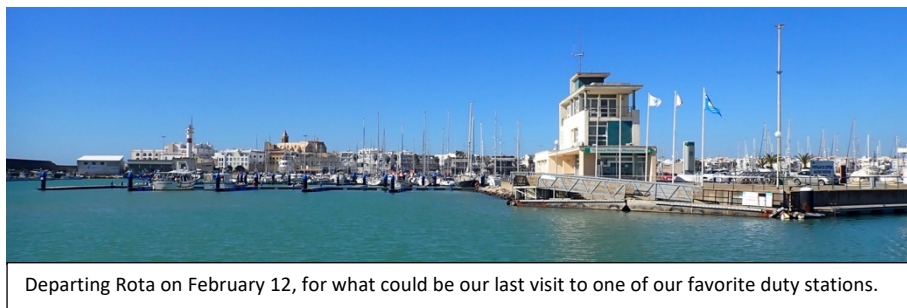


## Passage Making Again: Rota to Gran Canaria February 12-17, 2021



We arrived in Rota on 5 February and departed on the 12<sup>th</sup>. This picturesque pueblo had been our home from 2000-2003, and it served as our marina of choice for 3 months at the end of 2019. Vicki and I would have been quite comfortable hanging out there for a long while this time, too; but our main reason for this port visit was to stage for our upcoming transatlantic crossing. And we had lots to do. So, between COVID-modified reunions with local friends coupled with provisioning and planning for our upcoming passages, our week in Rota flew by.

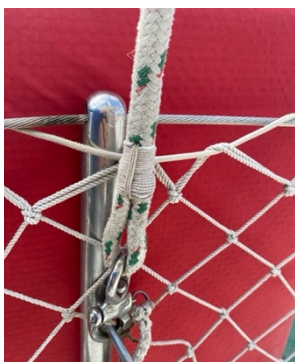


While I tended to preventive maintenance and repairs – lube oil and fuel filter changes, fixing the fuel gauge, installing more Alpenglow cabin lights, etc. – Vicki worked on provisioning for

the crossings. She spent a full day shopping with Kim Diaz, our longtime American friend who married a Spaniard 40 years ago and has lived near Rota ever since. Kim knows how to shop like few others, and she knows which stores have the best selections and best bargains. All I can say is that it's a good thing Kim has a large SUV, because we were definitely well provisioned after their mutual *victualing* extravaganza.



After a shopping run with our good friend Kim Diaz, AFS was awash in provisions above and below decks. Somehow, Vicki always finds a proper place for everything, and then puts everything in its proper place.



Starboard mizzen staysail halyard with a nicely done eye splice.

In addition, Vicki, who has become quite skilled with *marlinspike seamanship*, spent ~6 hours one day trying to splice a shackle on to the new mizzen staysail halyard we purchased at a local chandlery. This is normally a 30-minute process; however, this rope had been pre-stretched, perhaps to excess, and it seems to have made the outer jacket too tight for splicing. We ended up bending the shackle on with a halyard hitch instead of a splice.

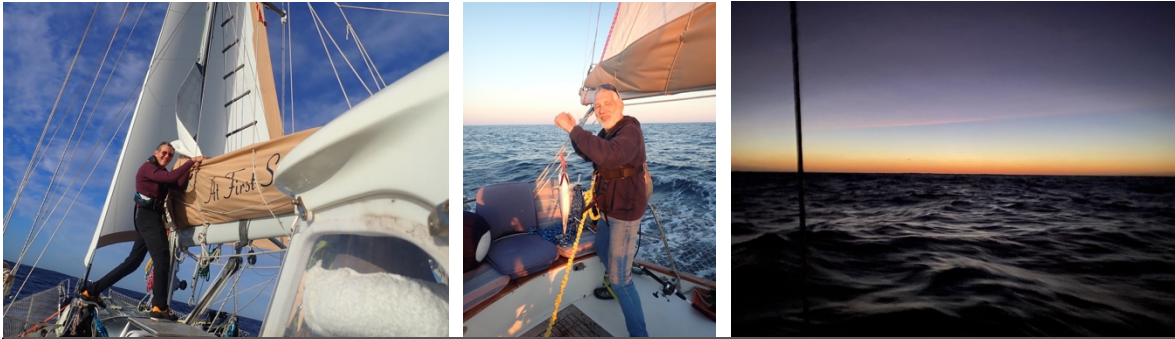


New port mizzen staysail halyard with a nicely done halyard hitch.

On our last morning in port, Juan drove us to Cádiz, the closest port of entry, in order to clear out with Spanish immigration authorities. Technically, we didn't need to clear out since we were destined for the Canary Islands, which is Spanish territory, part of the EU, and in the Schengen Zone. However, we were nearing the end of our legal length of stay in the Schengen

Zone, and if we checked out in Cádiz, the 5 days we would spend at sea in transit to the Canary Islands wouldn't count against our length of stay in Europe. We returned to Rota around noon, made final preparations for getting underway, and cast off at 14:45h.

