Two Men in a Boat - Illyrian Shores
By Jeremy Norman

Wed 13th April 2011; London to Corfu via Athens

After a long flight and a change of planes at Athens, we have finally arrived in Corfu. Tim Chevalier, our cameraman, travelled out with us. Bruce Marais, the chef, got here from London yesterday. He spent the night in a pension while the boat was somewhere on the high seas. We were worried all day today having heard nothing from Captain Tim although we know how he often forgets to text or call. No news usually means he is outside the mobile telephone coverage area and so unable to call.
After a delicious dinner, we all went to bed leaving the post mortem until tomorrow. I am interested to know how their passage across went. Alex, the steward, suggested that the crossing took 25 hours – I find that rather hard to believe unless she was slowed down by bad weather or engine trouble. 25 Hours at 10 knots implies a journey of 250 miles and I don't think she sailed that far? (I later found out that I was wrong, it was a 250 nm crossing.)
I have already been informed that she had a problem with the hydraulics for the steering and that an engineer has been on board and a spare part ordered from Athens. If anything else goes wrong with this boat, the owners tell me they plan to take her out to sea and pull the plug.
Kalani looks magnificent after over a year of refit, the main deck is new and pristine and the paintwork gleams. The two-tone colour scheme of sand and off white is a success and improves her lines by making her look longer and sleeker.
Tomorrow, we will get up late and have a day of rest, planning and unpacking.

The Johns family, who are old friends, has asked us to dinner in the evening. We don't plan to film at all tomorrow; anyway the weather is overcast and stormy. We hope the spare part for the steering hydraulics arrives tomorrow. The owners of the spectacular seaside villa where we hope to shoot in a day or two have been in touch to say they aren't happy with our third-party insurance cover – another glitch to be sorted tomorrow.

Thu, 14th April 2011; Corfu

Our first full day of the voyage and we are going nowhere. Capt. Tim is waiting for a spare part to arrive so he can fix the steering hydraulics. Timot, as we have decided to call Tim Chevalier to avoid confusion with Capt. Tim, spends the day checking and assembling his camera equipment. We are getting to know the crew and Derek is directing them in the way he likes things done. We are all tired and happy to have a quiet day.

Fri, 15th April 2011; Corfu

We decide to get up early and film the dawn breaking over Albania but it is a misty and overcast day. It's a 5:45 am start; we drive through the dark on empty roads for forty minutes from Gouvia Marina where the boat is moored to Kassiopi in the North of the island. The dawn itself was a disappointment but the

day soon cheers up and the bright Grecian sunlight illuminates the swathes of wild flowers at the roadside, Jerusalem Sage with its bright yellow flowers contrasting with banks of purple Honesty, the flower that dries into golden discs-like seed pods looking like nature's money. Wild garlic and other alliums run riot, close to the road we notice the huge plants of Verbascum with their furry leaves, it is not yet in flower. In the fields wild lupines are bursting into bloom.

The Johns family, Derek, Daphne and daughters Leafie and Amber welcome us to a hearty breakfast on the terrace. They have expanded and improved their little hamlet of houses over the last forty years. We have seen it evolve having been guests at various periods in its evolution. Leafie and her husband Marcus now live in the house closest to the main gate; they live and work in Corfu as landscape designers and speak perfect Greek. Their charming little daughter, Mirsini, captivates us all as she smiles and performs perfectly for the camera. The grandparents are both so charmingly loving and affectionate with her – she and they won all our hearts.

Derek is short and stooped with grey hair and a pipe clamped to his mouth. He wears strange and eccentric clothes, a Tyrolean style coat and a hat with a triangular peak resembling a coal heavers cap with its flap protecting the neck. Derek is a fascinating man with a wide-ranging knowledge of history and the arts, by profession an old master picture dealer but also a former master chef. He can be terse and verbally provocative but is kind and has a twinkle in his eye and becomes engagingly childlike when playing with his only grandchild. He loves to shock and in no time we are back together chatting away about mutual friends and the pictures he has discovered or sold.

Daphne, his wife of many years, is much taller. A striking woman of poise and presence, she directs operations and manages their complicated life. They have both gone out of the way top facilitate our stay here and introduce us to interesting people and places. Daphne likes to know the right people.

Derek took us to visit the seaside villa of a friend. The house is a dramatic collection of buildings surrounding a small valley with a virtually private bay, the whole covering about 30 acres. The gardens are dotted with statuary, some of it Roman including two magnificent decorated sarcophagi. A 19th C bust of Lord Byron stood in a corner.

The first courtyard is decorated in a Venetian style with a scalloped top to the surrounding walls and typical Greek inlaid pebble floor in squares. I noticed a magnificent wellhead that Derek said is Venetian. On one side was a Latin inscription and the base was supported by acanthus leaves that lead me to speculate that the piece was originally Roman and was updated in the 16th or 17th C with a carved Venetian coat of arms; Derek thought this entirely possible. We passed through an orchard of citrus trees laden with huge yellow fruit; we were told they are lemons but they are the size of grapefruit. In between the trees are manicured beds of vegetables and herbs.

We pass through the fragrant garden in the enchanted valley down to the shore and then ascend a path up to the other promontory where a vista opens up of a rock quarry facing the sea. Apparently the quarry was revealed from a mass of rubble and screed when the swimming pool was made. Now Cypress seedlings have established themselves in the crevices of the rock looking like a bonsai garden. At the side of the large swimming pool are Roman statues of female torsos draped in folds of stone fabric. It is the villa of a modern day emperor.

Next we moved on to visit another "Imperial Villa" but this time a contemporary one. Our host's daughter and her husband, Leafie and Marcus Warren, designed the garden.

Like the house we have just visited, it enjoys an elevated seaside position with magnificent coastal views. The architecture works well and the whole is pleasing. We have come to see the garden and to enjoy the way that Leafie has designed the wild garden to blend into the wild olive grove beyond. The olive trees have been allowed to grow naturally whereas they are normally tightly pruned. It's too early for poppies but we see a carpet of mostly white, wild flowers in blossomunder the trees.

Next we drove to a small sandy beach where Derek told us the story of its naming by the family, "Auntie's snake beach". Many years ago, aunty was picking wild asparagus while wearing sandals; suddenly there was a shrill scream. Derek rushed to her side to discover that an adder had bitten her. It was in springtime, the season when snakes emerge from hibernation to warm themselves in the still weak sunshine so they are lazy and sluggish – easily trod on by unwary aunties.

Along the shore and inland in the grassy wilderness bloom blue iris-like Barbarynuts, wild asparagus as well as delicate wild orchids. As we were filming, the shoot was interrupted by barking dogs heralding the arrival of a herd of goats with their tinkling neck bells; a scene as timeless as agriculture itself.

It was here that my childhood hero, Gerald Durrell, came with his older friend, the naturalist Dr Theodore Stefanidis to search for frogs, snakes and lizards and all manner of small Corfiot wildlife. I kept a dog-eared copy of his book, "My Family and other Animals" with me at all times when I was a child. It was my inspiration and my Bible; I read his beautiful prose over and over again. I related to his love of nature and his rather solitary existence; if only I had been fortunate enough to have had a Dr Theo to guide and advise me.

Taking advantage of the now bright sunlight, we moved on to a small lagoon of sweet water into which runs a channel to the sea. Where the two meet, the water is brackish and is the perfect environment for farming grey mullet and sea bream both prized local fish. The farm was simple and traditional in design, just a few nets retaining the fish in separate compartments. The Mullet are farmed for their roe; extracted by squeezing the abdomen of the gravid females. The fish survive to live another day. The roe is then sun dried to make a prized delicacy, Bottarga, from which taramosalata is traditionally made. The roe can be shaved over pasta to make a dish of delicious subtlety and concentrated flavour.

Sat, 16th April, 2011; Corfu

We awoke to a rainy and miserable day cold and clammy with grey cloud cover. We decide to make it a day of filming indoors, so we re-shoot the opening sequence where we introduce ourselves, and the expedition's quest, to the viewer. With each passing day we both become more relaxed and natural in front of the camera. Next we talk to Amber about her marine biology and her experiences on a local fish farm, she has been coming here ever since she was a baby – what a wonderful place to grow up.
Derek and Timot go down the hill to the old olive press to shoot an interview with the engaging young man who makes olive wood furniture and bowls. I stay up at the house to write my blog and answer my emails. My Derek is an artist and an accomplished stills photographer. He was a major beauty in his youth but he has remained thin and lithe and has retained a noble bone structure. He is energetic and endlessly fascinated by life. I love his tender side but to the world he can be serious and even austere and on occasions abrupt with others.

Derek and Daphne want to take us up into the hills to an abandoned 18th C village, Old Perithea, apparently there is a good place for lunch there and the place is an abandoned 18th C village.

After a good but simple lunch we emerge to find the weather has cleared even if the temperature is still very cold. We decide to shoot some of the picturesque derelict village and its hidden setting in a deep valley. The almond and Judas trees are in blossom and the hillsides are a mass of purples, off-white and yellow. The scene is a capriccio of fallen stones with verdant hills rising in the background dotted with patches of colour from the flowering fruit trees and the yellow broom. Wild grasses lie at the feet of the old stones and in amongst are wild flowers, Verbascum, Asphodel, mints, Euphorbia and Jerusalem Sage. I was reminded of a flower painting by Klimt such was the haze of spring colour. The sage has almost finished flowering up here whereas it is still in full flower down at the coast – the opposite of what I would have expected. We notice a quince in blossom as well as a ground cover of scentless mayweed. We are delighted that we decided to stay and film, the place is a visual treat.

Sun, 17th April 2011; Corfu

Today is going to be a whirlwind of activity; it is Palm Sunday and the day St Spiridon, the local patron saint, is paraded through the streets with all the local dignitaries of church and state. We get Alex to take us into town as we fear parking will be impossible. We arrive in time to meet Derek and Daphne. Derek walks us through the town pointing out the most important features and telling us some of its history. The town looks and is Venetian 17thC and 18thC with crowded narrow streets and winding alleys. The main square has a cricket pitch left by the British and a fine promenade made by the French in their brief period in charge; it is a replica of the Rue du Rivoli in Paris. We learn about the eccentric Brit, Lord North, who had vile personal habits, dressed as a ancient Greek, and did many good works including founding the Ionian Academy. These Islands

were under Venice for four hundred years until Napoleon extinguished the Republic in 1798. Most Venetian possessions, including Corfu, became French. Their period in charge was short. The British defeated Napoleon for good in 1915 at Waterloo, so Corfu became British until 1864 when The Ionian Republic was formed; it lasted for about 50 years until Enonis or union with Greece occurred.

We walked though the square and into the old fort that commands the town and the harbour. It is an impressive array of military architecture mostly from 18th C but there is a fine 17th C canal dug by the Venetians to provide a moat for the castle and its towering rock base. They kept their cavalry here and we were shown the exercise paddock between the outer and inner defensive walls. We stopped to linger on the drawbridge while Derek regaled us with funny stories of friends and prominent Corfiots. At last we came to the castle outer wall and looked over into a small harbour surrounded by a stone jetty; it was here that the Venetian galleys stopped in safety to re-provision and take on board the precious Olive Oil for which the island is famous. Derek proudly drew our attention to the stone posts at the outer edge of the jetty and he told us that he had noticed that they were of the same exotic stone as the remains of a Roman Temple that had been excavated nearby. It seems the Venetians had robbed the temple of some of its columns and used them as piles for the harbour wall.

As we left the fort, the massed brass bands in their military style uniforms were lined up ready to start the parade. The youngest bands go first followed by the next in seniority until the band that is the oldest – about 1840 – proudly marches just ahead of the Greek Orthodox Archbishop surrounded in a cloud of incense that made me sneeze and he marches or rather strolls in front of the canopied silver reliquary containing the mummy of St Spiridon. St Spiridon although dead for hundreds of years has an armed guard of sailors to accompany him. The parade ends with a phalanx of local worthies and politicians for whom the parade is a three line whip. Timot weaved in and out of the parade taking close ups of the players and of the many and varied hairstyles of the younger men. The uniform of each band was different; each team has its own colours but common to all was a Ruritanian camp military theme stuck somewhere in the early 19th C.

We then repaired to a noble house on the main square where a private party was in full swing. A rather upset Daphne greeted us and told us we were very late and many of the important guests had already left. We explained that we were caught up in the parade and entranced by it visual and auditory excesses. There was so much good food provided by our hosts Mario and Tassi Paipet that I was rather alarmed to discover that our next port of call was a restaurant and a table of twenty odd people all of whom expected to eat a large Sunday lunch. The food was so good that we did manage to sample most dishes – best of all was the cuttlefish and spinach.

After lunch and hardly able to walk, we repaired to the Johns' flat in town to meet the beautiful Rosa Cappon, a Corfiot opera singer. Rosa is a charmer pretty with dark hair and eyes, she has a winning smile and a modest demeanor, so unlike most performers. She wore tight black trousers and a black top with a colourful

mauve scarf around her neck. She volunteered to sing some early Greek opera songs for us. It was quite clear that her feminine charms were working their magic on us all but especially on Derek Johns who was clearly rather taken with her and flirted outrageously.

Derek Johns tells me that he is mounting a picture exhibition in Corfu next year to mark the 200th anniversary of the birth of Edward Lear, the author of the Nonsense Rhymes, and a wonderfully accomplished landscape artist. Lear lived for some time in Corfu in order to be close to his younger friend, Franklin Lushington, a member of the diplomatic service posted to Corfu. They travelled extensively, especially to Albania where they were guests of Ali Pasha the governor or Bey of the local Turkish province; a man renown for his lavish hospitality and iron rule. Lushington, the more masculine of the two, went shooting while Lear sketched and painted. Lear's Nonsense and limericks where part of both our childhoods, none more so than the famous poem, "The Owl and the Pussycat" who "went to sea in a beautiful pea-green boat". His works were part of an Englishman's childhood memories; we learnt his verses by heart. We know that he was probably a gay man like us and that he was especially fond of Lushington; this was one of a number of sentimental and possibly sexual relationships that Lear had with younger men. Their travels together seem to parallel our forthcoming journey and be an apt counterpoint to our loving adventures.

The day ended appropriately with a drink on the roof terrace of the flat looking over the lichen covered tiled roofs of the town, hearing the bells pealing and watching the swifts dive and dart after the evening flush of insects, twittering all the while and flashing past us to end their day with a sudden headlong flight disappearing into a wall or guttering where they have their nests.

Mon, 18th April; Corfu and Albania

We tried and failed to get an export stamp for the camera equipment that we bought in England; so we can't reclaim the VAT; we wasted over two hours first thing to no avail. Meanwhile the crew went shopping for food on the grounds that not much worth eating will be available in Albania.

Our guests, Alex and Lizzie Catto, arrived straight off the aeroplane just in time to join the boat before we left on our first adventure. Alex, an old Cambridge friend, is tall and grey with a craggy intelligent face. Lizzie is rather shy and charming and a dear sweet friend. We crossed the Corfu channel in flat calm to a point not far from the southern border of Albania. We are heading for the delta of the river Thiamas; a wildlife area famed for its flamingoes and pelicans but the main channel is poorly marked; the river has a very shallow sandbar at its mouth. Derek had to strip off and pull us through water only six or seven inches deep.

The Cattos stayed on board and slept, they were very tired having left home at 2 am. We took the tender to the mouth of the river and found the white stick that is the sole marker. The river mouth was strewn with dead trees and debris and we

were unable at first to find the way in and got stuck in the mud many times. Derek stripped off and towed us over the bar.

Once inside the estuary the channel deepened. I saw some flamingoes in the distance but only gulls, swifts and sandpipers close to. It is a dull day and the weather has turned very cold; my hands are cold and numb.

On the left bank among the reeds, I spotted a large brown shape that at first I took to be a cat but I quickly realized was an otter; it slid silently into the water and swam along the shore. We got quite close in the tender and the creature didn't seem that perturbed by the noise of the engine. It looked like a log floating but under power, after a short while it dived. We saw two more of the creatures and were struck by their large size and how unconcerned they appeared to be by us. After a while cruising up this jungle-like river with tall reeds on each bank, we felt we had to turn back as Capt Tim is keen to get to Saranda in daylight – there are no proper charts in these waters. We were tired and cold by the time we returned to the warmth and comfort of Kalani.

