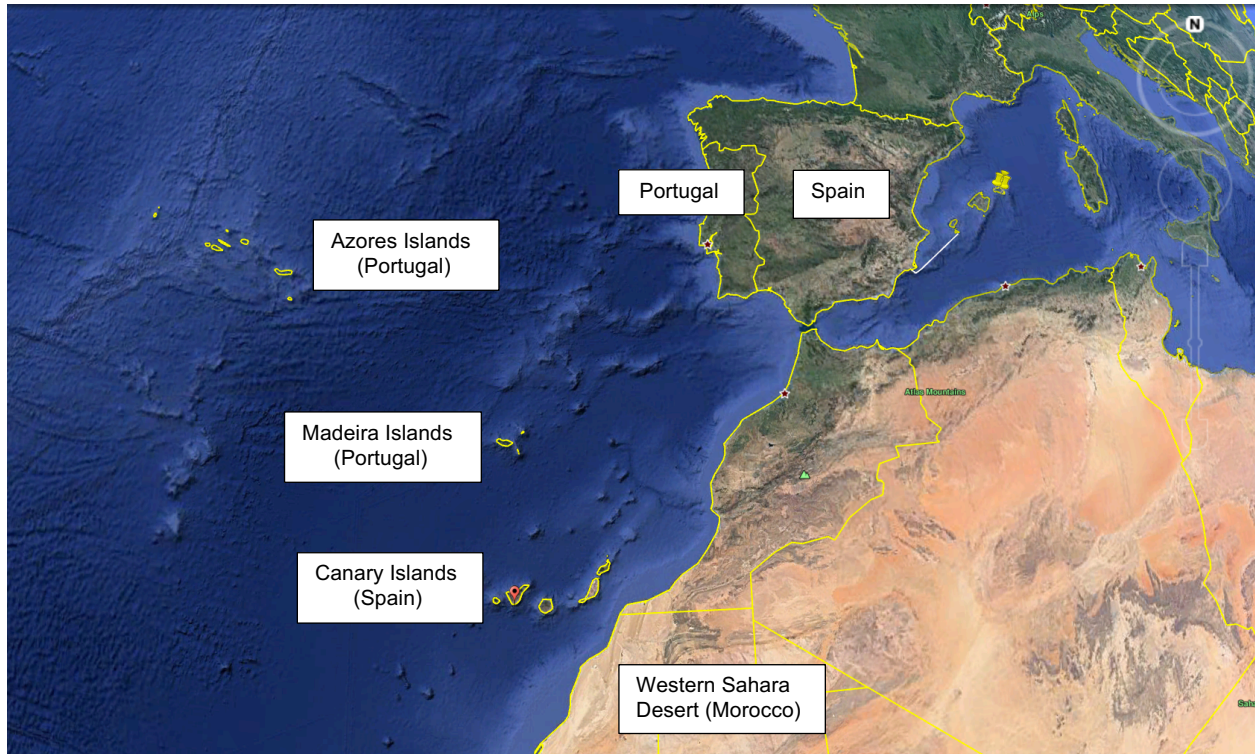


How Two Weeks Became Nearly Two Months In the Beautiful Canary Islands, February 17– April 9(?), 2021



Striking the quarantine Q flag after clearing customs & immigration on February 17.

We try to update our chronicle every few weeks, and we're woefully behind this time. Our last update was over a month ago, just a short while after arriving in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria on February 17, which culminated a 5-day passage from Rota. Much to our surprise, we're still in Las Palmas, and we probably will be for another week.

Don't get us wrong, this is a very very nice place to be; a paradise, really. It's just that we expected to be ~2,700nm south-southwest of here by now. Our unexpectedly longer stay in the Canaries can be divided up into 3 phases – initial arrival, *la vuelta* (the circuit), and our surprisingly colorful return to Las Palmas.

Initial Arrival, February 17 – March 10. As we noted in our last post, we were graciously provided docking space at the Arsenal Naval de Las Palmas. This busy little base is located at the prime intersection between the *paseo marítimo* that parallels the waterfront for much of downtown Las Palmas and the city center's grand walking boulevard that leads perpendicularly

away from the base and the water's edge. Not only is the base home to 4 Spanish ocean patrol ships, but the *Guardia Civil's* maritime force and the *Aduana* (Customs Agency) base ships here, too. In fact, we are docked just a few boat lengths from a million-dollar Rhode Island-registered sailing yacht and a rust bucket of a Panamanian-registered fishing boat, both impounded by the *Aduana* for smuggling several tons of cocaine each. This would surely be the most sought-after venue in the port, if it was a commercial marina, and we are grateful to Juan Peñuelas and his friends in the *Armada de España* that made our extended stay possible.