If a cruising sailor were to write a script for what a perfect first day underway should be like, this first day would take star billing. The sea was calm and the wind was perfect for a beam- or broad reach straight from Rota to the Canary Islands, and we were under full sails and making 6+ knots less than 20 minutes after leaving port. Then a few minutes after leaving the Bay of Cádiz and already in the deeper waters of the Atlantic Ocean proper, Juan decided to troll a lure; and I kid you not, within 30 seconds he had a strike on the line and 10 minutes later he had landed a 3kg Bonito Tuna. And if that wasn't enough, we had a gorgeous sunset capped off with a picture-perfect *green flash*. (Unfortunately, no picture to prove it...) We had completed a first-day trifecta and Gran Canaria lay just 675nm downwind!



A first-day cruising trifecta: We hoisted sails within minutes of leaving the marina. Juan caught an edible fish within seconds of putting a lure in the water. And, although we missed capturing it in a photo, the entire crew witnessed a spectacular green flash.

Despite lots of commercial traffic in the sea lanes to and from Gibraltar, our first night at sea was as pleasant as they come with the wind clocking ever so slightly during the night from NW to NNW, putting us on a broad reach. There was almost no moon, but the night sky was ablaze with stars. And when MV REGGANE crossed ~1.5nm astern, she represented our last Gibraltar-bound contact of concern. It was now clear sailing to the Canaries.

As perfectly *tranquilla* as the first afternoon and evening had been, the next full day presented quite a contrast with so many sail changes I had flashbacks to days of big boat regatta sailing in the Chesapeake Bay. First the mainsail was flopping and snapping back and forth so we doused it; but then we were rocking tremendously from side to side and we lost nearly all our speed despite relatively steady winds at 14kts. We were getting gusts up near 20kts though, which seemed a little too brisk for our big drifter sail.

I had a bright idea, or so I thought. Why not pole out the forestaysail to port (opposite the genoa) using the boom? What a goat rope that turned out to be. First, we had to un-foul the forestay and its halyard from out behind the whisker pole holding the genoa out. This meant climbing the ratlines in rolling seas and passing their ends over the pole to free them for use. Then we had to rig a preventer to secure the main boom out at 90°. Then we had to set the running backstays... Etc. It took us so long to do all of the above that by the time we completed the housekeeping chores the wind had shifted another 30° and was now off the port quarter and the staysail was constantly backfilling. And so, we doused it, re-hoisted the mainsail, this time on the starboard side (e.g., port tack) – and then relaxed for a while. We went in this configuration – genoa poled to starboard, mainsail to starboard, mizzen to starboard – for several hours, with the wind and boat speed gradually but steadily decreasing.



Climbing the *ratlines* to un-foul the forestay and its halyard for a not so bright idea.

But the wind eventually rebounded and settled out at 8-12kts from the N-NNE, and by mid-afternoon we had completed yet another sail change. We doused the mainsail and were now flying the genoa poled to starboard, the drifter poled to port (with the boom), running dead downwind at 6.5-8.5kts in 16-18kts of wind. Perfect downwind sailing again, and we were now well offshore midway between the Spanish and Moroccan coasts.



This photo set shows the various downwind sail configurations we used during our passage from Rota to Gran Canaria – poled out genoa, poled out drifter, both headsails poled out, mizzen staysail. We weren't racing, per se, but sometimes it felt like it since we did so many sail changes.

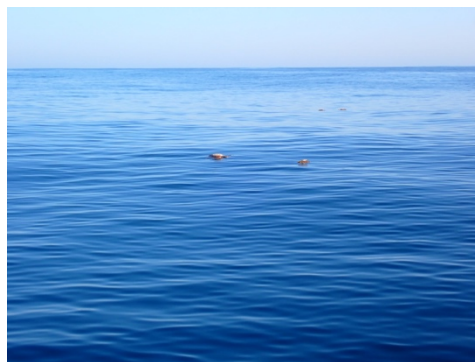
The next day, Valentine's Day, brought more comfortable sailing, but also more sail changes. The wind was clocking more to the east, and we went from a poled-out genoa to a beam reach with the genoa, and then a change to the drifter. We even flew the mizzen staysail, for about an hour. The wind eventually abated, and we doused all sails and lit off the Perkins for several hours of motoring into the calm sea. Oh well, at least we would have hot water for showering.



Vicki making a delicious Valentine's Day, Asian-themed meal, and Juan showing his appreciation.

By dinnertime, however, the wind freshened just enough... And after finishing a romantic, Asian-themed Valentine's Day dinner of soba noodles with vegetables and shrimp, we quickly poled the genoa to port and the drifter to starboard, and resumed a dead downwind run into the night making 5.5-6kts. By midnight, however, the wind had died again and we could not maintain steerageway. We once again lit off the Perkins, and at the next watch change, we doused all the sails.

In fact, we went nearly 24 hours with little to no wind and the Atlantic Ocean looked like a big, calm lake. In fact, the sea was so calm we could detect the smallest of breaks in the water's surface, which allowed us to see literally dozens of sea turtles scattered here and there just chillaxing and sunning themselves. Now we were ~45nm off the west coast of Morocco. In different times, we no doubt would have been tempted to make a stopover in Casablanca. In a tribute to our location, instead, Vicki made a delicious vegetarian Moroccan stew for dinner. "Here's looking at you, Kid."