We were greeted at Saranda by a bevy of officials who were all unusually polite and helpful. The reason soon became clear. Our contact here, Arni Tare, is an important local politician and clearly a man of influence. He arrived rather late to welcome us having attended some local political meeting. He and his American wife, Nancy, are coming to dinner on board.

Bruce excelled himself with the food, he really is an excellent chef. Arni is a very tall man, I judged him to be 6'3'' at least but as he said he is shorter than King Lecha. He was a fascinating guest having been brought up here under the Marxist strongman, Enva Hoxa, and apart from a few spells abroad has lived here all his life. He is a forceful man of about 45 who exudes power and confidence. He is involved with an American underwater archaeology project; no doubt we will hear more of this tomorrow. An American who lives in Key West, a town I know well, owns the boat concerned; we saw the boat in Malta, where we now own a flat, and had a tour of her and her expedition equipment that includes an underwater explorer vehicle. The boat can remain geo-stationary while not at anchor by using side thrusters and GPS to maintain a constant position – something that is helpful when doing marine archaeology. They have a license to explore this coast from the government and Arni said that he could have supplied us with the results of their own surveys to use as charts.

He is very taken with Alex Catto and his concentration and attention is mostly directed to him. He is fluent in English with no accent. His height and nearly bald head, give him an imposing appearance. He answers his phone a number of times at dinner; either a sign that he is rather rude or perhaps he has important and urgent matters to attend to. He is open, charming and friendly. He is kindly coming with us to Butrint tomorrow. He was Director of the Butrint Foundation until he fell out with Jacob Rothschild, the major donor. Arni has given us some ideas for things and places to see that are not well known or easily accessible; it seems his name will permit us to cruise into places normally off limits. I am not sure how happy Capt Tim will be, he is rightly nervous of these uncharted waters.

Tues, 19th April; Saranda, Albania.

Arni Tare comes to collect in the morning to take us to Butrint. He comes in his 4x4 with a taxi in tow to take the others. He drives us the long way round the lake to Butrint through the green Albanian countryside. The towns here are not a pretty sight with uncontrolled urban sprawl and square concrete houses many of which are unfinished.

We go to a small village inhabited by Albanians from the north, all Roman Catholics unlike Arne who is a Sufi Muslim. They are also half as tall as him. The locals now make replica mosaics painted onto wood and pebbles to sell to tourists at Butrint.
He is the most genial and hospitable man and friends it seems with the many locals that stop him en route. The wild flowers are in bloom, mostly the same species as in Corfu. We see a raptor riding high above us but I'm not quick enough with the binos to see it well. I see a tiny Scops Owl as it alights on a post, it is the owl of Athene, the symbol of ancient Athens. We are lucky to see this nocturnal bird in broad daylight.

The distant views of the lakes below and the green hills in the distance are magnificent and Timot gets some great shots on file. Butrint Park is only half an hour away but two hours elapse before we get there.
The site is on a hill that is almost an island with the river on one side and a lake on the other. The area is well wooded and enjoys a view of the sea not far away across the marshes. Inland lies a patchwork of water meadows and a long low hill topped by a settlement of recent date.

Arne gives us a tour of the complex site; it has many layers from Greek through to Venetian and the site is impressive, well wooded and nearly surrounded by water.
The settlement dates from Illyrian times; then the Greeks came and built a shrine; the place was full of snakes and snakes were the symbol of healing, hence the caduceus the staff with snakes twined around it is the modern symbol of medical doctors and pharmacies. As such it became a place of pilgrimage, an ancient Lourdes. A hostel was built and then a theatre; the site remained sacred into Roman times and in the Romano-Christian period a baptistery was built with a beautiful mosaic floor and a Byzantine Basilica much larger than seems to be justified by the modest surrounding settlement.

Outside the main enclosed sanctuary area there are Venetian period buildings and a Palace of Ali Pasha, the Turkish ruler of this part of Greece and Albania at the time of Byron and Edward Lear. Lear stayed here with his boy friend, the aptly named Lushington who went boar hunting in the hills while Lear sketched.
On the journey home we took the shorter coast road. We were shaken by the uncontrolled development of badly built and designed houses, many either half-built or fallen down, that has produced an urban blight and ugliness on an unparallel scale. At least the area surrounding the site of Butrint has been

preserved from further encroachment by the establishment of a National Park and its designation as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Wed, 20th Saranda to Kotor

A day at sea; this will be our longest cruising passage from Saranda up to Montenegro. The distance is about 160 nms, which equates to about 18 hours cruising. We plan to arrive in the very early morning tomorrow.
The passage up is calm for us experienced sailors but our guests feel a little queasy because of a rolling swell. The coast is mostly clear of buildings as the high mountains fall sharply down to the coast with little or no flat land and few roads. Some of the tallest peaks still have a little snow on them. The coast has cliffs, caves and tiny coves with sandy beaches that I would love to have time to explore but we must press on as we have a schedule to maintain.

Thurs, 21st April; Kotor

We have just arrived in the beautiful bay of Kotor in Montenegro. Sadly, our time here is now reduced to just 24 hours as we are running behind schedule. The port agent has just come to see us and has told us about the many bureaucratic obstacles; we need a cruising permit – cost Euros 420 – and apparently this is not obtainable here but only in Kotor and after 1pm and we are not permitted to cruise in these waters or leave the boat until we have the permit. If we anchor close to Kotor we will be charged Euros 100 per day and another Euros 100 after midnight for the next day. This is not a great welcome and seems so authoritarian and unnecessary.

Eventually, with formalities completed, we go into town. Kotor is at the head of an arm of the inner sea lake and is a beautiful small town that dates from 9th C. For most of its history it was a Venetian possession, an important port and safe haven for their trading galleys as they plied to and from the near east. Rising above the town far up the steep wooded hills behind, are the old walls. They zigzag up the hill looking like the great wall of China. They meander for well over a kilometer and rise up hundreds of meters. We climb some distance in the heat of the day and look down on a magnificent view of the bay and town below. The mass of ancient fortifications and the red tiled roofs look just like Dubrovnic.

We are surprised half way up by a large snake sunbathing on the path; we identified it later as a harmless European Glass snake, a type of slowworm. Once we reached the shore again, I sat down on a bench in front of the city walls to rest and although I didn't see it, another snake wriggled between my feet and slithered off into the bushes behind me. No one managed to get a photo, so I couldn't identify it with certainty but Alex Catto was convinced it was a viper of sorts. I think the Roman's might have taken this as a sort of omen but of what I'm not sure.

Friday, 22nd April, 2011; Dubrovnic

We have arrived at Porto Montenegro to take on duty free fuel. Things start to go wrong, the re-fuelling takes longer than we expected; eight tons of fuel take at least two hours, so we can't get underway until nearly ten in the morning. The voyage would normally take about five hours, we had planned to leave at 9 am and arrive at 1pm. Now its looking like we will be in Dubrovnic at 2 pm. Things go from bad to worse; at about midday we are enveloped in a thick sea fog, at one point we can hardly see the prow of the boat from the wheelhouse, we slow down to five knots – half speed. We are within quarter of a mile of the city walls and still can't see it. We nudge gingerly around to the back of the town to the main port where we must go to clear customs and immigration. We finally dock at nearly 4 pm. We wait for an eternity while Tim goes through the port arrival formalities. As we have to be in Mljet Island tomorrow at 10 am to meet our guide, it seems that we will hardly get to see Dubrovnic – a great disappointment. We are meant to meet our "fixer" here but he can't get past the fenced off enclosure. The locals certainly take their time stamping our passports and issuing us with our permits. At last, at about 5:30 pm we are free to leave and our fixer meets us with all our paperwork and itinerary details for the guides and places we will be filming. We make a fast pit-stop to buy local phone cards and then head for the old town.

To our surprise the town is bathed in beautiful evening light while out to sea a white blanket of fog hides everything except the tops of the offshore islands; they seem to float amongst the clouds.

We loose no time in climbing the many steps onto the old city walls and are rewarded with some stunning views and excellent low evening light, Tim our cameraman, is in ecstasy. As we walk around the fortifications, I tell Derek something of the history of the city-state of Ragusa as it was known; an Italianate independent city state from 1386 until it was ended by Napoleon, that destroyer of sovereign states both small and large, in 1808.
The city roofs show evidence of the massive destruction in the recent war. Only a few lichen covered old roofs remain among the brand new red tiles.
The fortifications are impressive; a fact that helped to preserve the independence of this tiny state for over 400 years; the city government, made rich by the trading merchant princes, used its coffers to bribe and pay ransom in order to remain free.
As the light faded and the twittering swifts headed for their roosts in the eaves of the houses, we head down from the walls to join the throng of strollers in the lamp lit old streets of the city.

Sat, 23rd April; Mljet

After some initial confusion about where we were meeting, we finally connected with our lady guide provided by the National Park. She was a rather dour, unsmiling Croatian lady still nostalgic for the days of Marshall Tito. She was pleasant but unenthusiastic and had almost no knowledge of natural history, something extraordinary in a park guide, I thought. As there was only one road into the park and we were in a taxi, her guiding skills such as they are, were never put to the test.

The island is beautiful and well wooded having been a possession of the Benedictine order for some centuries; they forbad the cutting down of trees. We rambled along the shoreline among the maquis and stands of Aleppo pine then took a short boat ride to an island in the lake where the ruins of the monastery stand.

Once back aboard, we had a delicious dinner and I think we all had a little too much wine. Lizzie's request for "just half a glass" became a standing joke as Derek refilled her glass for a second and third time.

Sun, 24th April – Easter Sunday; Korcula

We have just anchored off Korcula about a mile from the walled old town. It took us a while to complete the procedure and it was nearly 10 am before we finally got ashore. We hurried with all the camera equipment through the gate in the city walls, up to the church at the top of the town. No sooner had we established our position outside the church when the bells started pealing and the clerical procession arrived for the Easter service. It was a filmic opportunity not to be missed and we made it with a minute to spare. Timot, the cameraman, is brazen; he gets right in front of the procession and films close ups, then he goes inside the church and films the Roman Catholic service inside.

After the church service we explore the beautiful old Venetian town and then at one o'clock, we wave goodbye to Alex and Lizzie Catto as the jet away on the ferry to Split.

Today is Derek's birthday but I get the impression that he doesn't want to be reminded. I give him a big kiss and tell him how much I love him. We have long since decided not to give each other presents as we have what we need.
Alex's girlfriend baked him a Maltese Easter cake and we all had a slice to celebrate both Easter and Derek's birthday.

Mon, 25th April; Korcula to Lastovo

The crossing from Korcula to the island of Lastovo takes three and a half hours. It is the most westerly inhabited island of all those in the area and was a base for Tito during World War II when he was the leader of the communist partisans. The land is little touched by any signs of cultivation and there are not even any abandoned terraces. We see a few goats roaming on the hillside but little other sign of life either human or animal. The sea is clean and clear and, where there is shade, colourful yellow sea anemones and brick-red algae bloom. The overcast, chilly day does not inspire us to film much although we do admire the pristine maquis covered hillsides and the forests of Aleppo pine higher up the slopes.

We bought two large octopi off a fishing boat but Bruce was too scared to kill them, so Victor had to show him how. Derek overpaid for them probably because the fisherman was rather hot!

Apparently the last recorded case of vampirism in Croatia happened on this island. In 1737 there was an outbreak of a deadly diarrhea that the locals blamed on vampires.

Tuesday, 26th April; Lastovo

We woke to a dull and overcast day also cold with no sunshine to warm our bones.
There is little to see or film on this strange island of Lastovo. The guidebook tells us that there are many raptors here but we have not seen any. The bay is surrounded by wooded hills with a few modern houses clustered around the quay.

We take off in the tender to explore a sinister looking bay with the remains of watchtowers and abandoned industrial buildings. It must have been a secret naval base under Tito; the island was closed to visitors until 1988. The caved-in roofs and the abandoned tunnels dug deep into the hillside are eerie and a bit scary. Inside the well-made tunnels are many long-legged cockroaches that look a bit like spiders. Captain Tim was rather scared by them but then he is a bit scared of creepy things on land but fearless at sea.

Viktor tells us that his grandfather, still alive aged 95, was imprisoned by Tito for seven years just for daring to express the mildest criticism of the regime. He spent the time breaking stones on some offshore island but still doesn't know which one. He was blindfolded and just shipped away.

The West's view of Tito as a benign old communist at odds with the horrid Stalinists is far from the truth. His may have been a less stringent form of communism in the economic sphere but it was just as cruel and ruthless a police state as any of them. His image was ameliorated by film of this avuncular gentleman entertaining gullible Heads of State and film stars such as Bob Hope on his luxury private islands of Brioni and Sveti Stefan.

Bruce is running out of food, so he is glad we are heading back to civilization tomorrow. He complains that the variety of food is lamentable, very few vegetables and little choice of meat.

Wednesday, 27th April, 11; Lastovo to Nevretna River Delta

We left Lastovo at 8 am for the seven hours voyage back to the mainland and the Nevretna River delta. The crossing was uneventful except for the sighting a lone common dolphin that came to say hello, rode our bow wave three times and then peeled off to explore other diversions. This interested me I have read that common dolphins are no longer seen in the Adriatic. The sea was mirror calm so the boat was steady and I managed to get a great deal of work done while underway.

By the time we anchored off the delta, the weather had turned cold and rainy even so we decided to try to explore the delta by tender. A closed lock gate barred

the entrance to the channel but when we arrived exactly at 5 pm the gate was opening as it does every hour on the hour. No sooner had we negotiated the small lock than the rain started to fall in big heavy blobs, so we scuttled back and pleaded with the keeper to let us retrace our steps. He let us through and rather sheepishly we returned to the warmth of the mother ship.

I called the contact number I had been given for the bird watching guide that had been booked. I had been trying all day to reach the man and finally I spoke to a woman who promised to get him to call me. After some hours he had not called back so I asked Victor to call him for me. The man was brusque to the point of rudeness and seemed entirely disinterested in helping; he said that the man who was meant to take us out tomorrow was sleeping – this seemed an unlikely excuse. Eventually, and after much cajoling, he arranged for a guide for tomorrow at 3 pm. On calling this guide we found that he speaks no English; I think we can manage with a bird book if he points out each species. This saga illustrates the rather negative and uncooperative attitude we have encountered to date. I think it must be a hangover from a state run economy where no one learns to be customer focused or how to deal properly with clients in a welcoming, friendly manner; their attitude seems to be, "I don't care either way".

Thursday, April 28, 2011; Neretva Delta

At last, a brighter and warmer morning so we decide to make another attempt to go up river in the tender. This time we take Viktor to translate. He is such a great find, charming, smiling and helpful at all times. He tells us that he prefers to be a Croatian in Croatia and a Bosnian in Bosnia. The first man we encounter, fishing from his traditional wooden boat, won't talk to us on camera. Apparently he was formerly a Captain in the Marines and many former soldiers have been taken by the police and extradited to The Hague to stand trial for war crimes.

Derek, ever the bold one, stops the boat and talks to a gnarled old lady standing outside her house on the riverbank. She has a characterful face, deeply crevassed and ancient looking; she seems eager to talk to us – that makes a change. She tells us that she farms mandarin oranges and indeed there are orchards all along the riverbank; neat rows of trees on square plots separated by drainage ditches. She informs us that before the locks were made the banks of the channels regularly flooded with seawater. Sadly, the effect of these drainage schemes is to spoil the riverine marsh habitat so important for young fish and birdlife. The only birds we are seeing are herons, an egret, a moorhen scuttling into the reeds, a diving Little Grebe, a Lesser Bittern and a small bird with a very loud repetetive song perched high on a waving reed, a Great Reed Warbler.

