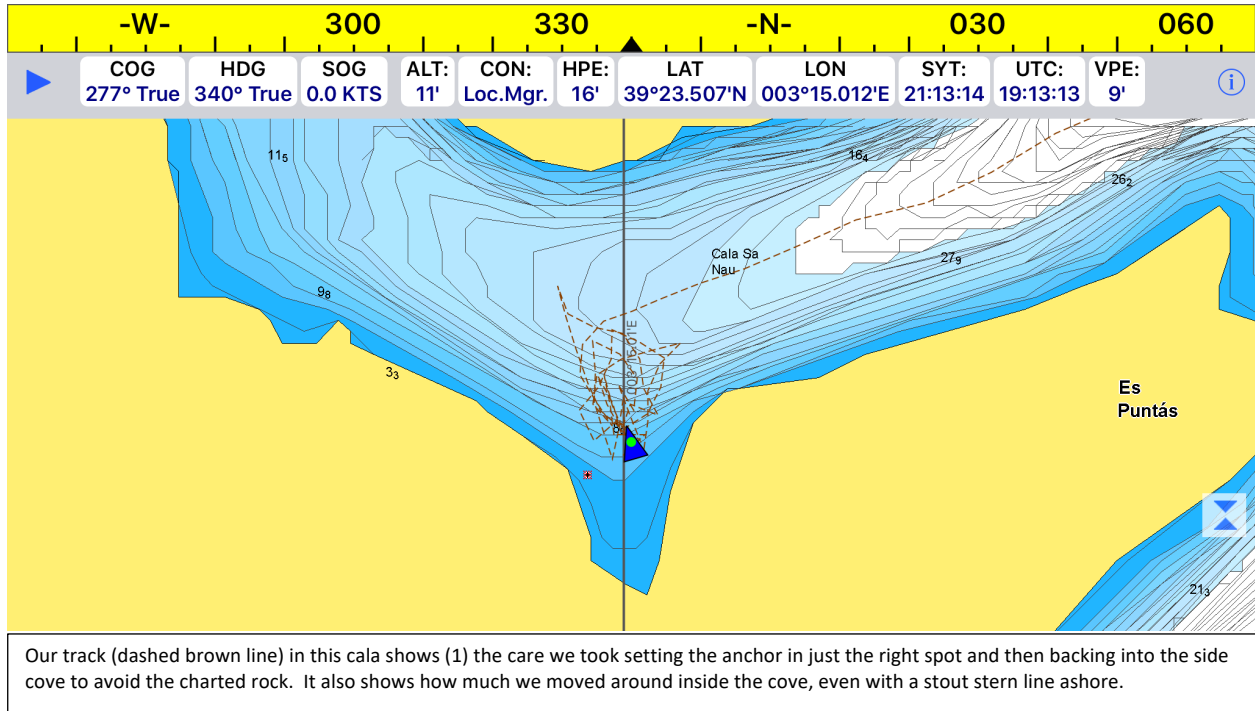


What's All This Cala Hopping About?

Aboard S/V At First Sight

August 17, 2020



Apparently, *cala hopping* is the thing to do when cruising Mallorca and Menorca, which is similar to gunkholing in the Chesapeake Bay or along New England's rocky coast. After being tied to a pier in Palma, on a mooring in Cabrera, and then spending a few days anchored off the long sandy beaches of Colonia de San Jordi, we were ready for some cala hopping.

An unforgettable experience in Cala Sa Nau!

As we wrote in our last post, Cala Sa Nau was our first attempt (if you ignore the fact that we thought we were at Cala Minjana instead), and we were quite pleased with how we had tucked AFS in for the night into a small cranny that was well protected from the prevailing southeasterly breeze. It was also our first time using a stern line with AFS, too. We went to bed late that night, after a wonderful dinner on the fantail, accompanied by a terrific local *vino tinto*, and some surreal star and moon gazing.



Left:
Checking our
stern line
one last time
before
nightfall.