Neighbor boats impounded for drug running by the Aduana at Arsenal de Las Palmas. They offloaded 8 tons of cocaine from the rusty fishing boat.

Despite the premier location, we intended to make this somewhat of a working port, do a little touring, and then be on our way. The three main projects on our to do list were (1) fix the main boom gooseneck fitting, boom vang, and storm trysail track, which were damaged on the passage from Rota, (2) install a dual wind- and hydro-generator that we had shipped here from England (to avoid the 21% VAT tax in the rest of the European Union), and (3) take our folding bicycle to a Shimano warranty center to repair the gear hub.

Much to my surprise, installing the DuoGen® wind and sea generator was a fun and a totally successful project – and we did it ourselves in just 3 days without drilling any holes into the hull.



Boys and their toys. Installing the DuoGen® air and sea generator was surprisingly straightforward, and it did not require drilling any holes into the boat. It will give us the ability to keep our batteries fully charged overnight while on passages.

On the other hand, it took us every bit of 3 weeks to repair the damaged standing rigging through a combination of DIY projects and professional riggers. We got our part of the repairs done in just about a week; most of the delay was due to the hectic schedule of the riggers who sometimes would hop aboard for 15-20 minutes, measure, drill, or prep something on the mast, and then rush off to another boat in another marina.



Repairing the gooseneck and vang was a mix of DIY and pro work. We needed a machine shop to straighten the bent tang on the vang, and riggers with extra-large Monel rivets to reattach the gooseneck.

We failed, however, in getting the bike fixed, which was maddening given the exorbitant price tag of a Bike Friday bicycle, which is still very much under warranty. Although Shimano is the dominant global force in bike componentry, their warranty is disturbingly not global, and Shimano Europe would not honor the Shimano USA warranty. Fortunately, Bike Friday (a bike shop in Oregon) stepped up and agreed to replace the hub that self-destructed if we shipped the wheel back to them, which we did. The downside, of course, is now we're without the use of a pretty nifty bike until we get within reasonable shipping distance of the Pacific Northwest. As the 1970s and 80s American power balladier Meat Loaf might have belted out, "Two out of Three Ain't Bad."

In between these "must do" projects, before he returned to Rota, Juan borrowed 2 wetsuits from the navy dive locker, and he and I endured the 18°C/65°F water for 2 hours, and thoroughly cleaned AFS's dirty bottom. And Vicki and I replaced all the black water plumbing hoses for the forward head, the lengthy hoses for which we had been lugging around since September. We also mounted much needed handholds onto our new hardtop Bimini – a lesson learned from rough seas we experienced on arrival to Las Palmas.



Never a shortage of work to do on a cruising sailboat. Here Juan and I are cleaning the bottom of plant and barnacle growth using our *hookah* rig, and Vicki and I through-bolt handhold rails inside and outside on the Bimini we installed in Menorca.

Well, what about the touring? We did some of that, too. Besides sampling Canary Island cuisine in and around Las Palmas, we rented a car a couple of times and visited various parts of