Eels come up river in November to spawn and are netted with great nets strung across the river. The young elvers hatch in the spring and when they are big enough they migrate thousands of miles across the Atlantic Ocean to the Sargasso Sea, only to return to their birth river when they too are of breeding age.

We just got back to the lock in time for the twelve o'clock opening. As we were about to enter the lock, I saw a snake swimming close to the boat and, from its zigzag markings; I knew it was clearly a viper. Viktor identified it as a horned viper, a common but very poisonous species. It disappeared in a flash, swimming in serpentine fashion back into the reeds.

At three in the afternoon, our guide Drazan appeared to drive us around the delta and to look at birds. He came with an ornithologist who spoke no English. We drove up onto the hills overlooking the patchwork of Dutch-style polders, sections of reclaimed marsh that our now salt free and lie just below sea level. The roadside is still a blaze of colour from broom and salvia. From up high, we got a great panoramic view of the wide expanse of the delta interspersed with islands of jagged limestone boulders and banks of reed beds.

Our bird guide proved to be knowledgeable, able to identify everything with its Latin name; otherwise conversation was limited to mutterings in Croat that were unintelligible. Among the more interesting sightings were a Little Bittern, Black Winged Stilt, ten Avocets and the sound and sight of many raucous great reed warblers that vied for dominance from their reedy cathedrals all along the river bank.

We are taken to some electricity pylons and atop two of them we see two dead Eagle Owls, a pair that had been electrocuted where they had perched simultaneously on two adjacent pylons. It was angry making to see two such magnificent birds killed for the want of a better-designed pylon. The birds were able to touch the wires and the metal frame of the structure simultaneously thus bypassing the insulators.

Friday, April 29, 2011; Nevretna Delta to Hvar

We venture up the river again this morning. We see locals paddling their traditional river skiffs, some now fitted with ancient outboard motors. Whenever we see an interesting character, we stop to chat. An elderly lady that we spied fishing with a crude reed pole greets us with a broad smile on her weather-beaten, leathery face. She is wearing an old grey skirt and a stained flowery smock, on her head, a floppy khaki fisherman's hat. She quickly removed the hat to show off her new blue-rinse hairstyle of which she was so proud. She chats away, with Viktor translating, thrilled that she might be on TV. At the end of the piece Timot asks us to leave in the boat so that he can film us going. The lady was visibly alarmed thinking we were leaving Timot behind. I laughed and told her that he was on special offer for one day only. We are back at the boat by 12:15 in time to meet our friends. William Thuillier and Alvaro Picardo are waiting on the shore to be picked up by the tender, our next guests on board.

We pick up the anchor and immediately eat a delicious lunch under way. Four hours later we are anchoring outside the pretty Venetian town of Hvar. It is great to see our friends again after so long away. I have known William for over 35 years, longer than I have known Derek. He is an old master picture dealer and opera lover with a sharp intelligent wit. Alvaro, his boy friend, is Catalan and

much younger than William; he loves good food and wild flowers; he is a gentle and artistic spirit. Both of them are now grey and have grown beards likewise flecked with grey. They are a good-looking couple and have been an item for fifteen years.

Saturday, 30th April 2011; Hvar

Hvar doesn't disappoint; it is picture pretty with Venetian architecture, a beautiful Baroque church and an Italianate campanile. Our guide, Josco Domancic, is a local official and in charge of a major restoration project on the old theatre and arsenal building. He is an engaging young guy with floppy blond hair and a sweet rather shy manner.

He arranges a large combi taxi to take us to Stari Grad, the old capital of Hvar and originally a Greek settlement of 4th C BC. Our driver is dressed as a cowboy complete with Stetson hat, Lee Marvin droopy whiskers, high-heeled black boots of tooled leather and an unbuttoned tan leather jerkin. Flushed with pride, he tells a friend in Croatian, "Look at me, I'm taking the English TV people on a tour"; he doesn't realize that Viktor can translate every word. We cram into the vehicle with all our kit and head into the hills, Timot up front with his camera across his knees riding shotgun.

The site that greets us at every turn is remarkable, despite the rain we stop to look and film. The mountainside is covered with fields and terraces separated by walls of grey weathered limestone many feet thick. Most of the fields are square or rectangular; what is remarkable is the sheer number of stones piled into neat mounds with carefully dressed sides; the labour that it must have taken to create these fields, now mostly abandoned, is incalculable and all to gain a few square meters of dry, stony soil.

Stari Grad itself lies nestled at the end of a long estuary. The river here is narrow and looks like a Venetian canal lined with boats and, from a distance, attractive houses. The stonework is grey and the building style makes use of large blocks laid with a thick band of mortar giving impression of graph paper. Sadly, on close observation, the houses seem over restored and too brash with nasty modern doors and shutters spoiling the effect. We agreed that all would be improved with a little age, some distressed paintwork and moss between the stone courses.

Our tame cowboy took us on to two remote hill villages, Vela Grabljje and its smaller deserted sister Malo Grabljie. Picturesque and tumbling down, the first village nestles on a hillside; the church bells peeling as if to greet our arrival. Spring flowers in profusion, wild garlic, the lacy white flowers of Tordylium, scarlet poppies amongst the olive trees with the distant capriccio of crumbling ruins presented a painterly scene.

We drove on to the deserted village; the road became a dirt track flanked by high limestone crags. I thought that Apaches might ambush us at any moment. The small village is so well hidden and protected by these flanks of limestone hills that an army could search for months without discovering this secret hideaway.

On arriving back in town, we hear music and merriment and came upon a throng of people outside the pretty baroque church. A wedding was in progress, young girls in short silk skirts and flimsy blouses shivering in the cool spring air, wearing lots of make-up and very high heels; the boys in ill-fitting suits in which they seemed uncomfortable; some older locals in more homely attire but everyone having so much fun. A red[1]-faced troubadour played an accordion with gusto and everyone joined in the singing. A young boy proudly swirled a Croatian flag atop a bendy pole creating dizzying circles in the air. I noticed two fresh-faced young boys craning out of a first floor window to watch the show, their happy faces caught in the low evening light and framed by the carved stone mullions and the period ochre stone façade. At last, the bride with her procession arrived to cut a swathe through the throng and enter the church on her father's arm.

Sunday, 1st May 2011; Hvar

We woke to another cold, wet day, the rain poured down relentlessly; Timot was nervous that his precious camera might get wet. We met Josco at nine as arranged to see the restoration work on the old theatre and arsenal. Inside we discover a miniature theatre complete with painted ceiling and tiny boxes all around; it can accommodate no more than a couple of hundred spectators; built in 1612 as a peace offering to the people after a rebellion against the aristocratic elite two years before; the first public theatre in Europe or so we were told.

I found the arsenal and the huge room above it more interesting and impressive. Above were the offices of the Captain of the Port and the draughtsman's drawing office where galleys and merchantmen were designed on a scale of 1:1 or full scale. The ships were constructed in the cavernous arsenal space below – Venice in miniature. The great pine beams bore witness to the use of local timber that helped to denude the islands of forest cover. Venice demanded good Croatian timber for her galleys and public buildings.

We just have time for a dash through the wet streets to the Franciscan Monastery with its fine church. The complex is on a rocky outcrop joined to the shore and surrounded by a low retaining wall.

We meet Brother Bernadino in his brown cassock, cowl and white rope belt, one of only two friars left in this house. This gentle, smiling monk spoke in French, our only tongue in common; he greets us warmly and bids us welcome. With his cropped grey beard and open face, he presents a picture of selfless devotion. First, we visit the refectory; there is a magnificent fresco at the far end of this paneled room. William gives us a short talk about this fine early 17th C work by a local Croatian master that depicts the last supper and covers the whole side of the room, about ten meters in length.

We filmed the Brother outside, sitting on a low wall at the far end of the garden he so clearly loves, a spreading cypress tree lending the space a shady cool. The garden is littered with broken pieces of ancient carved stone and on the low wall are two huge stone oil jars. He sits chatting to Derek looking out to sea towards our boat riding at anchor in the bay.

Weighed anchor at about 3pm and arrived the tiny fishing port of Komiza on Vis at about 6 pm.

Monday, 2nd May; Komiza, Vis

Wake to a sparkling morning and a feeling of summer, we go ashore to walk around the small port then decide to hike up the steep lanes of the old village, so little touched by modernity, to the church set alone high among terraces of olives, carobs and vines. The fields present the best show of wild blooms to date, carpets of yellow crown daisies, scarlet poppies and bright Large Blue Alkanet (Anchusa) humming with bumble bees. Attached to a dried flower stem we find a potter wasp attending to her tiny nest of perfect honeycomb cells looking like a delicate creation of papier-mâché.

On closer inspection, we find that the church is built inside the ruins of an old fort; the thick outer wall has gun embrasures and a sharp-pointed corner arris like the city walls of a 17th C fortification. Wild pink snapdragons grow profusely out of cracks in the stonework. In front of the tower two straight, pointed, tailored cypresses stand sentinel, thrusting skywards; dark green against the mellow grey stone. It is a calm and reflective afternoon; Timot takes advantage of the low golden evening light to capture some beautiful vignettes of walls and flowers and, finally, Alvaro and I walking down the steps from the church chatting while the bells peal out seven o'clock.

Tuesday, 3rd May 2011; Vis and at sea to Split

During the night the wind increases to 35 knots and Tim and Viktor stand watch; three hours on and three hours off for some fitful sleep. By morning the storm has abated but the forecast is for further high winds all day. Indeed, the wind did increase somewhat but, as we had to be in Split, we decided to try and run before the storm. We leave the shelter of Komitza bay with some trepidation fearing rough water as we round the headland. The voyage across will take about six hours and, so far, is peaceful and only a little lumpy. Bruce feels a bit sick but still manages to make some delicious sandwiches for lunch. The rest of us go up-top and laze around watching the coast slip by while we listen to music on headphones. I love these calm days; reflective and soulful, to be at sea is an excellent therapy for a troubled soul or an over-anxious brain. I can't help noticing the absence of birds on the crossing; a few seagulls and the odd shearwater and nothing else. The depths of the ocean, once so fecund now seems raped by man; fish catches diminish and the once huge shoals of sardine and tuna are no more. I hope we can stop this greedy mining of the sea before there is nothing left at all.

We have just docked at the marina in the center of Split next to a large modern motor yacht – the crew say it is one of a fleet of eight owned by the same owner, I would guess an Arab?

Wednesday, 4th May, 2011; Split

The storm we were expecting came through last night. The neighbouring large yacht came perilously close to our bow; we had to shout to raise anyone aboard. The new day is fresh and clear so we hop in a taxi and go to the Archaeological museum for our first appointment. They were not expecting us but after a few phone calls, we convinced them to let us in to film there. The courtyard looks like a Roman cloister with a lean-to roof and massive wooden beams. All around are bits of Roman marble, sarcophagi, stelae and statues. We make straight for two magnificent tessellated pavements now mounted and framed. I think these are my favourite objects from Antiquity, so vibrant and immediate do they appear to the modern eye. Inside the border are mythical scenes, depictions of birds and animals and in the central roundel a portrait of a god. William and I struggle with our sixth form Latin to translate inscriptions on the stelae without much success.

We pack up and rush to the Art museum where Jozip Dini, the curator, greets us; he is expecting us and is welcoming, although he struggles with his English - it is a great deal better than our Croatian. He is our age with grey hair and a beard; he looks professorial. The museum has works from the renaissance to contemporary but seemingly mostly 20th C. The quality is high and we find three or four pieces that resonate with us particularly. They are a series of pre-war landscapes in a loose post-impressionist style with a flavour of Gaugin by Ignjat Job including a view of the harbour in Komitza where we have just been. A picture of a red scorpion fish by Petar Dobrovic took my eye. It is painted in a rough, confident style; we like its bright free expressionism.

After the gallery, we feel hungry. Jozip suggest we try a local restaurant called Kod Joze cellar, we order seafood and a large fresh Scorpion fish which is delicious. Alvaro eats a great many chips and we all share great platters of clams and risotto.

Thursday, May 5, 2011; Split and Salona

At nine in the morning our guide, Mario, arrives as planned to take us to the Roman site of Salona about five miles out of town. It is a beautiful, warm day but neither of us remembers to bring sunscreen and I forget my hat; there is so much planning to do and so much to think of.

The filming gets off to a bad start as Mario's English isn't great; he is stiff and reluctant in front off the camera, finding it hard to be concise; his answers are far too long and rambling. The ruins of the Basilica cover a large area but we aren't that interested in the Romano-Christian period. My attention is drawn to the magnificent carvings on the Roman sarcophagi that are lying around in a jumble. There are beautiful reliefs of griffons, sphinxes, medusas and a bacchanalian scene with winged cherubs and bunches of grapes. Curious signs appear on more

than once coffin suggesting some sort of family emblem. Each stone sarcophagus is carved from a single block of marble with a separate lid that has a pitched roof and four stone shoulders. Derek and I stand by the finest example where I express a wish to be buried in just such a casket but Derek insists I will be burn – he's in charge.

After the basilica, we walk on to the magnificent amphitheatre dating from the 2nd C BC that must have held about 17,000 spectators. It was here that Diocletian killed many Christians including the local Archbishop Domnius in 304 AD, just a few years before Emperor Constantine converted the Empire to Christianity. Not much remains of the amphitheatre as the Venetians, Turks and Austrians robbed its stones successively. During Tito's time, a road was built right next to this important site and a hideous row of gasometers; the communists were no respecters of culture. The remains of the structure still has excellent acoustics, the sound of our voices is amplified in a marvelous way as we stroll around discussing the awful fate of the Christians, gladiators and slaves that were sacrificed for the amusement of others.

My attention, as always, is drawn to the beautiful flowers growing out of the ruins. There were Poppies of course, prickly thistle that was everywhere I put my hands or my bottom and the one I relished most, the intense bright green and yellow of a small fleshy leaved plant with yellow star-shaped flowers, Sedum acre, the Wallpepper; it seems to find a toe-hold where there is no apparent soil.

Salona was originally an Illyrian settlement and then a Greek one before becoming the capital city of Roman Dalmatia. The site is huge and we can only manage to see a small part of it. In about 614 AD the city was sacked by Slavs consequently the Romanized population migrated to Diocletian's former palace in Split and Salona was abandoned to weeds and the ravishes of time.

We felt we deserved a good lunch and so repaired to the same excellent restaurant as yesterday where William and Alvaro bought us a delicious lunch of squid risotto, friend frogs legs and salad. It was with great sadness that we waived them both goodbye after a great week together.

Friday, 6th May, 2011; Split and voyage to Sibenik.

After a calm and uneventful passage of about four hours, we anchored in the splendid natural harbour of Sibenik. The final approach is down a twisting narrow channel with a fort duly positioned to demolish any intrepid intruder.

Sibenik is an ancient Croat town built around an earlier Illyrian encampment. The earliest reference to the city is in 1066. Forts were constructed on the hills above the town then a wall and later a double wall was built to enclose it. By the early 15th C, Sibenik was in Venetian hands and remained so, like most of Dalmatia, until the fall of Venice. The Turks were a constant threat, their border was a mere 15 kms inland, but they never took the city.

The city built a magnificent cathedral out of stone, even the barrel vaulted roof is made of stone slabs fitted together without mortar. It takes pride of place on one side of the main town square. The old part of town possesses an atmosphere of timelessness and venerable age marred only by a few modern doors and ubiquitous electric cables.

I have so much preparation and telephoning to do that I leave Derek to go with Alex and Bruce to the fish market. They chatted to stall holders and bought a huge amount of food. Derek took a great picture of Alex in a butcher's shop, naked to the waist, next to a lamb carcass – *meat meets meat*. Then he met a choir of all-male Capella singers, filmed them and bought their music with the right to use it in the film, should we decide to do so.

