



Leaving Aden through the Bab el Mandeb strait and on up to Port Ghalib.

Arriving in Aden in late February 2011, I felt elated. Having crossed the Arabian sea without incident, I was looking forward to some rest and security before heading up the Red Sea and on to Egypt. There were two other boats at anchor, but on inspection it looked like they had been left by their owners and were both in quite a sorry state. I was to be on my own, a sole boat and singlehander in a country just stirring to the beat of the 'Arab Spring'.

**CHORES**

I checked in with customs and immigration, who retained my passport, and in return issued me a transit pass. I had a few jobs to do, as well as the usual fuels and laundry, so set off with a driver in search of the usual US Dollars, SIM cards and lunch. I sorted out a price with Whalid, and off we went in his rather dusty old car. Heading up into town we found a bank that dispensed USD as well as Yemeni Rials. "Ahh, no USD available." That was going to be the story of the day. After trying a number of ATMs we finally went to the Bank of Yemen, and secured 1,000USD



PEGASUS	Atlantic 46LR Catamaran	
LOA	14.73m	48ft 4in
LWL	14.32m	47ft
Beam	7.87m	25ft 10in
Draft	0.86m to 2.08m	2ft 10in to 6ft 10in
Displacement	6,350m	14,000 Lbs
Sail Area Cutter	125sqm	1,350sqft
Designer	Chris White	
Launched	1997	

from the manager. Clearly USD were being withheld from the locals, but at least I had some operating cash. After a trip to the supermarket and lunch I returned to *Pegasus*, alone at anchor off the customs wharf. Not a bad first day. Tomorrow would bring some maintenance and sorting the laundry and diesel. I had plenty of water and with the fresh supplies and money, was well on my way to being able to get going again.

That evening I walked the 200m back to the restaurant and ate a few shawarma while chatting with a Yemeni. Over tea I asked about the current situation and was surprised to hear 16 people had been shot over the past two weeks. I had heard the students marching and protesting and seen many different uniforms, everyone with a Kalashnikov, but had no idea that there was already blood on the streets. There were a number of jobs I needed

to do before setting off up the Red Sea. I could expect some windy conditions with short, steep seas and some hard windward sailing. I wanted to make sure *Pegasus* was ready and on inspection of the rig found two loose shackles, vindicating my efforts. I also had to start servicing the winches, a laborious job, but not done often. I spent a lovely morning scrubbing winch parts in diesel and re-greasing, and by afternoon had completed the four most important

winches. In the afternoon, Whalid and I put the laundry in and arranged to pick up diesel the following day, Friday. That evening I returned to the restaurant and after ordering food started chatting to another Yemeni English speaker. We talked about vague politics, the situation, unemployment and the unrest. I left for home before sundown. Sitting in the cockpit I could hear the student protests and some small arms fire and was

# HOSTILE WATERS

IN LAST MONTH'S PIRATE PASSAGE CRUISING STORY JASON LAWRENCE SUCCESSFULLY MADE SAFE LANDFALL IN ADEN. IN THIS SECOND PART THE 'ARAB SPRING' IS GATHERING MOMENTUM BY THE DAY AND CRUISING YACHTS ARE BECOMING THIN ON THE GROUND.

PHOTOS: JASON LAWRENCE



Main: *Pegasus* taking rest along the wall at Port Ghalib. Right: Jason and Amanda.



“BY 2200 I WAS HEARING REGULAR SMALL ARMS AND RIFLE FIRE AND IT ALL SEEMED TO BE GETTING CLOSER.”

Aden harbour in the evening.



The strait of Bab el Mandeb.



Barracuda caught S of Sudan.



The Navy boat that tried to stop me leaving.

starting to get concerned the situation on dry land was worsening.

### BAKSHEESH

Friday morning, and I went to see immigration who, understanding I wanted to go to their head office, gave me back my passport. After thanking them and being hit for baksheesh, I got in the dinghy with fuel cans and made my way to the bunker wharf, glad to be in possession of my passport.

Fuel was quite an involved process. Coffee with the accountant, pay for fuel, get a release chit and stamp from another office and present that at the pumps. The attendants, keen to get away early for their weekend, filled all my tanks quickly.