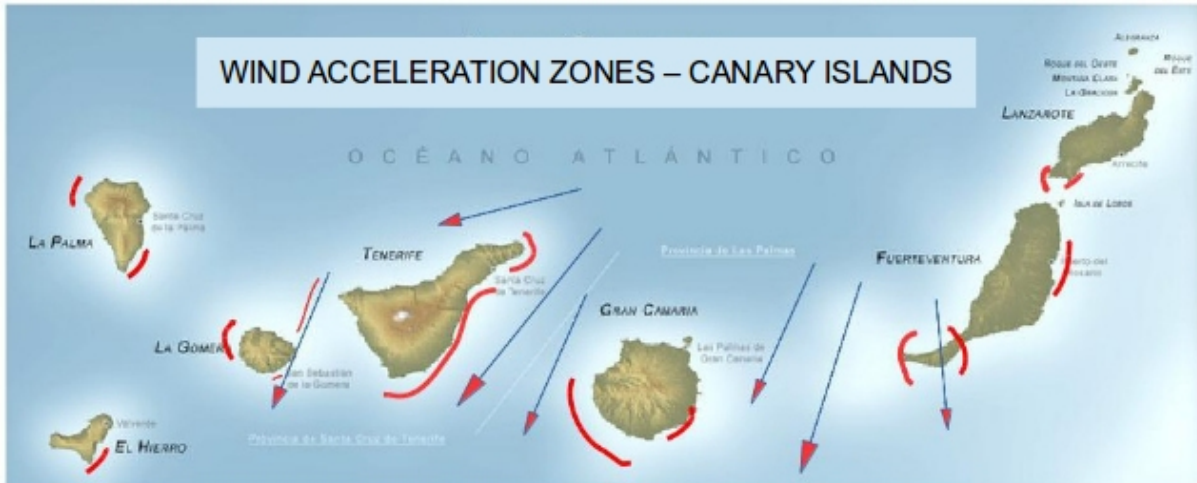
Grand Canaria. Most notably, we drove all around the mountains – desert brown on the dry side of the island and lush green on the wet side - with their tortuous switchbacks that make up the center of the island, and we visited the *Dunas de Maspalomas* on the southeast coast, which is a little like visiting the Western Sahara Desert, which lies ~150 miles to the southeast.



And once all the aforementioned work was done, we were tempted to set sail for Cabo Verde or go direct to the Caribbean. However, we were still waiting for a couple of important parcels to arrive from the U.S., including new credit cards to replace expiring ones. We can't contribute very well to the local economy without valid credit cards, can we? Besides, we needed to do a local sea trial to test the recent repairs and new installation, and for this we did a *vuelta* to other islands in the archipelago.

La Vuelta, March 11 – March 24. Archipelagos generally make for great cruising grounds because every inhabited island is usually pretty self-sufficient, meaning it has its own ports and anchorages, its own markets for (re)provisioning, and its own personality making it fun to hop from one island to the next. And, by definition, the individual islands in a group are in close proximity to one another making it relatively easy to island hop to several islands or more in a short period of time.

The Canary Island archipelago is a prime example of the above principles, except that traveling between islands here is complicated by a strong, dominant wind pattern from the north to northeast, which makes it easy to go in a southerly direction from one island to the next but considerably more challenging to return “uphill” to a starting point back to the north. In addition, there are very few anchorages in the Canaries suitable for overnight anchoring. And,



finally, this archipelago has treacherous *wind acceleration zones* (WAZs) between the islands due to the steep wind-shearing volcanic peaks on every island and catabatic effects in which the land heats up during the day and cools off at night much faster than the surrounding water. Forecast winds at, say, 15-20kts in the Canary Island region often accelerate up to 40kts in the WAZs. Sailing in that kind of wind is, at best, not much fun, and at worst, can be dangerous.

So, sailing between these islands requires keeping a close eye on wind and weather forecasts, augmented by listening to locals with experience transiting between the islands in their own boats. We had already experienced an hour of violent WAZ-induced rocking and rolling during our arrival to Las Palmas, and we wanted to minimize the likelihood of a recurrence to the greatest extent possible.

During our island hopping *vuelta* we had planned to visit Tenerife, La Gomera, and La Palma, but when all was said and done, we had visited just Tenerife and La Gomera. Again, two out of three ain't bad...

We left Las Palmas on a relatively calm morning, but the sea was unexpectedly rough in the WAZ on the northeast coast of Gran Canaria. Fortunately, we were heading downwind and were soon out of the zone. We spent one night in Marina Pasito Blanco, on the south coast, primarily to meet and (dare I say it during these COVID times) socialize with Agustín Martín, a local sailor who volunteers as Port Officer for the UK-based Ocean Cruising Club and as Station Host for the US-based Seven Seas Cruising Association. Agustín had been a great source of information about arrival procedures in the Canary Islands for clearing customs and immigration, and he had local knowledge for how to navigate (literally and figuratively) around and through the WAZs on our intended route. We welcomed him aboard *AFS* for tapas.



Enjoying *unas tapas y una copas* with Agustín, port officer for SSCA and OCC.

We left for Santa Cruz de Tenerife the next morning, motoring into the building wind up the west coast of Gran Canaria until we could reach Santa Cruz on a beam reach, crossing nearly perpendicular to the WAZ between Gran Canaria and Tenerife. Thanks to the tips from Agustín, we had a smooth ride most of the way, and we arrived in the Marina de Santa Cruz just before nightfall.