Saturday, May 7, 2011 - Sibenik

Today is more sedate. We meet our guide, Vanya, from the local tourist office. She has the day at our disposal so we walk up and up many steep steps until we reach the main castle and from there we get a panoramic view of the harbour with the mediaeval city roof tops arranged in shades of brick and orange below us. We immediately have problem with wind hitting the mikes and we are hearing a loud buzz saw and then hammering. We retire defeated and retrace our steps. Chatty Vanya speaks excellent English and is obliging and friendly. She takes us through a door into a small, walled, formal garden; it is the medicinal and culinary herb garden of the monastery of St Lawrence dating from the mediaeval period; it has been restored to its former self with neat box hedging bordering the planting and a central paths transecting at a small water feature. The smell is enticing; lavender, rosemary, thyme, chives, marjoram, basil, chamomile and curry plant all scent the air, there is even some borage for a Pims cocktail.

With appetites stimulated we repair to a restaurant to eat a local feast of octopus salad followed by a marinated beef dish in a local sauce with gnocchi. We all decide that we must re-shoot the scene at the fort because of intrusive hammering noise. After coffee, we struggle up the steps again and re-shoot the sequence. It was well worth it, the late afternoon light was perfect and the noisy builders had stopped their hammering. We have a birds-eye view of the ancient city below us in its superb natural setting in a fine protected anchorage.

Before returning to Kalani, we walk round the 14th and 15th C Venetian cathedral with its famous barrel vaulted roof made entirely of mitered slabs of stone. The decorated doorway is supported by figures of Adam and Eve and around the outside façade of the apse are carved portrait busts of mediaeval worthies forming a frieze just above eye level. The whole is a fitting monument to the power and prestige of Sibenik in the Venetian period.

Sunday, 8th May; Sibenik and Krka Park

Today, we are going to visit the Krka National Park. I've been looking forward to this part of the trip having read much about the beauty of the place. Our guide, Mariana Saric, meets us in front of the cathedral. She is reserved but

businesslike; we climb into her car full of baby things and domestic clutter. At last we have a really hot day and we wish we had worn shorts; it is the time of year when each new day brings different weather. Her car has no air-conditioning, so we wind down all the windows.

The park entrance at Lozovac is about 15 kms away. The view from the road as it descends is wide and green with bare hills above overlooking the verdant valley below. We are in Karst Limestone country, the green of the river valley contrasts noticeably with the grey limestone hills. Once we are at the level of the drowned river valley floor and are inside the park; the world changes from arid to lush. The sound of birdsong is all around us competing with the loud croaking of a multitude of sexually excited frogs their cheeks bulging as though they are blowing bubble gum. As we walk further into the park along well-maintained boardwalks, the rumble of rushing and tumbling water drowns out even this sound; we are at the falls.

Layers of travertine form natural ledges over which the limpid waters rush in a series of steps. These are not the largest, tallest or most mighty falls but they present elements of all these superlatives and are certainly beautiful. Bright green weeds trail like tresses in the clear water and, hanging from the limestone rocks in the face of the falls, are mounds of a complementary bright green grass glis.

The river at this point is divided into many small channels and a millrace that feeds an old water mill. The mill has been restored and we are shown the six huge millstones; one is still grinding maize flower, perfect for polenta. There are two other rooms, the first a sort of laundry room with a natural whirlpool for washing cloth and the other with two large wooden mallets driven by the watermill that hammer, with a repetitive rhythm, the freshly laundered cloth in order to soften it.

Visit to vineyard on the way back, we were told it produces the best wine in Croatia.

We hurry back at last to greet our friends Michael and Lucinda Waterhouse who have already arrived on board.

Monday, May 9, 2011; Sibenik and Krka Park

Michael is a friend from my Cambridge days, a lively, energetic and man with strong convictions; he loves wild birds and is currently writing a biography of the author, ornithologist and liberal politician, Lord Grey of Falloden. Michael is now starting to go grey and has a bit of a tummy, amazing considering that he is always so active. His clever and successful wife, our dear friend, Lucinda helps to run the home furnishing and accessories business OKA. Lucinda is not feeling very well and welcomes a chance to spend a quiet day reading. Derek, Michael and I head back to the Krka Park to explore the upper reaches beyond the Skradinski falls. Today is cold and a bit dull, quite unlike yesterday.

Michael is entranced by the birdsong we hear in the green woods by the riverbank. It is a medley of warbler song, blackcap, nightingale and the chorus provided by blackbirds. Great reed warblers sing their loud rasping song from the fringes of reed-bed that line the riverbanks. The scenery as we travel upstream is impressive, the boat passes through soaring gorges of naked limestone with the channel narrowing in places to little more than double the width of the boat.

We are taken up the river to a small round island, Visovac, with on it a Benedictine monastery from 15th C but the four remaining monks are not happy for us to film them or their six novitiates.

The park rangers are all men and, like many Croatians, extremely tall, one must be over six foot four inches. They are not rude but not friendly either and only warm a bit when Michael chats to them in the universal male language of football; one that neither Derek nor I speak. Our guide, under the impression that we are Canadian tells me that she doesn't care for the English; when I asked her why, she said English tourists are polite to her face but always complain behind her back. This may be so but, I would have thought, this must be preferable to tourists who complain angrily to her face and also behind her back. The general feeling I get is that Croatian men are rather short on charm or maybe it is a language problem. In many former communist countries the ethic of customer service has yet to penetrate. Croatia still seems beset by petty rules and is keen on notices everywhere that forbid something or other. The nicest of the rangers is the boat pilot who obligingly retraces our steps so that we can film some terrapins on the riverbank.

Although there are birds to be heard, the river seems short of bird life; a few mallard, dabchick and a pair of great crested grebe attract our attention and as we approach the orthodox monastery upstream, we see a flock of little egrets perching in the trees, other then these we don't see much evidence of ornithological variety.

The ancient orthodox monastery of Krka has few monks and only one is prepared to meet us and show us around although he refuses for no evident reason to be filmed. He is a genial old bearded Serb, short in stature in contrast to the Croat men, who tells us he had to leave the monastery and flee for three years during the Serb-Croat war. He chuckles a lot and is by far the best-humoured man we have encountered, he is entirely simpatico and has excellent English. The monastery is built on an ancient early Christian catacomb that is only partially on view; it is undergoing restoration. The chapel is over-decorated in the orthodox manner with many old Russian Icons on the wall behind the altar and newly painted frescoes of two-dimensional saints depicted everywhere. The church is dedicated to St Michael, the archangel and winged warrior. It seems that the monastery was severely damaged in the recent war, which is why the frescoes are so fresh.

We return to Kalani to find that the wind is up and Captain Tim advises that we delay our departure until five o'clock tomorrow morning.

Although extremely tired from our long day, we have enough energy left to enjoy a superb meal cooked lovingly by Bruce, bean and leek soup followed by octopus risotto, the same octopus that we had bought from a fisherman about ten days ago. It had been left to soften in the freezer and then stewed slowly in a pot with red wine for over two hours.

Tuesday, 10th May, 11 and Wednesday, May 11, 2011; Kornati Islands

Kalani takes us to the small fishing village of Murter on the edge of the Kornati National Park. The warden, Simon, is there to greet us and with him is a Park biologist. Simon is a tall and calm about 35 years of age but balding; we decide to call the small, wiry biologist "prof". Initially there is some tension between us all as Derek, who has taken-on the role of film director, tries to get everyone to listen and not all talk at once. Michael is chatting to the biologists about the birds when Derek drags him forcibly away – this gets his full attention. Finally we make some sort of plan but I am unsure if we really understand one another. The launch shoots off at 30 Knots across the eight miles of choppy water that separates us from the main group of islands.

They have a 35ft launch to take us at speed around a few of the many islands in the group. The Park covers 70% of Kornati but most of the 180 islands are still privately owned. The poor farmers and fishermen of Murter bought them about 100 years ago from a rich Zadar merchant. In those days these barren islands were considered worthless. The locals marked their land boundaries with carefully built dry-stone walls that run for hundreds of meters in straight lines across bare rock and scrubby garigue vegetation, seemingly going nowhere. Given the work involved, it is hard to imagine why they took the trouble to build them. On close inspection, the walls are seamlessly constructed to a high standard with level tops and sides; it is as though the farmers who made them decided to create a work of art. They must have taken pride in their work. From a distance, they look like the raised seams on a garment. They graze a few sheep and in the sheltered valleys, grow olives and little else. The islands are used seasonally at harvest time when the olives are ripe and ready.

The islands and rocks have a stark, barren beauty as they glisten in the sunshine scattered among a dark blue sea. The slopes slip gently into the water around them, the limestone rock strata expressed by wind erosion. Lines of plants gain a foothold in the lee where they can find a place to put their roots. There are low mounds of the Mastic tree (Pistacia lentiscus), Tucreum and other lime-loving garigue shrubs.
Amongst the clumps of Salvia I notice a fragrant bush with a cannabis-like leaf that I later identify as the Chaste tree (Vitex agnus-castus) so called because the fruit was eaten by priests and monks to reduce their libido; unfortunately, it clearly didn't work. Everywhere the coastal rocks are worn and jagged making landing difficult. The land is stony everywhere and my feet slip on the pebbles and sink into the cracks between the ancient boulders making walking perilous.

A few scattered trees, Holm Oak (Quercus ilex) or Aleppo pine (Pinus halepensis) manage to survive and even thrive when conditions permit. It is probable that parts of these islands were forested once until the Venetians cut the forest took the wood for their ships.

The Bora wind whips the sea into a foam at a moments notice, scouring the rocky slopes and bending the stunted bushes to its will. Not much can live here but on a hillside in a sheltered cove, I see a row of beehives; these tiny workers collect the pollen from a myriad of wild flowers in springtime to make a delicious honey suffused with the scents of lavender and thyme.

Unsurprisingly, there are few birds in these wild islands, some Yellow-legged gulls, a small cliff-nesting colony of Shag, rock doves and a pair of Peregrine falcons that predate on them. Swifts nest here late in the season choosing the safety of rocky crevices in the cliffs and crags.

High on a promontory lie the ruins of a small stone fort built by the Romans as part of their defense against the Illyrians. The Liburnian tribe of Illyrians, who lived in this area in the centuries before Christ, were noted seafarers who harried Roman shipping and fought their legions.

We leave this barren, enchanted, place with the feeling that we have found the wildest of the wild shores of Illyria.

Thursday, 12th May; Zadar

Zadar is a typical Mediterranean fortified port town. Built on a small rocky island close to the shore, it was originally an Illyrian settlement that became a Roman fortified town. Not much remains of the Roman walls but parts of the Roman forum can be seen and some of its stones are incorporated into the famous church of St Donats. The streets are still laid out on the original Roman gridiron pattern with long decumani bisected by the shorter cardo; the forum lies at the center.

St Donat's church is an imposing edifice; externally the architectural style in pre-Romanesque and redolent of northern Europe but the ground plan is Byzantine. The trio of semi-circular apses rise high punctured only by a few small, round-headed window openings near the top of the building. The whole has the appearance of a fortified tower rather than a church. It dates from the early 9th C at a time when Croatia was being converted by first the Latin Church of the Franks and later by the Orthodox missionaries Cyril and Methodius who used the local lingua franca to disseminate the gospel. They invented a new script, Glagolithic, to encompass the strange diphthongs of the Slavic language. This church seems to epitomize the power struggle between Rome and Byzantium; Rome favouring the Latin liturgy exclusively while the orthodox services were in the local language, of course there were liturgical and doctrinal differences that meant so much at the time but now seem so pointless and irrelevant. It was also a power struggle between the Pope in Rome and the Patriarch in Constantinople.

It was a struggle that was only resolved in 1045 with the great schism when these two great branches of the Church went their separate ways.

Our guide is a young local girl, Paola, who works as a free-lance guide knows her history; she shows us the Venetian land gate and the Venetian 16th C fortifications. Zadar was captured in 1202 by the 90 years old Doge Dandolo at the start of the fourth crusade. The Venetians had agreed to transport the crusaders to the Holy Land for a substantial fee but, even so, managed to divert them into capturing Zadar and then sacking Constantinople. Zadar reverted to the Hungarian (Angevin) Monarchy soon after and finally became Venetian in 1409 when King Ladislaus sold his Dalmatian possessions to Venice for 100,000 ducats. Zadar remained a Venetian possession for nearly four hundred years until the fall of Venice. Thereafter, a short period of Napoleonic rule ensued until the town became Austrian under the terms of the treaty of Campo-Formio. The history of this place followed the same pattern of changing imperial masters as most of the Illyrian shore. While the Venetians were in charge, the pervading fear was the Ottoman Turk who lurked only a few miles inland; an ever –present threat with which to frighten naughty children.

We get back to the boat, now safely moored in the marina, to find Bruce cooking a delicious dinner of venison steak and roasted vegetables with a demi-glaze jus. We sit around the aft deck table eagerly awaiting the arrival of Alex and Bruce's bearing the plates. Bruce describes the menu with such love and enthusiasm; he is really a talented chef. We all fear we are putting on weight although Bruce is under instruction to provide healthy food and small portions. The rule is no starters and no wine when we don't have guests aboard.

Friday, 13th May; Zadar and Paklenika National Park and Velebit Mountains.

Our guide a Park ranger, Zlatko Marasovic, is young, attractive and informed. He comes to pick us up at the marina and we drive through heavy traffic to the park entrance some 45 minutes away. Just before we get there, in the foothills, we come to the abandoned-looking village of Marasovici. It is the village where our guide's grandfather was born and it gave him his surname. The buildings are in a run down state, the yards are full of weeds and rusting equipment; there is no sign of farm animals in the stables or stalls. The village is picturesque; especially a fine ornamented stone doorway lintel and pediment; it is a curious design unlike anything I have seen before. We speculate as to the influences that led to such a creation, it feels oriental, even Chinese; we conclude that the curious swag-like element is probably a Turkish influence from central Asia.

We try to gain access to the yard of the main house but it is bolted and locked; I go round the side and find a small lane and some steps; then I hear a woman's voice and call our guide. The elderly lady is smiling and friendly and talks non-stop. She wears an old apron, a headscarf and black tights under a faded blue skirt; I guess she's about 75. Then an angry older lady appears on the balcony above; she's dressed all in black with a lined face and hands on her hips as though issuing a challenge. Zlatco talks to her for what seems an age, and finally turns to me to tell me that the lady in blue is his aunt and that the older lady is 95

and was married to his grandfather. A house that seemed run-down and abandoned is now full of life. These two old ladies are living in great poverty in a house that anywhere in northern Europe would be condemned.

We jump back into the car and go up into the hills behind. Our destination is the larger of the two limestone gorges that cut into the mountains behind. The scenery is spectacular; sheer walls of rock and white hillsides seemingly devoid of vegetation. There are climbers on many of the rock walls and some learners close to the path we are on. This is not a way I would choose to find recreation. On the rocky slopes of the canyon, mauve Window Bellflower (Campanula fenestrellata) grows in showy clumps.

There is a chorus of birdsong in the gorge but few birds to be seen. Michael says that he has never heard such a wonderful sound, his three favourite songsters all singing together; the nightingale; blackcap and blackbird; their song amplified by the enclosing walls of the gorge.

We pass a group of young men walking up hill rather slowly in bare feet. I stop the best looking of the quartet to ask him why he is walking without shoes on such sharp, stony ground. He looks at me and answers with a glazed-over look, "To get in touch with the earth", he might as well have added, "man", it was implied. Derek noticed them too and later he turned to me and said, "you must have noticed their dilated pupils, they were as high as Kilimanjaro."

We head back to the park headquarters and change vehicles to a four-wheel-drive. As we climb up into the Velebit Mountains, we pass through three different climate zones in an hour; Mediterranean maquis on the lower slopes moving up to Continental above 700 meters and then Alpine moorland above 1200 meters; each has its own plant species and dominant vegetation type.

In the continental range, we pass through a number of different forest habitats such as Beech woods on the more shady slopes, Black Pine and Holm Oak. On more open land we see bushes and low growing trees such as Manna Ash (Fraxinus ornus) with its feathery white blossom; Turkey Oak (Quercus cerris); Hornbeam (Carpinus betulus); Green Alder (Alnus viridis) and Buckthorn (Rhamnus intermedia). Apparently, this park has 2,700 species of plant.