Right: A
romantic
moon over
Cala Sa Nau



We anticipated a 2-night stay in Cala Sa Nau, expecting to move in the morning further into the cala and around a dogleg to the right before the day boats arrived, but still in advance of a forecasted significant wind shift later in the day. Unfortunately, however, the wind shift came not at 2pm the next day, but at 2am that night, and the breeze also quickly freshened with occasional gusts to 14kts. Saylor must have known something wasn't right, because she came down at 3am from sleeping in the cockpit and woke me up, alerting me to the sound of waves crashing on nearby rocks that must have gotten her attention, too. I raced to the cockpit and saw that although our anchor and stern line were holding us fast, the wind had flattened the catenary curve of the anchor chain and put more stress than I was comfortable with on our stern line, especially since it was being held to a bolder ashore by pitons placed there by someone else.

Now, instead of being tucked into the east side of the side of the cala, with its sheer cliff and unobstructed deep water, we were being set close to the west side; and when the wind gusts came, it looked like our rudder was right over a ginormous submerged rock. (I dove on that rock the night before, and knew it was deeper than our 6' draft, but not by much.)

We would have to move sooner than we had planned. I checked my watch, and saw we had three hours until sunrise, so I laid down to nap in the cockpit, keeping my ear attuned to the sound of the waves against the rocks, and periodically shining a flashlight into the water to ensure we weren't getting any closer to the rock. Thankfully, we weren't.



We were much further from that rock at nightfall, before the wind shifted. And then there's the big part of it you can't see that's right under the boat.

Vicki was up at first light, and immediately sensed that we were in a pickle. We needed to release the stern line to get underway, but with the wind blowing like it was, doing so would allow the stern to shift directly over the submerged rock, or worse, continue setting that way onto the rocky shore of that side of the cala. She suggested using her kayak to help, which is exactly what we did.

After starting the Perkins and gently putting it in forward gear, we turned the rudder hard to port – directly toward the rocks – hoping the stern line would (1) hold and (2) spring our stern to starboard, giving us some maneuvering room to weigh anchor. The strategy worked, and when we had sprung far enough to starboard, Vicki released the stern line from its cleat on our starboard side and then she quickly made for the bow to weigh anchor. Meanwhile, I maneuvered us to keep clear of the various obstacles. Once aweigh and with *AFS*'s bow into the wind, Vicki descended onto her kayak and paddled back to “the rock” to retrieve our 150' of mooring line that had done so well for us overnight. Meanwhile I took *AFS* out to sea, and waited for Vicki to give me a call on the handheld VHF radio when she was ready to rendezvous.



After weighing anchor in this cozy little outcropping of Cala Sa Nau, Vicki disembarked from *AFS*, and using her kayak, she went back to retrieve our lengthy stern anchor line and related tackle. We later rendezvoused at the entrance to the cala, and she climbed aboard. She wore a life vest, of course, and carried a handheld VHF radio.

After a short while that simultaneously seemed to pass in an instant and take forever, Vicki was back aboard *AFS*, with her kayak in tow behind us, alongside our dinghy, *2nd Sight*. Now to figure out where to anchor so to be out of the wind and swells. As often seems the case in the Islas Baleares, the trick is to find the sweet spot between rocky cliffs and shoals above the water and jagged rocks and protected *Posidonia* seagrass below, with enough swing room to avoid the myriad other vessels that always seem to beat you to the best spots.

We made a couple of passes deep into Cala Sa Nau, and determined there was plenty of room for us to drop the hook on the left side of the cove in front of the buoyed off swimming area, last along a row of other boats already at anchor, some with stern anchors and some without.

We dropped the anchor in 12' of the clearest water you can imagine in an area with a patchwork of sand, rock, and seagrass. Then we attached a line to starboard on a solid piece of rebar sticking up out of a rock near a concrete platform outside the swimming area, but that swimmers nevertheless used as a jump platform for their cannonballs and swan dives. And as an added measure, we set our small Danforth anchor 45 degrees off the port quarter to keep us from swinging into the jagged rocks to starboard, if the wind suddenly shifted. Everything was just hunky dory... until it wasn't.

As the boat settled astern after securing the anchor snubber, we felt like we were now encroaching on the swimming area. We slackened our two stern lines and tried to reposition the boat, but we couldn't find that sweet spot again, and when we did finally re-drop it, our 99-pound Spade never seemed to bite into the bottom like it had before. In fact, the wind was now pushing our bow over toward the jagged rocks to starboard, dragging our anchor along with it. Only our bow thruster was keeping us off the rocks, and I could hear the battery drain more every time we used it.