It was mostly a week of play in Tenerife, highlighted by hiring a taxi for a day for a narrated tour of this beautiful volcanic island. Miguel picked us up at 09:00h and dropped us off at sunset. In between, we enjoyed breakfast at a trendy bistro built on the edge of a steep precipice and overlooking El Teide, at 3718m (12,198ft) the tallest mountaintop in all of Spain, and when measured from the ocean floor, one of the world's largest mountains. We took the *telerífico* (cable car) to Teide's upper station, and then did a 2-hour hike on one of the authorized trails. It was cold and windy near the summit, as expected, and there was still snow in many of the north-facing areas.



We had a very comfortable ride from Pasito Blanco to Tenerife.



After descending the mountain, Miguel took us to his favorite neighborhood restaurant where we enjoyed an abundance of delicious local specialties, including a delicious house-made *vino tinto*. They sold it in bulk, so naturally we brought some back aboard *AFS* to enjoy later.



We got underway from Santa Cruz de Tenerife shortly after sunset for our next port of call, San Sebastián de La Gomera, to arrive there in late morning the next day. Interestingly, we passed by nine, large, brightly lit cruise ships laid up at anchor outside Sant Cruz, waiting for the cruise industry to rebound after the pandemic subsides and for their customers to return to the sea for their vacations.

Even as we approached La Gomera, it struck us as one of the most beautiful places on earth. It seems as if time has forgotten this nearly circular island covered in lush green volcanic peaks and dotted with black sand beaches and picturesque towns nestled in the rugged ravines between the ancient lava flows. Much of it is a World Biosphere Reserve.



Scenes from La Gomera, where 90% of the fresh water comes from dew as moisture laden clouds from the Atlantic Ocean lose their water when they hit the steep volcanic mountains. The island is awash in green.



As if the landscapes, seascapes, and natural beauty isn't enough, La Gomera has played an important role in world history, too. It was, in 1492, the western edge of the European world, and it is from here where Christopher Columbus made his last stop for provisions (and, perhaps, to visit his mistress) before setting off across the Atlantic Ocean to find a western sea route to China, and "discovering" the New World instead.



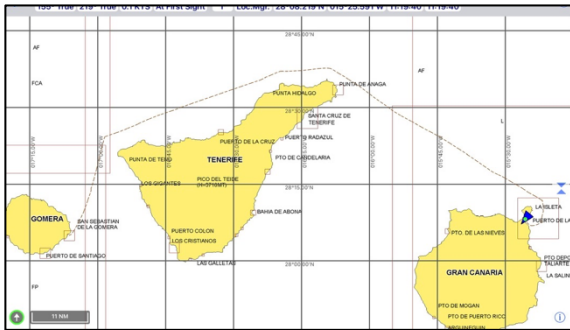
Christopher Columbus wasn't the first or only notable to spend time in La Gomera, but he is arguably the most famous, and references to him are everywhere on the island. The mosaic is on the seafront promenade and the statue is in the main town square. He stopped in San Sebastián in 1492 to provision, ostensibly in route to China.



Parque Nacional Garajonay is in the center of La Gomera. The park preserves the peak of the volcano (1487m/4880ft), the highest point on the island. The views are spectacular in all directions, and there are myriad microclimates.

We had planned to spend just 3-4 days in La Gomera, but we liked it so much we stayed a week. In fact, we might still be enjoying life there, but we took advantage of a great weather window for going “uphill” back to Las Palmas, 150nm (~24 hours) to the east northeast.

Return to Las Palmas, March 25 – April 9(?). We departed from San Sebastián mid-morning on



a day that started out with light and variable winds and a calm channel between islands. By mid-afternoon, we were half-way up the north shore of Tenerife, and the wind had accelerated to 25kts on our nose. Our strategy was to motor in the semi-sheltered water close to shore until we reached the northeast tip of Tenerife, where we could turn 90° to starboard for an overnight beam reach crossing under sail to Isleta at the

northern tip of Gran Canaria. Once we rounded Isleta, as the wind was forecasted to die off, we’d make another 90° turn to starboard for a downwind final approach to Las Palmas.



Vicki readying the drifter as we near the northern tip of Tenerife.