The real glory is left to last; the Alpine meadows vibrate with fresh green grass set against split and fissured limestone crags. Because of the cold up here, spring is later and we see a profusion of rare alpine flowers; yellow wild Tulip (Tulipa sylvestris); Brilliant blue Gentian (Gentiana acaulis) and best of all, the plant I had been hoping to see, the intensely blue-mauve Illyrian Iris. As we crest the road and come out onto a mountain plateau, we see four Alpine Choughs tumbling and clowning for our special delight – the perfect climax to a perfect day. We head back to the boat for a long hot bath and a nice cup of tea.

Saturday, May 14, 2011; Zadar

Mike and Lucinda Waterhouse leave in the morning. We have a break from filming and will stay in Zadar until 20th May when our next guests arrive and filming resumes on 21st May.

Break in filming for six days.

Friday, 20th May; Zadar

It now feels as though summer has finally arrived; settled weather and a calm sea, just perfect for the day we head out of Zadar with our latest guests on board, Dean Grant and his young friend, Ben Bolton. Dean has become a friend since we moved to Malta, we have only met his boyfriend briefly once before. They make a handsome couple, Ben is ten years younger than Dean, very slim and boyish; Dean looks in great shape for his 36 years although he has started to grey at the temples.

As we pull away from the dock, we are moored alongside a concrete jetty with no tires or fenders; the stern port quarter comes within about six inches of the hard concrete pier and due to the relative inexperience of the deck crew, our running fender comes out and flutters uselessly above the gunwales. I hold my breath as we move slowly away from a near disaster.

We head out in amongst the myriad of small islands that run parallel to the shore just off Zadar; our plan is to move slowly north over the next three days to our next destination of Losinj.

We decide to eat lunch underway. I love to sit at the aft dining table or stand at the aft rail watching our wake recede into the distance, the sun glinting on the calm water. No sooner has Bruce served a delicious lunch of langoustine, seafood risotto, than Victor comes aft to tell us that dolphins have been sighted off the bow. Everyone drops their forks and rushes forward to be greeted by the sight of three large bottle-nosed dolphins crossing under our bow. They perform beautifully for us, one leaps right out of the water while two others rise gracefully in unison to breathe audibly and plunge back into a dive. As quickly as they appeared they are gone.

To our surprise, these islands are heavily wooded, such a contrast to the bareness of the Kornati islands. We meander in and out of the islands as we wend our way slowly north; the waters are calm and the sun is shining, the reflections on the still sea like mother of pearl. In early afternoon, we anchor in a quiet bay with shelter all round so everyone can relax and have fun. The crew put the kayaks into the water; Alex and Bruce go for a paddle to the nearest small island. I take our guests for an exhilarating spin in the jet-ski; she runs down the coast at her maximum speed of 50 miles per hour; I put her into some tight turns that ensure Ben puts his arms around my waist; you need to employ every subterfuge when you get to my age. I take Timot out with the waterproof Gopro camera; the difference in handling is marked, Timot's weight as compared to Ben behind me makes it harder to get up onto the plane; then we shoot off, once underway the

difference is barely noticeable. Timot get some great shots of tight turns and waterline shots of the wash.

Saturday, 21st May, 2011; Zadar archipelago

In the morning we decide to go swimming and exploring the underwater life. It is still cold enough for wetsuits, so Derek and Victor suit-up. The water visibility is excellent and the underwater environment in this remote place looks undisturbed. There are plenty of sea urchins; some females have pebbles and shells on their backs – a sign they may have roe inside. Derek spots some large fan clams and collects a few to eat. From the sandy bottom they retrieve a number of disgusting-looking sea squirts or sea cucumbers; they look just like flaccid penises but the Japanese consider them to be a delicacy. I think I they are welcome to them.

After lunch we press on slowly northwards to find a sheltered anchorage by a small village. We venture ashore to explore. There are brilliant patches of yellow Spanish broom in flower; they look painterly against the dry-stone walls and greenery of the maquis. We look for other interesting plants. Dean is a landscape designer and, as he lives on Malta, has an extensive knowledge of Mediterranean plant life. Only the night before, we finished off a bottle of a clear liqueur called Mastica made on the Greek island of Chios. We identify the mastic tree, Pistacia lentiscus, from which this pungent, resinous drink is made. Alongside the crumbling stone walls we find a straggly hedge made entirely of a plant with palmate leaves like cannabis. Dean identifies it as Vitex agnus-castus, the Chaste tree, so called because priests used the berries to dull their libido; the translation of agnus-castus is castrated lamb.

The field system has been abandoned and has reverted to scrub. Not much apart from the broom is still in flower; there is one plant with pale yellow, upward-pointing, tiny, trumpet flowers; the leaves are broad and velvety with pronounced reticulate venation. Neither of us knows what this is, so we decide to take a flower back to identify. I love spending time with flower samples and a pile of reference books and soon I find the answer; it is Birthwort, Aristolochia clematatiis, so called because it was used to induce childbirth but the toxins it contains are now considered to dangerous for medicinal use. Timot likes the low evening sun that backlights the showy mass of yellow broom. It dances across the flat-calm water to illuminate Kalani's topsides with ripples of golden sunlight as it dips down behind the horizon.

Sunday, 22nd May, 11; Istria

This morning is a water-sports time; our guests both want to try waterskiing but the 40 HP engine on our small tender isn't sufficiently powerful to pull an adult male of 70 kilos or more. Dean, who has been up on water-skis before, managed to get up for a while but without much finesse. Derek, who has skied all his life, performed elegantly on one ski. I meanwhile, dear reader, am chained to my computer writing this blog.

After lunch, we head further north towards Losinj and its neighbouring island of Susak. This island has a unique geology; it is made of limestone like all the islands around but covered with an overlay of between 10 and 20 meters of sand. No one has explained this extraordinary phenomenon satisfactorily but the best guess is that before the last glaciation, the Po valley delta came this far south and provided the sandy sediment for the capping layer of this island.

There is a single sandy beach where, in the past, turtles have nested. A local tells us that, while they are seen swimming close to the island, none have nested there for years; another sad tale of man's unthinking destructiveness.

We try to anchor but are prevented from doing so by a local patrol boat. We are directed to some newly laid mooring buoys nearby but find that they have been laid down with insufficient slack on the line to be useable. We try to move away but the tight lines foul our bottom. After we are clear, Captain Tim will have nothing further to do with Susak so we head east for Mali Losinj.

During all this carry-on, I attempt to board the tender when the neoprene tube is wet; I slip and hurt the toes on my left foot. This adds my small injury to Tim's cut hand, Bruce's stubbed toe and then another minor injury. Both our guests attempt the Kalani challenge, a swim to the anchor and then a climb up onto the foredeck up the anchor chain. Only heroes are able to complete this test of strength and agility. To our surprise both Dean and Ben succeed but at the costs of a nasty looking graze to Dean's shin.

Monday, May 23, 2011; Losinj and then Rab.

Tim and I have our usual after-breakfast discussion. The weather forecast is for a strong bora wind to come-up in the late afternoon. Tim, ever cautious, wants to leave soon after lunch so as to be in Rab well before the forecast storm hits.

I have arranged to see the museum in this delightful waterside town. It is one of the largest urban communities on an offshore island but, although quite sizeable, the more unsightly elements are tucked around a corner out of sight. There is a ship repair facility based on a floating dock and a number of larger commercial fishing boats. The main town is at the end of a deep bay with pretty pastel coloured waterside buildings most of which are a hundred years old or even older.

The lady I have been told to contact at the museum does not appear to have heard of us. Ten minutes later, she calls back to tell us she will be happy to meet us and show us the museum. Zrinka Ettinger is a marine archeologist in charge of the small museum in the neighbouring older town of Malo Losinj.

She meets us in the main open space by the inner harbour. She is young, dark and attractive, wears her hair short and uses little make-up. She has khaki bell-bottomed trousers and a simple top undone to emphasize her slim neck. She wins us all over in no time with her winsome smile and articulate English. For some reason Timot seems particularly impressed.

We are here to see a remarkable local find, an Apoximenos or classical statue of an athlete cleaning himself after exercise. The Greek, bronze from the second century BC is life-size. The statue was discovered in 1997 by a Belgian tourist at a depth of about 40 mtrs lying in sand wedged between two rocks. He tried to hide the find but was unable to raise the statue from such a great depth. The news of the find leaked and, fortunately, in 2005, the authorities were able to raise it from its long dormant sleep under the sea. Very few Greek bronzes are extant as the metal was usually recycled in antiquity; this is one of a select handful from that already small number that is almost entire. The piece is now in Zagreb having been beautifully and expertly restored and conserved. We are only able to see life-sized photographs and a well-designed audio-visual display.

Words do not often fail me but there is no superlative that can do justice to this masterpiece. It is finely and exquisitely modeled clearly from life, the body is beautifully toned and proportioned, the musculature well rendered. But the face is ethereal, the long curly hair is brushed back as if by the athlete's own hand; the mouth is sensitive and the eyes expressive. So handsome is this "ephebe" that he must have been a hero and probably the admired love object of a powerful older man, maybe the one who commissioned the work? The figure is in the process of using a "strigil" or scraper that sadly has not survived, to remove the oil dust and dirt from his smooth skin after a wrestling bout in the "palaestra" or gymnasium. As a gym owner, I am entranced by this idea. I can't help feeling that this is a superior and more sensual way to get clean than our prosaic soap and shower. It must have left the skin feeling wonderfully soft and silky. Sometimes athletes would perform this grooming service for each other….. I think I had better stop here before I get too carried away.

We took up the anchor and were underway in the early afternoon on passage for Rab. This necessitated a diversion south again to round the southern tip of Losinj before venturing northeast to Rab. As we crossed, about two hours into the passage, the sky darkened and a storm threatened but never materialized. We have been lucky with the wind. It is unusual to go this long without a single storm or strong bora wind, especially so early in the year. The temperature of the air is still cool in the early part of the day but the sun is now strong and persistent making walking around at midday tiring and hot. I now find I am always dressed in shorts and a short-sleeved shirt. My trusty battered panama does good service but will, I fear, soon need replacing.

We arrive at Rab on a perfect cloudless evening. The exquisite fortified town and its famous four bell-towers are bathed in golden evening light. Kalani passes in front of the scene while Timot shoots it from the tender; one could not hope for a more evocative picture – he is delighted and so are we. I have seen many beautiful Mediterranean coastal towns perched on rocky islets, guarding a safe anchorage; so many that I am spoiled and a sense of ennui has replaced my former rapture but not here; the light is so perfect and the town such a gem. The Venetian walls are almost ochre in this light, the towers rise in silent testimony to the awe their ancestors felt for the unknown and bells peel out the hours. On close approach, the beauty of the Venetian balconies and fenestration is

apparent; the houses that lie atop the walls are revealed in all their intricately carved detail.

Tuesday, 24th May, 11; Rab

After a late breakfast, we venture into town to meet Vanja Sersic from the town hall. His English is rudimentary so we take Viktor along to translate. The process is long as we are clearly not expected although Vanja does recall having received a phone call about us a week or so ago. He is friendly but vague and its clear he is not available or equipped to show us around. It is now nearly 11:00 am and I am getting hot and frustrated, I want to start filming. We are finally invited to cross the main square and go to the tourist office where Luka Percinic will meet us. At last, we meet our guide. He is young and enthusiastic and speaks good English. Luka talks to us as we walk around this perfect, small, fortified town. He tells us everything, perhaps a few too many facts; we are looking for good shots and great stories. There is no shortage of good shots but stories are harder to discern. He is patient while we go about the repetitive and slow process of filming.

On the hill overlooking the sea we come to the first of two nunneries, a Franciscan convent with only two nuns still in residence. The younger of the two shows us into the small chapel but will neither allow us into the convent nor is she willing to speak to camera herself. The convent was founded in 16th C during the Venetian period for the daughters of local aristocratic families, presumably Venetian. This struck me as odd given that St Francis is almost a patron saint of the poor and dispossessed. But then the Catholic Church is full of such contradictions, it is hierarchical, its highest princes flout wealth and pomp and yet Christianity is founded on principles of simplicity and humility. To Roman Catholics the clergy and the flock are both separate and unequal. To become a Knight of the Catholic Sovereign order of Malta, a candidate had to show sixteen quarterings that is to say armigerous ancestors on all sides going back to their great, great grandparents – I'm sure god was happy to know his knights weren't plebs.

The second convent lies a few hundred meters from the first. This one is Benedictine and a closed house. Temptingly, we hear beautiful female voices raised in a melodious descant coming from within but we are not permitted to enter. I cannot help questioning the purpose of such an order of hermits, how do they serve either the world or themselves by such frugality and denial? We are told that this house was founded about a hundred years after the Franciscan one, but for the daughters of the common people; divisions of race and class have never been a stranger to Christianity despite its teaching that we are all one before god.

We decide to walk up to the top of the tallest of the four bell towers. By the time we get there the clock tells us it is about five minutes to midday. We stand on the narrow walkway that goes around the tower while the mighty bell strikes the noon hour. When I hear the knell of a bell tolling at home, I think back to my schooldays when bells meant a summons to class or to prayer. Bells in the

Mediterranean have a different timbre and speak of a leisured life that tells one it is time for lunch or time for cocktails at a café in the square.

Timot films Kalani as she steams around the city and into the outer harbour. Below the bell tower we can see into the walled kitchen garden of the nunnery; one of the sisters is watering a row of beans. She bends over in her blue habit and white headdress using an old-fashioned painted metal watering can; no one has told her that it is pointless to water in the heat of the midday sun. Somehow, her labours seem timeless and pleasing even if fruitless.

Derek and I descend the tower steps back into the narrow alley and walk toward the Cathedral with its 12th C Romanesque façade. Narrow, rounded arches are inset into a wall of banded stone in pink and red; the façade has been recently renovated and the work has been beautifully realized. I have only one criticism that I voice to Luka. The new pointing between the stones here and everywhere else in Croatia is too harsh. The mortar used has too high a percentage of cement that renders it inert whereas a thinner mix would allow plants and mosses to colonize the stonework or at least the interstices, softening and mellowing the effect over time.

By now it is well past lunchtime and the restaurant that Luka has chosen for us has finished serving but our resourceful guide finds another that is prepared to remain open as late as 2 pm. He leads us back to the town center and down a small alleyway to a touristy restaurant. We are the only diners. I order calves liver. It is served with white rice and no vegetables. The rich sauce is thick with onion and the liver is cut into small pieces and overcooked, never the less I am grateful for an edible meal and a cold drink. The others choose tuna salad that, just as I predict, is a mound of tinned tuna atop some chopped iceberg lettuce garnished with rings of cucumber and wedges of tasteless under-ripe tomato. A few beers help the meal go down. Croatia is beautiful beyond compare but has some catching-up to do when it comes to gastronomy.

After lunch, we summon Viktor and the tender to take us back to the boat for a siesta.

25th May, 11; Rab to Senj

We make passage for Senj on the mainland. There is a stormy Bora wind gusting up to 55 knots forecast.

After three hours of uneventful passage, we decide to stop opposite the southern end of Krk where there is a narrow channel between there and the small island of Prvic. It is a barren limestone island with a few sheep and no sign of human life except a sheep pen close to the shore. We wade ashore onto a stony beach from our tender.

The island has a stark beauty with soaring rounded hills scoured clean to the north and east by the salt-laden bora wind. On the lee side and in the valley where we landed, sparse vegetation grows, mostly herbs like Sage (Salvia

offininalis), Curry plant (Helichrysum italicum), a few saxifrages and tufts of grass. The half-wild sheep look mangy and run away at the sight of us. The warm air smells of the sea and mountain herbs; the light is harsh against the bare hillside. There is no sign of animal life save for the buzzing of a solitary honeybee feeding on the purple sage flowers. The island has a savage beauty and a scenic grandeur; the vegetation type is a garigue on a broken and fissured limestone pavement. There are rocks and pebbles everywhere making walking hard and dangerous. Nonetheless, we decide to hike to a tall dry-stone wall that marks the field boundary and runs out of sight up the slope of the hill. From there we trace the line of the wall to half way up the hill to where we can get a better view. The hike is tiring, the day is hot and the going hard. We take care not to slip and twist an ankle on the rough jumble of bare stones. After half an hour or so, I've had enough; we have climbed to about 80 mtrs above sea level. The others seem happy to stop and admire the view across the bay to where Kalani lies at anchor. We sit and marvel at the wildness of the scene and drink deep draughts from a warm bottle of water.