We obviously needed to get out of there, fast, so we cast off the two stern lines and tried to weigh anchor and get to deeper water where we could regroup. But suddenly we had no thrust from our big Perkins 6.354 diesel. We could hear the transmission engage in both forward and reverse, but we weren't going anywhere. And there was a strange noise from down below. My first thought was we had fouled the prop on one of our dropped stern lines, or on someone else's. Vicki took helm and bow thruster duty, and I dove overboard to de-foul the prop. But it wasn't fouled. Now what?

Once back aboard, Vicki and I both raced to put fenders out everywhere we could in the 30 seconds or so we had before the inevitable slide into the rocky cliff happened. In addition, several Spanish and German beachgoers saw what was happening, and they rushed cliffside to help us fend off.

There must have been some sort of divine intervention, because although we couldn't entirely prevent hitting the rocks, the wind seemed to abate at that very moment, and we gently came to rest (mostly on the fenders) a few inches away from a phalanx of rocky daggers protruding from the cliff along the middle 50% of our starboard side. Oh sure, we took several "hits" but nothing too serious, although the sound each one had was agonizingly reminiscent of the sound you may have heard if you've ever scraped the side of a car against a light pole, a tree, or another vehicle.



At this point, one of our shoreside Spanish helpers astutely called out to a boat that was just positioning himself to anchor in the spot we had partially vacated moments earlier. Our helper asked the new guy if he would tow us out to deeper water, adding that our motor wasn't working. And in the longstanding nautical tradition of seamen helping seaman, the new guy readily obliged. He put his stern to our port bow, Vicki tossed him a line, and he towed us out to the center of the cala, admittedly a little exposed to the fresh breeze, but probably where a boat our size and displacement should have anchored in the first place. He dropped the line and Vicki dropped the hook, which held like a champ this time, since we were able to let out enough scope and the wind forcefully pushed us back to help naturally set the anchor in its place.

Three cheers for the Spanish Salvamento Marítimo.

One of the lifeguards from the swim beach had come over from her post early on in this ordeal, mostly to monitor for safety we presume. She yelled out to see if we had called for assistance, which we had done once or twice on the VHF radio, but without receiving a response.

She gave Vicki the telephone number for the Spanish Salvamento Marítimo, and Vicki promptly reached them via her cellphone. Meanwhile, I hopped aboard 2nd *Sight* and rowed back to the scene of our mini disaster and recovered the fenders we had left behind, and the Danforth stern anchor, as well as its 70' of chain and 100' of rope rode.



Within 30 minutes we saw the international orange hull and superstructure of the Salvamento Marítimo's rescue boat entering the cala. Their highly professional crew spoke to us in a mix of Spanish and English as we attached their tow bridle to our bow cleats, raised our anchor, centered our rudder, and prepared for the tow to the port of Portocolom.



During the tow, I went below and inspected the drive train to determine why we lost our ability to maneuver under diesel power, when we needed it most. To my surprise, I discovered that the propeller shaft damper had totally failed, essentially decoupling the back of the transmission from the leading end of the shaft. The Perkins and transmission were

working fine; they just weren't connected to the shaft or propeller. This would be akin to a universal joint breaking on the drive shaft of a rear-wheel drive car. And it's not like we had ignored this vital link in the drive train. We had worked in this area with pro mechanics in both Puerto Rico and Bermuda.



We entered the curvy channel of Portocolom's well-protected harbor on this beautiful Sunday, glided past the fleet of boats on moorings, and then the captain of the rescue boat skillfully pushed us starboard side to, near the end of the city wharf, and then he invited us to come aboard his vessel to do the requisite admin stuff after he docked

at the end of the quay. The paperwork couldn't have been easier, and we hope we'll recoup the towing fee soon through our Boat U.S. towing insurance, which we've now used 3 times in 2 years, after not using it at all for the first 4 years of the policy. The captain also gave us a 2-page sheet in Spanish, French, German, and English with a list of mechanics, chandleries, hardware stores, and restaurants that deliver – as though he's dropped off more than a boat or two during his career.



After getting towed from the *cala* to the port, the towboat became more of a tugboat. He came along our port side and nudged us up to the quay, where one of the crewmen through our first line to a waiting *marinero* on the dock.

Don't miss a chance to visit Portocolom...

But do try to get there under your own power.