Blue water sailing motoring on Lago Atlántico. The water was glassy calm for ~24 hours. In fact, it was so still we saw dozens of turtles sunning themselves on the surface as we motored by.

**Land ho! Tierra a la vista!** We passed <8nm by Isla de Alegranza, the northernmost Canary Islet, around midday the next day; but it was just a teaser, as the islet would soon disappear behind us and we wouldn't see land again until in sight of Gran Canaria on our final day at sea.



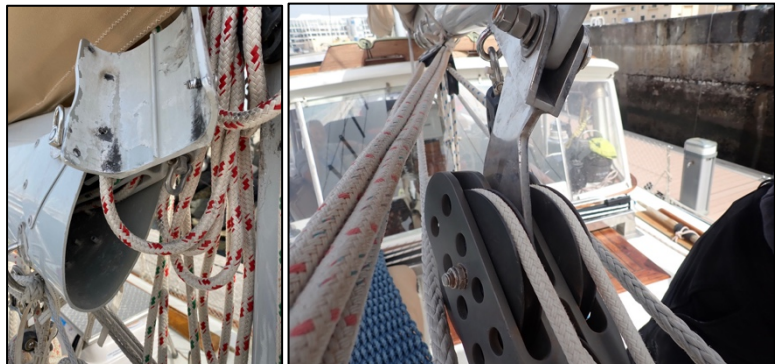
David taking a noonsite with a sextant while Vicki records the precise time of the sighting.

In addition to seeing land, one of the highlights was taking a noonsite with our sextant – and actually plotting our position using the sighting. I suppose 75nm off from our actual GPS fix is nothing to brag about; on the other hand, at least our sunline calculation was in the vicinity of the Canary Islands. We'll keep practicing during future passages.



Land ho! *Tierra a la vista!*  
Isla de Aleganza.

If that was a highlight, the lowlight was just after sunset as the dark of night descended upon us, when we heard a rather loud crash somewhere forward on the boat. We looked up and saw the gooseneck for the main boom was not attached to the mast, and the boom was being held up only by the mainsail itself and by the mechanical vang below! We quickly doused the mainsail even though we were running before the wind, and then once the sail was stowed, lashed the gooseneck to the mast with Dyneema® so it wouldn't thrash about. Unfortunately, we have no idea how the gooseneck came loose.



Surveying the damage – fortunately there was none – after the gooseneck became disconnected from the mast. The bent tang in the vang was easily straightened in a machine shop on the base.

Winds were relatively light at 12-15kts from dead astern, and although the mainsail had been “popping” from time to time after backfilling between swells, the pops had not been especially strong or violent. And we had a full blue-water-type preventer properly rigged at the end of the boom to prevent an accidental gybe. I suspect several mounting screws simply came loose, and we had missed seeing them during our regular checks of the standing rigging. We also doused the mizzen, too, in order to have one less thing to manage. Nevertheless, we were still making ~6kts under a poled-out genoa alone!

The rest of the evening was thankfully uneventful, although the wind clocked east and we could no longer keep the genoa poled out. We gybed the genoa over to the starboard side and cruised into our final landfall off La Isleta at the northern tip of Gran Canaria.

We had a busy, and perhaps, a too exciting approach to Las Palmas. (Left) Vicki hoisting the "Q" (quarantine flag) prior to arrival. (Center) A pod of 6 dolphins played in our bow wake and teased Saylor for ~10 minutes. (Right) A wicked cross-swell slammed into us for nearly an hour while we were in the *wind acceleration zone* in the coastal waters beneath the mountains of Gran Canaria.



By 10:30h we were docked port side to the reception pier at Puerto Deportivo de Las Palmas – but not before experiencing 45-60 minutes of the roughest sea state we've seen in a long, long time. We were clearly in a Canary Island *wind acceleration zone*, and the wicked and unusual southeast winds had kicked up steep 3-4m swells with breaking wavetops, and they were crashing regularly into and occasionally over our port bow. *AFS* was getting bounced around like a cork from one wave to the next, and down below anything that wasn't properly stowed (and a few things that were) were tossed around the cabin making it look like a tornado had passed through. Miraculously, no one was hurt and nothing was damaged, and a serene sense of normalcy returned to the boat and crew instantly as we rounded the outer breakwater and entered Las Palmas harbor.

While I checked us in with Spanish immigration authorities, Juan called his friend, the commandant of the naval base at Las Palmas to ensure we could stay on the base. Thirty minutes later we were docked at the floating pontoon at the Arsenal Naval de Las Palmas, greeted by the base CO, CN Carlos Múgica Ruiz and his XO, CF Antonio "Coco" Ugarte. It pays to have Juan as a friend, crewmember, and *enchufe*!



Our waterfront neighbor at Arsenal Naval de Las Palmas, Spanish Navy Patrol Vessel *METEORO* (P-41).