After our walk and then tea back at Kalani, we press on towards Senj. As we head out into the straight that separates the mainland from Krk we start to feel the force of the strong Bora. There is only a short fetch or distance for the wind to travel over water so that, despite the wind force, the waves remain modest; even so great spumes of spindrift fleck the windscreen and reach up to drench us on the boat deck where we stand to watch the drama unfold.

Docking any boat in a strong wind is hard but to dock a 25 meter motor yacht with no bow-thruster is only to be attempted by the most experienced master mariner. Capt. Tim is up to the challenge and with all hands and passengers on deck to man the fenders we ease up toward the dock. As usual, the dock is a concrete pier with no rubber fenders attached and on the final approach we notice a nasty concrete ledge projecting two foot from the jetty for its last five meters and it is just submerged beneath the sea. Who would think to build a jetty with such a vicious obstruction? No sooner are we alongside and are greeted by a throng of admiring locals than we are approached by an old sea-dog who tells us we cannot think of mooring there for the night. He tells us that if the bora gets up over night, we will not be able to get off the dock and we will be trapped like a nut in the jaws of a nutcracker. Tim decides that we must move and we complete the whole terrifying maneuver a second time. We now understand why the harbour master said to Tim when he called up asking if there was any space in the port, "Of course yes, but why would you want to come here?"

26th May, 11; Senj to Opatija

It is a fine day and we can see the castle on the hill close to the town, so we decide to walk up to it. It was easy to find and we arrive in plenty of time for our 10 am meeting. We spent the few minutes we have in hand filming outside the castle. It stands on top of a steep hill overlooking the sea and so enjoys some commanding views of the sea in all directions.

The day got off on a bad note. The Lady Professor at the museum whom we were scheduled to meet at 10 am did not appear. After chatting to the man on the till, who hardly spoke English, he made a call and then let us in for free, I having told him that we had an appointment to met the museum director, the professor. No one comes down to meet us or show us around, which seems a bit strange, so we look after ourselves and read the few signs in English that tell us about the Uskok pirates of Senj who build and manned this fortress and start filming inside.

The Uskoks were Christian refugees from the Turks who came to the coast to find refuge in an area under Austrian rule. They became seafarers and lived by attacking Turkish shipping, a matter of little concern to the Austrians. They became rich and powerful and built this castle in 15th C. Unfortunately for them, the Austrians made peace with the Turks and so they turned their attention on the Venetians. Venice was the supreme naval power in the area and didn't take kindly to being raided and having Venetians sold into slavery. They were unable to make Austria take action, so they went to war and in the early 17th C they fought Austria for three years and defeated her. Under the terms of the peace treaty of Madrid Austria undertook to suppress the Uskoks, burn their ships, garrison the town of Senj and transport the troublesome Uskoks inland; all of which then transpired.

The castle interior is not of great interest but the story of this pirate's lair is. After about forty minutes of filming, I ask again at the desk about the missing professor. This time there is a young girl on the till who speaks better English, she tells me that the Professor works at the museum in town – we had no idea there was one - and is not available to drive up to the castle to meet us; we say we will go down to meet her. We pack up and walk back into town, it takes us about fifteen minutes and we arrive at the museum at 11:30 to find the gates locked and no bell in sight. I call the professor's number but there is no reply. I am at a total loss to explain this rudeness and cannot think why she had not felt it appropriate to inform us that there were two museums in her very small town or to talk to us when she was informed we were at the castle as clearly she must have been.

We set sail as soon as we are back at the boat and all of us, including the crew, are pleased to be leaving this strange and unfriendly town.

27th May, 11; Opatija marina; Tour of Rijeka

Our final guests on this trip, Dean and Ben, leave the marina by taxi for Trieste.

We had intended to moor in Rijeka but realize that the town has extensive commercial docks but no marina, so we plow on to Opatija, another two hours further on. After the rather grim industrial appearance of Rijeka, Opatija has great charm, surrounded as it is by woods of Bay, Pine and Holm Oak. It is a late 19th C seaside resort built for rich Austro-Hungarians in the late 19th C; it became their equivalent of Nice or Cannes. The coastal road is lined with imposing Victorian villas painted in creams, pinks and ochres; the fancy cornices and plasterwork now, sadly, so often defaced by modern additions or conversions.

The hillside on which the town lies is less arid than the Cote D'Azure but there are no beaches here to speak of and now, shorn of its political connection to Austria, the town is prosperous but has lost its former glamour.

Our Rijeka guide is Sandra Bandera; she walks us around the lack-lustre city center. In spite of its Roman origins there is little left of historical importance to be seen and the 19th C architecture that must have been the chief glory of the place, is for the most part, in want of love and attention. It is a dirty, industrial town whose chief claim to fame is that an Englishman invented the torpedo here in the 1860's. It is a distinction that, on both counts, I would if I were them, tend to keep rather quiet about.

Sandra tells us that her grandfather lived in the same house in the town under six different flags; Austo-Hungary, The Kingdom of Yugoslavia, the Fiume Republic, Italy, Communist Yugoslavia and Croatia. All that without moving house! Fiume has a large Italian population; in the 1930's the town lay on the border between Italy and Yugoslavia, in fact the city was divided in two, rather like Berlin after the war. For a brief while it became an independent state under the aegis of the League of Nations but was soon subsumed into fascist Italy. What a tragic history and one so typical of the Balkans where people seem unable to live in peace with one another and borders are always a source of conflict.

We end the day at an imposing castle, Trsat, on a hill across the river that gave Rijeka or Fiume its name. Little is left of interest to see at the castle but we were bought a refreshing round of cool drinks that we sorely needed after a day of walking in the hot sunshine.

Saturday, 28th May, 11; Day at Risnjak NP

We drove to the park to be met by our guide Sylvija Barbaric but, because the day is wet and foggy, there is no point in venturing into the hills to see the chief glory of the park, Risnjak Mountain. Instead we drive down to the Slovenian border about ten miles distant, into an area where the park has been recently extended, to visit some beautiful water meadows full of spring flowers and some very bedraggled butterflies that I identify as Black-veined whites. These are apparently common here but a rarity back home.

We dive along the banks of the river on dirt roads strewn with jagged boulders brought crashing down the hillside by last night's heavy rainfall; we have to stop every hundred meters or so to remove large rocks that block our path. Every now and again we stop to admire the rushing water and the riverine landscape or to take a closer look at a wild flower. There are many species new to me but we don't have time to stop and identify them all. I make a mental note to return here one day.

Silvija who lives locally, tells us that the villagers all speak Slovenian, Croatian as well as the local dialect of their particular village; each dialect is almost a separate language with a different vocabulary; it sounds very confusing. I wonder if the same is to be found at all border towns where different tongues meet.

It is a long drive back to the boat and we arrive tired and hungry.

Sunday, 29th May, 11; Opatija. Risnjak NP for the night.

I decide to re-arrange our itinerary. We were so disappointed to see so little of the National Park yesterday that I decide that to go back today as the forecast is for sunshine.

The park authorities have set up an ambitious program for us today. First, we are driven to within about 100 meters of the summit of Risnjak Mountain in a four-wheel drive vehicle; we climb the last bit on a path that is about a kilometer long. The land falls off steeply to first one side and then the other. A cuckoo sings persistently on our way up through the woods, otherwise there is little sound of bird life. Shafts of sunlight penetrate between the tall trunks of the beech trees and reflect off limestone boulders that lie dotted in amongst the forest floor. Underfoot the deep, squashy leaf litter, dampened by the rain, smells deliciously autumnal. The trees have a strange curve in their trunks just above the ground surface, this we are told, is because of the weight of snow in winter pressing against the trees and distorting their growth.

There is a hut near the top; the views are well worth the hike. We spend about two hours admiring the mountain scenery and the forest spread out below us. The lush alpine meadows above the tree line are divided by rocky crags of hard, white limestone. It is a truly "Julie Andrews" moment.

We go back down to the main Park reception area for a late lunch of venison goulash that is surprisingly delicious. The helpings are sufficiently generous to satisfy even Timot's prodigious appetite.

After lunch, we take a walk in an open meadow surrounded by pine forests with many different species flower and a few remind us of a wild flower meadow back home. We laze in the long grass letting the warm sun bathe us, inhale the fragrances of the meadow and let our lunch digest.

Our guide takes us by car on a journey through the woods on precipitous gravel roads. After about an hour we come to another open forest clearing about three hundred acres in area with a lone wood cabin in the centre. This is to be our lodging for the night and we have come to see a very rare and special creature.

The facilities are primitive, no hot water and no means of heating food. Our guide leaves us and we are alone with the stillness of the forest. As the evening draws in we prepare to watch and wait. The air grows chilly and we put on warm clothes but are careful to stay inside and out of sight less we should put our hoped-for guest to flight.

At eight o'clock, Timot perversely decides to make one last sortie outside to film the sunset. No sooner has he set-up his camera and tripod than our visitor strolls

into view. He is about 400 meters away across the open clearing and has left the shelter of the trees and has started to cross the open meadow.

He is an enormous old male brown bear. He ambles directly towards us, we can see his grey chest and neck and the tuft of brown fur on his back that looks like a mane. He raises his sensitive snout to sniff the air; by this time he is only a hundred meters away and in plain view. He disappears behind a clump of trees only to re-appear five minutes later even closer to where we sit with bated breath. He seems unconcerned but must have either seen a movement or smelt something alien in the air as he trots rapidly towards the tree line and then disappears from view for good.

By now it is about 8:45 pm and the light is fading fast. But we have had a great sighting and Timot has shot some excellent footage. We are too tired to have any appetite for the cold pasta that we brought with us. We are elated and happy as we climb into our cot beds for warmth. I sleep fully clothed with three blankets. The hut is very cold, it has no heating and the air is cool at night here in the mountains.

The next morning we wake before sunrise and shivering in the cold morning air, keep watch again for the brown bear but he does not deign to call again. Instead we are treated to a wonderful show of rolling mist banks slowly evaporating in the weak morning sunshine, in places, clinging to the trees as though reluctant to let go and rising upward like white smoke from a fire. The open meadow of short grass has lines of mist breaking the space into areas of green and white with the sunlight playing on the surfaces of both. We watch entranced until the last wisps of white dissolve away.

We would not have missed this experience for anything; it is a high point of the trip for all of us.

Monday, 30th May, 11; Opatija; Galeb

In the morning, we get up early and eat a bowl of cereal before setting off down the hill back to the coast and Kalani. As we descend the air warms up and by the time we reach the coast we are suddenly back in Mediterranean summer.

We arrive back in time for a mid-morning coffee and an early lunch.

On our tour of Rijeka two days before, we had noticed that there was a rusty hulk tied up in the main port; our guide told us that it was Galeb, President Josip Brod Tito's State motor yacht. It is enormous, about 200 meters long, covered in rust and peeling paint. The riveted steel plates betray her pre-war vintage. The Captain had invited us to come back and see around her – an invitation not to be missed. We duly arrived as bidden at 2 pm.

Galeb (or Seagull) is in poor shape, covered in rust inside and out with traces of paint remaining close to the waterline like blobs on an artists palette; most of the interior has been stripped out; bare metal plates are revealed where once some

lining would have been. She arrived in Rijeka only the day before we first saw her. She had lain rotting in a local ship-yard because her owners could not afford the enormous cost of repair. The City of Riejka has bought her and hope to raise the money to restore her for use as a tourist attraction. I think they must have underestimated the cost involved in such a project – in my view all she is fit for is scrap.

The Captain's initial warmth stemmed from his belief that we are all from South Africa. Once he started to realise that some of us might be British, he was distinctly less friendly. I discovered that his dislike of the British is because he blames us for the deaths of Croatian prisoners at the end of the war in the infamous incident highlighted by Mr Tolstoy in his book. In it he accused Lord Aldington of perpetrating a war crime. His lordship won his libel action against Tolstoy but our Croatian captain is clearly unconvinced by this version of events. When I tell him I am half Scottish, he thaws again. He is an older man, tall with grey hair and wearing a dirty pair of blue overalls. His manner alternates between friendly and suspicious but he has a twinkle in his eye and I am never sure whether he is being serious or just teasing.

He shows us to the private staterooms of President and Mrs Tito. They had separate bedrooms, which is not altogether surprising given their 30-year age difference. Between the two bedrooms is their private sitting room decorated with period 50's fittings and furniture all now rather faded and dirty but which must once have been the acme of contemporary design. The scale of the private apartments is modest given the size of the Presidential ego and the size of his yacht. The room reminds me of those advertisements of the period that depict an ideal father figure, perhaps with a pipe, and mother in an apron smiling as she uses the latest domestic gadget. The man always looks middle aged despite his youthful skin. The impression of Tito's sitting room is one of solid middle class suburban comfort although this very room must have entertained many heads of state such as Pandit Nehru and Abdul Nasser. You can learn a great deal about a person by the way they decorate their living space.

The engine room is on two levels and is like a dystopian vision of a worker's factory in a communist manifesto. Apparently 38 sailors toiled in its steamy bowels. I cannot imagine how much diesel it must have burned per hour. The Captain tells us that the engines are still in good working order but, as she was towed to her berth, I can't imagine how he knows this to be the case.

The rest of Galeb is a sorry sight, the decks are made of softwood planking and scorched dark brown in many places, all the machinery is rusting or has been scavenged for scrap or spare parts. Areas of the deck have been covered in a thick layer of reinforced concrete. I can't wait to leave such is the smell of dereliction and decay.

Our Mate, Viktor, is with us and it is not long before Captain scents that he must be from either Serbia or Montenegro; another black mark against us. Victor wanted to come with us as he was stationed on Galeb when she was being used as a training ship for the Montenegrin forces in 1996. Viktor had joined up in an

effort to get out of Bosnia and served only for about a year after the war had ended. He was emotional when he found his cabin with the very same bunk bed that he slept in still in situ.

I was not sorry when finally we got away and started for home.

Tuesday, 31st May, 11;

We spend the day at anchor in Rabac, Istria, catching up on work. Both Derek and I have a great deal of administrative work and emails to answer, so a day's break from our punishing filming schedule is most welcome.

We are anchored opposite Cres in a rather ugly bay with three huge concrete hotels. They look as though they were constructed during the enlightened era of the worker's paradise as a reward, or possibly a punishment, for diligent manual workers.

Unfortunately, this is the only convenient anchorage on this exposed stretch of coast, so we will have to put up with it. I think the bay was chosen because there appears to be a sandy beach and they are a rarity on this limestone coast where the shore is either rocky or at best a pebble beach.

Wednesday, 1st June, 11; Bay of Rabac, Istria to Cres Town

We spend the early part of the day on board catching up on our "missing shots" list and filming introductions to the crew. At about 15:00 we set sail for Cres Town on the long thin island of the same name.

We anchor in the wide bay outside the pretty little Venetian town; a huge rusting floating dry-dock is anchored close by and spoils the delightful panorama, it is painted in ugly garish patterns along both sides. We try in vain to position ourselves where it will not intrude visually but, try as we might, we swing at anchor and it always comes back into view.

Thursday, 2nd June 3, 2011; Cres Vulture Center.

This morning, we venture into town to meet Marin, the son of the founder of the Vulture Eco-center, who has come to meet us. Pavement cafes ring the inner harbour; in the center of the open space they describe, where the harbour ends a fountain, that looks like a dandelion flower in seed, sprays forth its spume. The town center is for pedestrians only; it has a relaxed charm and lacks pretension. Many of the houses are painted in bright colours and some buildings have Venetian features; there is a small loggia, now a fruit market, and a handsome clock tower in the Venetian style. People pass by on bikes or on foot dressed for hiking with sticks like ski poles and backpacks. There are young girls in tight bum-hugging shorts and strappy tops. This is an island for bikers and hikers and students on a budget.