No mariner ever wants to get stuck anywhere, but if you have to be stuck somewhere, Portocolom is pretty much as good as it gets. It's a beautiful small town with a sheltered harbor, and a *paseo marítimo* lined on one side by a fleet of "Med moored" commercial fishing boats and pleasure craft, and on the other side by restaurants and shops. Even under these circumstances, it seemed like it was going to be a great place to visit.

We were on the phone and WhatsApp first thing Monday morning trying to find a mechanic to help us determine if we had some occult cause for the damper failure, and to also help us order the replacement parts and install them. The first 4 mechanics we contacted were either on vacation (it's August, after all) or fully booked covering for their colleagues who were on vacation. Fortunately, the fifth happened to be on a service call aboard the commercial fishing boat across the quay from us. David, the mechanic, popped over about an hour later, by which time we had the remnants of the damper removed and available for his inspection. He was aboard for only ~15 minutes, but assured us that the repair

would be a piece of cake. The challenge would be getting the parts in a timely manner – it being August in Europe, after all, not to mention that all the parts suppliers were operating at ~50% capacity anyway due to COVID-19 workplace density requirements.

Everything came up roses for us in Portocolm. On the day we arrived, we were hailed from the water by Andrew Miles, a British cruiser in *SY Miles Away*, who we met in Cartagena back in March, shortly before lockdown there, but who returned to England before we had exchanged contact info. His wife, Ali, was flying in that day, and we went out for dinner the next night – a slight break in the usual social distancing practices that we’ve become accustomed to. Besides a delightful evening in its own right, they were fountains of knowledge about cruising in the Balears, which they’ve done for the past 5 years.

We spent 3 days in the prime spot on the city wharf before getting towed to a Club Náutico mooring by one of their service boats. I nearly fell over when the harbormaster told me “no charge” for the wharf space since we were there due to mechanical problems. And once on the mooring, we were quickly into an all too comfortable routine. Vicki did her intense cardio and yoga routines on the fantail of *AFS*. Meanwhile, I rowed ashore most mornings, biked 3km to Cala Marçal, swam for a while, then biked to a *panadería* or *supermercado* for a few things, returned to the dinghy dock, and rowed back to *AFS* for a late breakfast. After breakfast but before Spanish lunchtime (~1430ish) we’d launch into a boat project or two. There’s always something that needs polishing, painting, mending, or lubing. This time Vicki polished all the stainless steel and worked on improving our sunshade, while I washed and waxed the hull, which we hadn’t done since shortly before leaving Rota in January.



On one such day, a man from a neighbor boat stopped by in his dinghy and asked Vicki if we wanted to join his wife and him for dinner. And that’s how we met

another lovely cruising couple, Colin and Alison aboard *SY Spiritus*, both formerly creative talents with the BBC, and who know the best restaurants in Portocolom.



Colin and Alison, our new friends from *SY Spiritus*, picked us up in their dinghy and took us to a nearby beach for the short walk to the “Blue Bar” for “big fish.” We had grilled lubina and grilled vegetables, and everything was delicious. Since Colin and Alison are regulars at the Blue Bar, we were all gifted a bottle of cava as a nightcap aperitif. We didn’t get back to *AFS* until well after midnight

But the best rose of all was our parts came in several days sooner than David (the mechanic) had anticipated, and he was back aboard to install them just 5 days after his first visit. We arranged for a tow back to the quay, David arrived at 3pm, and we were back on the mooring (using our own power to get there) by 7pm.

We used every bit of the next two days getting ready to get underway again, including a quick trip in a rental car back to Palma to buy a new bilge pump, and to restock with enough fruits and veggies to stay off the grid for a few days. We slipped from our mooring lines at noon on Saturday, and we were scouting out Cala Virgili (recommended by Andrew and Ali) 90 minutes later. Unfortunately, it was overstuffed boats, some we knew would leave before sunset, but others looked like they were staying the night. So we went maybe 200 meters or so further north up the coast to Cala Magraner, and dropped our hook there. We could feel the waves of relaxation come over us.



Our *At First Sight* is front and center in Cala Magraner. We anchored at the entrance to the cala until ~6pm when all of the day boats returned to their marinas. We moved further up into the protected waters of the cala and enjoyed the rest of the first night in solitude. More about Cala Magraner in our next post!