Everything went according to plan, until shortly after sunrise and we were within 4nm of the breakwater at the entrance to Las Palmas harbor, which we had just received permission to enter. We had already doused the mizzen sail and furled the genoa, and were making 2-3kts downwind in just 5kts of morning breeze when we pressed the start button on the Perkins diesel – which had worked flawlessly since we rebuilt the fuel injection pump in Palma de Mallorca last July – but it wouldn’t start. It turned over just fine, but it wouldn’t light off. In fact, this was the same symptom that prompted us to have the fuel pump rebuilt back in Palma.

After notifying Las Palmas Traffic Control of our problem, we sprang into action to troubleshoot and fix the motor, while steering clear (with minimum steerageway) of fast-moving ferries, freighters, and other large commercial ships entering port. We quickly determined it was a fuel issue – it’s almost always the fuel when a diesel won’t start – but none of the usual expedient

fixes fixed the problem. With almost no wind and too numerous to count big ships entering and leaving the harbor, we would have to call for a tow!



Troubleshooting the Perkins fuel system in the seaway outside Las Palmas harbor.

Before hailing the *Salvamento Marítimo* (a process we're still familiar with from Portocolom in August 2020), I decided to call the XO of the naval base, where we were intending to dock, to see if arriving under tow was an even an option. Much to my surprise, the XO said he would come rescue us in the naval station's utility boat. "Sail in circles," he said, and he would rendezvous with us in 30-45 minutes. About 10 minutes later we saw a small blue utility boat through our binoculars emerging from behind the breakwater that appeared to be heading in our direction. At about the same time, we received a WhatsApp message from the XO to share our location; which I did, allowing us to watch his boat's icon move toward us on my iPhone. But then the utility boat stopped in its tracks while still just barely visible in the distance with the naked eye. Then my phone rang. It was the XO calling to say a belt broke on his boat's motor, and it was "boiling like a kettle." Now two boats needed a tow!

What happened next, we probably wouldn't believe if we hadn't lived it ourselves. While I was in the process of calling the *Salvamento Marítimo* on the VHF radio to take AFS out of the naval station's rescue equation, the XO called back to say a navy tugboat was coming out to rescue both of us. He said since we were the larger of the two vessels, we should sail over to his boat and take his towline to our stern; meanwhile, we would give our towline to the tugboat when it arrived. Forty-five minutes later, the parade was formed and proceeding into safe harbor with the navy tug in the lead, AFS in the middle, and the naval station utility boat bringing up the rear, each connected by ~50m of towline. Entry into port and the base, and docking in the *tren naval* (small boat section of the navy base) were thankfully uneventful.



(Left) AFS being towed by Spanish Navy tugboat. (Center) AFS towing naval station utility craft. (Right) AFS being gently nudged alongside the small boat pantalán.

Why wouldn't the Perkins start? We had diesel technicians aboard by close of business that day. They went through the same troubleshooting steps dockside that we had done at sea, and concluded that the recently rebuilt fuel injection pump was not working. Now, a week later,

we're back up and running with a newly rebuilt injection pump, although we're still unclear why the pump failed just 9 months after being rebuilt the first time.

When the local pump shop disassembled the pump, they discovered it was completely seized inside. They concluded that it was gummed up by bad fuel. (It's always the fuel.) But we had had the fuel analyzed while the pump was off the boat, and found no smoking gun there. This led the pump shop to conjecture that, perhaps, an overly caustic fuel additive had damaged the seals leading to the pump's demise. It's a little unsettling to not be certain of the cause, so as a precaution going forward, we ordered a second (new) injection pump and are waiting for its arrival from England.

We will get underway for a sea trial shortly after the pump arrives from England next week. Meanwhile, we are starting the Perkins several times a day, listening for any changes to its usual rhythmic hum for signs of impeded fuel flow. Since weather forecasters say the usual steady 15-20kt wind flow from the north-northeast is taking a 2-week break, we'll do our sea trial to Santa Cruz de La Palma (~150nm west-southwest and not to be confused with Santa Cruz de Tenerife) prior to setting sail on our transatlantic crossing to the Lesser Antilles, a passage of ~2,700nm that should take ~3 weeks. Stay tuned...

And that, our friends, is how two weeks in the Canary Islands turned into nearly two months.



A beautiful rainbow over AFS's main boom. A good omen, we hope, for our upcoming voyages.