Marin arrives to drive us to the center; it is about half an hour north of here. We are told that Cres is the largest island in the Adriatic despite being only a few hundred meters wide in a couple of places. En route, we pass the 45th parallel, the point that is equidistant from the equator and the pole. It makes for a significant change in climate and vegetation. South of the line, the vegetation is typically Mediterranean while to the north, in the Tramontana, the climate is more continental and central European. Both zones have some different plant species and, for those they share, the flowering dates can differ. The northern forests are composed of chestnut, oak and laurel bay while the south of the island is mostly pine and maquis.

The island is actually the top of a long mountain chain. Our car climbs rapidly from the shore and soon we stop to look back down on the bay. The calm water is rippled by the occasional light gust of wind that seems to paint the surface of the sea with light affectionate brush strokes.

The center, Caput Insulae, is at Beli, a tiny village of about 170 houses perched above the sea. We are greeted by the founder and man-in-charge, Dr Goran Susic, a biologist with a doctorate in ornithology. He is about fifty and stocky with dark hair going grey. His charm and enthusiasm for his many projects are at once apparent. We like him instantly and he is a mine of information about not only his beloved Griffon Vultures but about local ecology, history and legend.

The center is designed to be a "visitor attraction" for tourists with all that that implies; horrid signs everywhere and dejected looking birds in cages. Fund raising for vultures is an uphill struggle so Goran has to be self reliant; he now gets seventeen thousand visitors a year. It is still not enough and his work involves a constant battle to raise the 100,000 Euros a year he needs.

The real work of the center is impressive; birds are being rehabilitated, taught to fly and then released into the wild. Misguided tourists frighten young vultures into premature flight so they fall into the sea from their nests on the cliff face, unable to fly. The center rescues about ten such birds every year.

I have so many questions to ask and Goran has so much to tell us that neither of us know where to start. Goran explains that the Griffon Vulture is an endangered species. When he came to Cres to start the rescue center about 17 years ago, there were only twenty-four pairs of birds and now there are eighty. He claims to have achieved this through a holistic ecological approach. They are using volunteers to remove alien vegetation and they have set-up vulture restaurants, sites where they provide meat for the vultures to feed them. The local population of animals that sustained them over the centuries has now all but disappeared as the population on the island has plummeted. Beli now has only twenty permanent inhabitants; everything closes in winter including the food shops. Those that have remained work in tourism and the land is untended. The farming that remains is mechanized but with no farm animals. The sheep population is but a fifth of what it used to be. Dead sheep provided the vultures with most of their food. The even more endangered Black Vulture died out on the island fifty years ago; Goran hopes to re-introduce it. He tells us that the Mediterranean

Monk Seal, a highly endangered species, has been sighted off Cres in the last year. Apparently, a family of three is using a cave somewhere on the mainland; the location is a secret, but they are often seen around Cres.

He has created nature eco-trails that wind across the island for miles dotted with beautiful stone sculptures and many labyrinths of imaginative design. These are patterns of stones laid in plan on the ground. Goran has a mystical Buddhist approach to the earth. He believes in contemplation and stillness and he tells us that these labyrinths fascinate people and help them to slow down and breath in the soul of this beautiful place. Inside the labyrinth, he says, time is "Kairos" time – the moments in between- while outside it is governed by "Chronos" - the clock or sequential time.

He walks with us down an old stone track into the almost deserted village of Beli. We sit under a lime (linden) tree in flower alive with the buzzing of innumerable bees and winged beetles feeding on the soporific pollen and nectar; butterflies dart from flower to flower, the flash of their copper coloured wings glinting in the sun as they pass from shadow into light. We stop here to eat the sandwiches Bruce has made for us and to talk further with Goran. Derek, particularly, relates to him on the subjects of philosophy and spiritual matters - both Hermann Hesse and the Upanishads are firm favorites with both of them. I am more interested in talking to him about his work with nature and the land.

We plan to return to Cres for a longer stay, there is so much of interest here and so much to explore; it would be a simple life, walking, swimming, painting, reading and exploring the diverse ecosystem. There are over 3,000 different species on Cres about the same number as in the whole of UK; there is a new flower or tree at every turn.

Goran cannot stay with us for the afternoon so he takes us down to the little harbour and points out the cliffs where the vultures nest. We do not much like the thought of the long walk and the hill climb necessary to get within camera range, so Timot suggest we try to rent a boat. The lady behind the counter in the beach bar is skeptical but is persuaded to telephone a local boat owner. He says he will take us out in his small boat for a couple of hours for 500 Kuna – about £65. We say yes, enthusiastically.

After about half an hour, it is now four o'clock, a very red-faced man appears and we gingerly step into his small fishing boat. He speaks no English but a little Italian, which helps. We set off for the cliffs, soon he is earning his fee pointing out vultures on their nests and some perched on rocky ledges. They are wonderfully camouflaged against the cliff and the vegetation. After a while, our eyes adjust and sometimes we can spot them first. Thankfully, the sea is only a little choppy but Timot need to be put ashore to get a stable platform from which to shoot. This we do and he manages to get some good shots from a precarious perch on a rocky ledge. Finally, a bird decides to fly and we are awestruck by its size and grace. Timot gets a good shot of it in flight with its nine-foot wingspan and splayed primary feathers like fingers pointing at the dying sun.

We return to the little harbour well pleased with the footage we have obtained of these remarkable birds. Someone from the center is waiting in a ancient Lada to drive us back into town.

Friday, June 3, 2011; **Cres to Rasa Estuary.**

It is but a short hop of a couple of hours from Cres to the Ria or drowned river valley estuary of Rasa. It is a deep inlet of limestone covered in forest down to its shores. There are no beaches and almost no houses. A few small boat moorings and the occasional rickety jetty line the shore. The place has a dejected and abandoned feel to it, perhaps even a bit spooky.

We wind our way slowly into the recesses of the estuary until we come its head. Here, there is evidence of industry or at least stone quarrying; a large bulk ore-carrying vessel lies empty and at anchor, it is called appropriately, "Stone". Kalani anchors opposite the only settlement, a tiny hamlet called Trget.

I call the guide whose name I have for the town of Barban. She tells me that she cannot meet us as the road is blocked and it is now a journey of over 100 kms to make the detour. The ancient town of Barban is about five kilometers upstream from where we lie at anchor.

Nothing daunted, I decide that we will try to reach Barban by tender. The first obstacle to my plan is the lagoon where we have anchored. It becomes shallow close to where the river enters and we soon run aground. Nosing forward cautiously, we find our way into the river mouth, our propeller kicking up a great deal of mud behind us. The water deepens once we are in the river and we set off along the reed-fringed stream at top speed. The left bank has the ugly remains of some vast industrial complex now abandoned to dust and weeds; it is probably associated either with a nearby quarry or perhaps with the local timber industry? There is nothing else to catch the eye as we progress up river, certainly no bird life. For about two kilometers the river runs alongside a road that has plenty of traffic on it. Four young men on garishly painted trail bikes race us – they waive enthusiastically as the burn past.

After about two and a half miles we see an obstruction ahead. We have come to a wooden pontoon that entirely blocks the stream. On it stand a group of workmen building a road bridge over the river. The workmen carry on without paying us the slightest heed although we are the only craft on the river. We have no choice but to turn back so we retrace our steps and speed back towards Kalani.

Once back at Trget, we pull into a tiny jetty that belongs to an attractive looking waterside restaurant. We enquire if there is a local taxi. They confirm what we have already been told, it is 100 kms to Barban. As the restaurant looks so nice, we decide to take all the crew out for lunch tomorrow before we head for Pula.

Back to Kalani for a rest and a bath then dinner in front of the TV watching Jean de Florette the French classic from the 70's.

Saturday, 4th June, 11; Rasa Estuary to Pula

We enjoy a convivial and delicious lunch at "Martin Pescador". The crew must limit themselves to a glass of wine; they will be on duty all afternoon. We all choose seafood, the restaurant's specialty. All that is, apart from Alex who will eat no fish or shellfish except tuna, he is happy with a big juicy steak.

While Derek and I have a rest, the crew raise the anchor and we set sail for the City of Pula some five hours sailing time away.

Sunday, June 5, 2011; Pula

We are anchored in the sheltered bay just outside the town where we have an excellent view of the Roman Amphitheatre that is just yards from the shore. Its stone takes on the colour of oaked chardonnay in the morning light. It is the sixth largest in the world and one of the best preserved. It was built by Claudius but enlarged by Vespesian in 79 AD in order to stage naval battles. It is a truly impressive piece of architecture and I am looking forward to seeing inside.

But first we walk into the center of town to find an Orthodox church as we have yet to film an orthodox service. The only one in town is 6th Century Byzantine but it is padlocked despite declaring that it is open for Sunday morning service on this day. Perhaps the congregation has departed and the priest did not feel there was any point of holding a service – we are disappointed.

It is a hot and humid morning but we continue up the hill to find a Franciscan church and friary that is open. We while away some pleasant minutes in its 12th C cloister watching a family of tortoise that includes a baby no larger than a golf ball. Just before 11 am a male choir arrives, some forty strong all dressed identically in short-sleeve white shirts and bright red ties. They are on tour from Bavaria. We spend an hour listening to their beautiful singing but uninspiring choice of songs.

Next, we head for the forum and the center of town to have lunch and visit the exquisite small Roman Temple of Romulae and Augustus dating from the 2nd C AD. The latter is a good deal tastier than the former. Bruce has spoiled us for anything but the best.

By now we are tired and hot but cannot miss the amphitheater. It is not far to walk but it is hot for Timot carrying his camera and tripod. It is well worth the trudge. The oval amphitheatre was built to seat 23,000 spectators with cells and cages below and three tiers on the harbour side that tower some 80 feet above us. The sheer scale of it takes our breath away but there is a mystery why a town of only 30,000 should have needed a theater of this size.

Monday, 6th June, 11; Pula to Brioni

We arrive at the little port of Brijuni (Brioni) at about 2 pm and decide to rent an electronic buggy to take us, and our camera equipment, around the island. It is a

warm and sunny day despite a storm being forecast. The main island is only about two miles long and cars are not permitted.

The islands have an interesting history; in 1893 Herr Paul Kuppleweiser, an Austrian steel magnate, purchased them. Up to this time, they had been uninhabited on account of being malarial. The new owner bought them for a song and immediately sought the best available advice as to how to rid the islands of malaria. Recent work in London had identified the cause as a mosquito, Anopheles, and so Kuppleweiser set about draining the fresh water lakes and planting eucalyptus trees. His energies were rewarded and the islands were rid of the dangerous insects. He invested heavily in building hotels and other infrastructure in order to create a top line resort. He put money into marketing and by ensuring that the place became fashionable, garnered excellent press coverage. The cream of European society flocked to his new resort.

After the First World War, the islands were ceded by Austria to Italy. The Italians permitted the Kuppelweisers to retain their ownership and, after the father died, his son Karl took over. He borrowed extensively to develop the place further but, with the financial crash of 1929, went bankrupt and lost everything. He committed suicide and the islands became the property of the state.

After the Second World War, the victorious partisan leader, Josip Tito, became President and dictator of communist Yugoslavia; he decided to make Brijuni his private playground and the seat of government for the summer months. He loved the islands and built a number of residences for himself, his ministers and his guests. He liked to show off the place and entertained a galaxy of world leaders here using the island to host the inaugural session of his non-allied movement with Nasser and Nehru as his initial partners. As well as politicians, he loved to entertain film stars, especially attractive female ones; he hosted shooting parties and stocked the island with game. His passions were young women, photography, wine making and shooting but most of all he loved power and that gave him ready access to all the others. Tito was estranged from his third and last wife, Jovanka, in 1977; they were never reconciled. He died of a gangrenous ulcer in 1980. His beloved Yugoslavia and its communist regime lasted another nine years, finally falling apart in 1989, riven asunder by the poison of Balkan nationalisms and by the inherent flaws in the economic and political systems.

We have no idea what to expect from Brioni and are pleasantly surprised; the island is green and lush with a variety of mature trees and woodland, some large open grassy spaces teeming with fallow deer. There is a 18-hole golf course that despoils the natural beauty of the island but no doubt is enjoyed by many and an unsightly wildlife park with the remains of Tito's extensive collection of unhappy looking wild animals, mostly donated by his non-aligned buddies.

The best bits are the areas left relatively untouched by man. There are areas of maquis where the myrtle bush thrives scenting the island paths with its delicious fragrance. Hares run freely everywhere seeming unconcerned by the presence of man. There doesn't appear to be much birdlife except a multitude of mewing seagulls and some crows both in noisy disputation with each other. Tito's villas

are off-limits being still occupied by government ministers. One of the chief glories of the NP, so we are told, is the marine environment but as no one is allowed access, we cannot judge.

The whole island has the air of a rich man's private estate, a deer park with picturesque ruins and no inhabitants other than staff. There are three outstanding ruins that we visited. First, an exquisite early Christian basilica of the 6th C AD – we caught it flooded by golden evening light that filtered through the columns of the nave and apse leaving a patchwork of light and shadow across the old stones. The carved capitols are decorated with early Christian symbols now worn and faded. The little chapel sits in a hollow in a romantic glade of fir trees. No one was around to spoil the aura of calm and tranquility of this special place.

By the shore, on either side of an inlet, are the ruins of a roman palace complex with baths, cisterns, olive press and extensive buildings, so luxurious and extensive that archeologists have suggested it might even have been an Imperial summer residence; probably the first but definitely not the last autocrat to claim the island for his own.

Close to Tito's villa lies a walled and fortified Kastrum of the Byzantine era. The Byzantines were great imperialists and sea traders who were the dominant power in the region after the fall of the Roman Empire until the rise of the Venetians – from 6th C to 13th C AD. They clearly had enemies for they chose a hidden cove in which to build their settlement and fortified it with a substantial stone retaining wall still standing about three meters above the ground for its entire length. The walls enclose a large settlement of houses and workshops. Grapes were pressed here into wine and maybe olives too; there are great earthenware storage jars sunk into pits in the ground to contain the produce. It is the only settlement from this era that we have seen on this trip; so often Byzantine remains are overlaid by settlement of a more recent date. Their basilicas remain; places of Christian worship are often inviolate while other structures fall.

The wonderful evening light affords us some great shots of the island's scenic beauties and wildlife. We return to Kalani after six hours of filming exhausted but well pleased.

Tuesday, June 7, 2011; Brioni to Pula

This is our first wet and rainy day since the voyage began. It started out overcast with threatening black clouds and about lunchtime, the heavens opened. The only things of interest that we are able to film today are Tito's gleaming Cadillac from 1955 and an exhibition of photographs of the great statesman. We see him kissing babies and travelling the world on his "peace missions" to non-allied nations such as India at about the same time that Indira Ghandi launched her unprovoked attack on Goa – another diplomatic success then? Other peace-lovers he palled-up to included Col Gaddafi; Castro; Ho Chi Min and Sophia Loren – and she was quite a-piece.

It seems that the beloved leader had all the necessary accoutrements; a police state, no press freedom, schoolchildren brainwashed to revere him like a god and a network of secret gulags for dissidents. Many people here still remember him with affection including those who put together this sickeningly uncritical exhibition that does great disservice to Brijuni and the National Parks of Croatia who administer the island.

People tell us that everyone in his day had a job and was allowed to travel, indeed that is true; as if working for a living and being allowed to go abroad were some wonderful benefit denied to the rest of mankind. Tito oversaw an economy based on sleight of hand, like all communist command economies, it could not be sustained and ended up as bankrupt as the political philosophy that spawned it.

We get back to the boat to learn from Captain Tim that we were aground. The port, administered by the National Park, had permitted our vessel to tie up in a berth with insufficient depth. Not satisfied with endangering our boat, on being informed of their error, the lady in the office offered no word of apology and made us pay none-the-less. The standards of customer relations so dear to the socialists everywhere are evidently still alive in the new Croatia.

Wednesday, 8th June, 11; Limski Kanal.

We are entering the beautiful and deep drowned river valley or "Ria" of Limski; a strange Polish sounding name for a very Istrian place. It is a major tourist attraction on account of its natural beauty but inaccessible by land. It is long and winding, about nine kilometers from the coast to the highest navigable point. There is little sign of human habitation, just mixed deciduous forest coming right down to the shore with little or no inter-tidal zone. Its beauty lies in its depth and in some places, its sheer limestone cliffs, and the fact that it is pristine forest, unspoiled by human presence. There are some mussel farms and ever-present day-tripper cruises plying their way at too fast a speed along the narrow waterway.

At one point, about halfway along the ria, a large tourist cruiser decides to turn to go back and, without any thought to us, starts to turn right across our path. They are entirely in the wrong on many counts, we are on their starboard side which gives us right-of-way, to name just one. None-the-less they continue, only to reverse at the very last moment as if they were playing "chicken" with us. They shout abuse and gesticulate wildly. It is clear that their captain had either no knowledge of the rules of the sea or chooses to willfully ignore them. I have often observed that ferry and charter captains treat the seaway on their regular routes as if it was their personal property and behave as though they have right of way at all times.

We launch our tender and spend half an hour with the kayaks having fun; it is still a bit too chilly to swim without a wet suits. By five o'clock it is getting cold and the sun has gone, so we carry on to Rovinj; it will be our final port of call in Croatia.

Thursday, June 9, 2011; Rovinj and Motovun.

Today, we hire a car and drive inland to visit one of Istria's ancient hill towns, Motovun. The day starts wet and rainy, hardly an auspicious day for filming. After about an hour we crest the top of a mountain pass and see a green valley laid out before us; it that splits into two to form a "Y". It is a patchwork of well-tended agricultural fields, mixed forest and isolated farm buildings. In the middle of the valley stands a tall hill and on top lies our destination. It looks like the background to a 14th C Italian painting. The church on top of the hill surrounded by low houses and a city wall; a winding path rising up to the town gate with cypress tress standing sentinel along the route. The sky is dark and brooding, thunder and rain threaten. We stop to admire the scene from our vantage point, Timot managing to shoot a time-lapse sequence of the clouds scudding overhead. Rain fills the distant valley and threatens to come our way but breaks in the cloud lend patches of sunlight to illuminate the scene.

We drive on to Motovun, a typical 15th C Venetian town. The lions of St Mark are depicted in a number of places but always with the gospel of St Mark closed – a sign that Venice was not at peace when the image was carved. The town is full of eager German tourist, some Italian is still spoken; older people remember the period between the wars when Istria reverted to Italy. Every road sign is in German, Italian and Croatian.

There isn't much to film as every potential shot is marred by modern signs, umbrellas, ice cream stands, souvenir shops and the like. There is an austere town square with a typical early Venetian wellhead at its center and opposite a pretty 17th C church. It is closed but we sneak inside to find three girls painstakingly restoring a late 18th C fresco that has been recently revealed under 19th C over-painting. Looking at the images, I am not sure the result will be worth the trouble and expense. The best part is the view from the ramparts over the valley below.

Timot calls to me urgently and I hurry towards him. He is filming a swift lying on the gravel not moving but clearly alive. I go to it, pick it up and it is alive and trembling. I release it into the air and in flies away with no signs of injury. We wonder what led it to fall to earth? I can only presume that it was a young bird not yet confident of flight and that, once grounded, it cannot re-launch itself. Swifts only land on cables or ledges and never on the ground – now I know why.

On our way back, we drive through lovely countryside with wild flowers and butterflies along the verges and in the fields. We stop to shoot some great film of marbled white butterflies, shimmering burnet moths and great green grasshoppers glistening and bright on yellow, blue and white flowers.

We pass through the village of Portole (Optalj), a smaller village on a hill. As the sun has now come out, Timot wants another shot from the edge of the village. We drive down a lane no wider than our car along a rough stone path and park outside a rather grand gate to a walled garden. As we are chatting outside the

house, an older lady comes to the gate and asks us who we are. She speaks perfect educated English with a trace of a German accent. She is dressed for gardening in old clothes, a pair of secateurs in one hand and a cigarette in the other. She asks us in for a drink or a cup of tea. Intrigued, we accept.

It transpires that she is recently widowed. Her husband was a Scotsman but she was brought up in Austria before the war. The two of them bought this property as a ruin and restored it but shortly after the completion of the project, he died. We quickly discovered that we had many friends in common both in England, America and Austria. Her brother in law is Rory McEwen, the accomplished artist. We even have an example of his work at home. Timot is amazed that we can discover someone in the middle of nowhere who knows friends of ours – we are quite surprised too.

Friday, 10th June; Rovinj

We decide to spend our last day in Croatia exploring the beautiful Venetian town of Rovingno (Rovinj) that lies just across the marina from where Kalani is moored.

As Mediterranean seaside towns go, Rovingno is in many ways typical; there is a substantial cathedral, with its tall Venetian campanile (bell tower), at the top of the rocky outcrop on which the town sits. Around the cathedral are clustered a romantic looking jumble of old houses of every different size and shape. They are plastered and painted in muted colours of brick, ochre, pink and mustard with the odd gay example of pastel blue. One thing they all share in common is that they look as though they were last plastered and painted twenty years ago. Almost every house has an ugly satellite dish on the roof.

Between the houses the narrow cobbled lanes twist and turn as they rise up towards the apex of the hill towards the flat cathedral square. The usual mix of tourist shops and fashion boutiques line the main routes up the hill but if you turn down a side lane you soon find yourself in a romantic courtyard with old stones, ancient wooden beams and geraniums scenting the air. The buildings seem to have grown organically and fit together like the pieces in a jig-saw; some are dilapidated and nearly all in want of some repair. The feel is of an old Venetian town gone to seed rather more completely than a similar place in Italy.

The harbour sits at the foot of the hill in the lee of the wind; around its sides are the usual pavement cafes and restaurants with large umbrellas to shade their patrons from the sun. Tourists stroll along the waterfront and board the ferries bound for other places and even for Venice where we will be soon. Gnarled fishermen, wearing yellow oversize waterproof trousers, stand on their boats sorting through their nets and lobsterpots, mending their equipment. The boats go out at night and fish using powerful lamps to attract fish; it must be a hard and unrewarding life. Pleasure craft; sailing boats and flash contemporary motor cruisers outnumber them along the quayside leaving them as mementos of another, simpler age.

We choose a lively looking café and sit at a table next to a couple of English girls on holiday together; we chat to them and they tell us that they are from Bristol and have come here on a package. Their slight west-country burr seems homely but incongruous. Mostly, the tourists are German, a language you hear spoken everywhere. Timot loves ice cream and he is always trying to persuade me to have one, he doesn't like to appear greedy by being the only one to indulge. I consent and go up to the ice-cream counter to order. The handsome man serving does a little show with the ice cream cones similar to a barman with the bottles, flinging them and balls of ice-cream in the air with magical wizardry – finally we get our ice creams and he doesn't even charge us for them.

We get back to Kalani in time to welcome guests on board for drinks. Our lovely new friend, Cecilia Mc Ewan, whom we met in Portole (Optalj)), comes with John, Freiherr von Twickel, a retired banker and his wife Charlotte who ran Christies in Germany. They seem to divide their time between England, Germany and here. I don't get the chance to talk to the Freiherr or his English wife. Derek chats away to her about art and design. The Frieherr talks to Timot while I chat to Cecilia about her life in England and her house here. We chat away like old friends about people we both know such as Podge Bune in New York.

Saturday, 11th June: Rovinj to Venice

We left early and had a smooth crossing. We stopped and swam from the boat in the middle of the sea about half way there. I swam for the first time this season and found the water quite warm. The crew loved their swim and of course Bruce and Alex had never before swum in the open sea miles from land. The thought is at first a bit scary but soon seems quite normal. We are all excited about the end of our journey and seeing Venice. For most on board it will be the first time in that magical city.

We got there at about four in the afternoon. Tim was nervous about the approach as he didn't have up-to-date local charts and his computer charting system is down thanks to an electrical surge. We creep into the lagoon slowly past an island that doesn't even appear on the old paper chart we have. It looks to me as if they are constructing a sea defense system across the mouth of the lagoon and that this artificial island is part of that project. The depths in the lagoon are shallow and we approach the small marina, Lio Grando, with caution. The marina answers neither the telephone nor the radio. Finally, someone sees us from the mole and directs us into our berth.

Derek and I can't wait to launch the tender and we speed into Venice in the late afternoon. It seems like coming home.

Sunday, 12th June 2011; Venice

Timot, Derek and I take the tender into Venice to get some footage of us in that memorable setting. We go ashore at St Giorgio where there is a small marina next to the magnificent Palladio church. We discover that the couple from Buckler's Hard, Nigel and Annette, we met in Croatia has their yacht moored here. Roberto,

the marina harbourmaster, tells us that we can have their berth if they are prepared to move across the marina and if we are happy to bring our 25meter yacht into such a small space. We decide against, as the berth requires maneuvering in too tight a space. There is a waiting berth by the entrance that would take a boat of our length. Roberto says we can have it on Tuesday night but we must be away by 9 am on Wednesday. We thank him and say we will take it. It is about the best spot in all of Venice to be moored. Roberto allows us to climb up into the small tower that is his office so that Timot can shoot from a higher vantage point looking directly across the basin at St Mark's.

We get back into the tender to go across to Salute only to find the engine won't start. They ignition key is broken. We finally manage to contact Tim back on Kalani and he says he will try to get to us on the jet-ski. We sit disconsolately in a café at the side of the church and eat a rather tasteless meal. By now it is hot and we are thirsty. We chat to a young Swedish couple; they are clearly very much in love. The girl offers to lend us her bike key and that might just work. They are so sweet, kind and trusting that we rather fall for them and I buy them lunch telling them that no one under thirty who is pretty should have to buy their own lunch.

By now the annual regatta is in full swing and the waterways are closed to traffic. We get a good view of the passing races from where are. It is a colourful affair. Oarsmen of every description from canoes to eighths and even one boat with eighteen oars bedecked on flags and pennants row past in perfect co-ordination. The four great maritime cities states of mediaeval Italy, Amalfi, Genoa and Pisa compete against Venice; the whole City is *en fete* and St Mark's Square is cordoned off. It is great to see the Baccino with only rowing boats, canoes and gondolas. The only anachronism is the police boats patrolling to stop anyone entering the race area. The sun is out, the day hot and the water calm – a perfect day for the regatta.

Tim has advised us to try and borrow a screwdriver and to use that instead of the broken key. Just after he calls, I spot a small private motor launch pull alongside at the quay of St Giorgio, just outside the cordoned-off area. A beautiful lithe blond boy jumps off to secure the lines followed by a young dark haired one. I take the opportunity of asking them if I could borrow a screwdriver but my intention is just to meet them and find out who these adorable boys might be. They look so like Sebastian Flight and Charles Ryder in Brideshead Revisited.

The dark one is English, Mark Silver, and the blond is Parisian, Tibot. He tells me his daddy has a palazzo here and that is why they have their own boat in Venice. Sadly they are leaving tomorrow to go to the Basle art fair. Mark looks Jewish with dark hair and eyes, he is young handsome and speaks like an old Etonian. Tibot tells me his name is T with a bow and he mimes the action of pulling a bowstring. He doesn't say what his surname is and I don't feel able to ask. I suspect it might be a name I have heard of; clearly his parents are very rich. His hair flops over his eyes and he is constantly flicking it away in a seductive and sexy fashion. His blue eyes shine with life and love; I am sure the two boys are lovers of more than art. They disappear into St Giorgio to see an art exhibition and with them my fantasy evaporates.

Tim arrives on the jet-ski having miraculously got through the police cordon by feigning ignorance and gesticulating wildly. I can do nothing more to help, so I go across to Salute to admire the pristine white statue of a naked young boy holding a frog in his outstretched hand; he is like a modern figurehead to the Dogana point. It brings Gerald Durrell to mind; a fitting image to take away at the end of our adventure for he has been with us in spirit all the way.

I walk across the Acadamia Bridge and push through the milling throng to the Piazza to brave the crowds in St Mark's. I am hot and tired by now; there is nowhere to sit down except a café that has run out of orange juice. I take time to look at the returning oarsmen in their skin-tight Lycra shorts; some are really hot and hunky. It is a very gay and festive occasion, crowds pressing against the barriers, flags and banners waving. The dignitaries of Venice are seated on scarlet-covered bleachers erected in front of the Ducal Palace. I imagine the Doge leaving on his golden barge to marry the sea in the 14th or 15th Cs, he would have seen young men in parti-coloured hose as skin tight as these oarsmen's shorts with their parts accentuated by a codpiece tied with ribbons – nothing is new. Boys like that are often depicted in the art of the period especially in the work of Sodoma.

Eventually, the barriers come down and I can cross to the vaporetto stops on the Schiavoni side to find one to take me back to the Lido and Kalani. I return to find that Tim has arrived before me and has hot-wired the tender outboard so the others can get their shots and then get back.

Before the night falls, I stand in front of the backdrop of Venice and declaim the immortal words of the poet Wordsworth, written to mark the extinction of the Venetian Republic by Napoleon in 1798. I have memorized the first verse; it begins, "Once did she hold the gorgeous East in fee and was the safeguard of the West. The worth of Venice did not fall below her worth; Venice, the eldest child of liberty". Etc. It is a fitting panegyric to the 900 year-old Serene Republic and a fitting finale to our wonderful one thousand mile adventure.

Monday, June 13, 2011; Venice

Thanks to Derek's smooth talking; we have secured a berth alongside the entrance to the tiny marina at St Giorgio. Kalani can only just fit and Roberto, the marina manager, has told us that we will be on the waiting place and so can only stay one night.

St Giorgio is a beautiful Palladian Church (by the master himself) next to a former monastery, now the Cini Institute and library. The façade is white marble of an exceptional purity, it is a classical temple with both complete and sculpted columns and Palladio's trademark double pediments; there are niches for statues and more statues adorn the top surface of the upper pediment at either end and midway between the apex and the side points in fine Roman tradition. It dates from the early 16th C. It sits on its own on a small island right across the Baccino

from St Mark's Square – the primo place in all of Venice regarding St Mark's and it's seat of temporal power, the Doge's Palace.

We arrive at just after 1 pm as arranged and slip into our assigned place by the mouth of the marina. Roberto allows Timot to film us arriving from his little watchtower. The day is glistening, the water calm and light fluffy clouds dot the horizon – a perfect Venice summer day. The panorama as we sail down the Riva degla Schiavoni is almost perfect, just marred by a few adverts on bridges and a large canvas to one side of the Doge's Palace advertising Mario Testino, what a place for Mario to have his name in lights. It hides some scaffolding and the works behind but it is sad to see such a fine building disfigured by crass modernity.

Derek and I stand on the top deck at the rail watching the panorama of Venice float by; we have our arms around each other, happy to have achieved our objective but also looking forward to some time alone just with the crew on the ten day passage home. Bruce leaves tomorrow, as does Timot. His wife, Sue, and his son, Justin, are coming aboard tonight and will be with us for dinner and lunch tomorrow and then they all leave.

Derek, pushing his luck as always, wants Tim to make one more pass in Kalani for Timot to film. The shots taken the other day were in flat, dull light and will not match the light conditions of our arrival shots today. Timot, being a cameraman and wedded to good light, understands and agrees, even though he has packed away his kit.

Our lovely friend, Taryn, an art historian who lives in Venice, arrives bearing a huge bunch of flowers and a box of Venetian cakes to have dinner with us. We watch the sun go down over the city and drink cocktails on the aft-deck watched by a few remaining passers-by. Bruce excels himself, producing a great last supper for us to enjoy. Taryn has a few glasses of wine and becomes jolly and talkative. We brake after dinner to walk the few steps onto the large terrace in front of the church with the water behind to watch the full moon rise behind St Giorgio. Derek and I hold each other and waltz by the light of the moon just like Edward Lear's "Owl and the Pussycat".

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