Great, I was ready to get back. Not quite that simple! The attendants then proceeded to wind back the meter and issued me a chit for a refund. I then went back to the accountant, more coffee, and returned with the refund, of which 100% went into their pockets. There's nothing like a bit of baksheesh to make you happy to get back on-board, and with the diesel, costing 0.93USD per lt, it felt good to have full tanks and be ready for the off.

In Aden that day I had noticed many more armed men. As I sat in the restaurant and ordered shawarma, another English speaking Yemeni sat with me. This was becoming a regular occurrence. We talked and while sitting on the sidewalk I noticed a few army utility vehicles pass, each with six men on board and large guns mounted on the back. Heavy weapons, not a good sign. I finished up and went back to *Pegasus* not keen to be out after sunset.

### GUNFIRE

As I sat in the cockpit listening to the prayers in the Mosque, things were heating up. I thought of all the chance encounters I'd had over the last few days, the warnings, the guns, and now the marching on the street. By 2200 I was hearing regular small arms and rifle fire and it all seemed to be getting closer. As the only westerner around I was starting to feel a little nervous. I had been there three days and that's enough time to get noticed and become a target. What was I doing there? I had my passport in my pocket, *Pegasus* was ready, and with nothing to stop me, I pulled up the anchor at 2300. By that time gunfire was regular and I was sure I was doing the right thing.

Of my withdrawal from Aden I wrote to a friend on yacht *Imagine*, some 300 miles astern sailing along the corridor in convoy with a warship in sight (see top right).

Leaving Aden in a hurry I couldn't finesse the weather, and knew it would be a rough ride through the strait of Bab el Mandeb. That suited me fine, the rougher the better.

Hi Mark,  
Great that you're with Lapalapa and a warship, excellent news. I left Aden last night, midnight as mass protests on street and gunfire around. Army out with 50 cal on back of jeeps. I was the only boat there and feeling like the last tomato in a salad. Stopped by a port control launch with Kalashnikov bloke on front. Port control ordered me back to anchorage five times, I refused, saying there was gunfire on the street, then an English boat and I want to leave now. After half an hour he called off the dogs and gave me permission to leave and asked if I would please come back to Aden and it's not always like that!

I had just 200 miles to go until I was in the clear.

I Crossed to the African side of the strait and was in the Bab el Mandeb by 1500 Saturday. I pushed on, and with the winds picking up all afternoon, hitting 40kn with large steep seas, I wrote;

17.30 Seas bigger now at 4.5m, wind 35-40kn, four reefs in and dinghy sized jib!! Quite nasty but at least its behind us. There are some really big waves here, short and steep.

The winds eased and by 0845 on Sunday I was well past the Hanish islands, out of the official danger zone. I was being pushed up the Red Sea like a tumble weed and quite happy about it.

Feeling like stopping for a rest I found an anchorage behind a large rock (small island) and dropped anchor at 1830, poured a glass of wine and put dinner on the table. As I lifted my knife and fork the anchor drag alarm sounded. I couldn't believe it. The sun was down, it was a dark night and we were drifting out to sea and into 20kn of breeze. Having considered my options, I drifted into the darkness and finished dinner, pulled up the hook and cruised downwind on course for the port of Massawa, Eritrea.

I was really looking forward to Massawa. I had heard great things about it and was thinking of spending a day or two up in the capital, Asmara, which by all accounts is a remarkable place. I was just 20 miles from the entrance when I picked up my e-mail.

Some American friends had sent out their consulate's advice on the situation in Eritrea, containing a state department

## COMMUNICATIONS AT SEA

While I was advised of the importance to minimise the signals coming from *Pegasus*, such as Single side band (SSB) and Radar, it was also welcome to receive messages from home, and friends also on passage. On board we have an SSB, which with pactor modem and laptop is an effective long range tool. In addition to voice communications you can send and receive email and receive GRIB weather files. This proved very useful as Amanda and I would often exchange emails and relevant information was passed on between cruisers. This is a real lifeline offshore and whichever system you choose, SSB, sat phones or more sophisticated systems, having a two-way link to the outside world is a real boost to morale.

warning. In addition, a report from a cruising friend warned of two boats being under arrest in Massawa since December 2010, with no consular access...OK, not for the lone singlehander.

I altered course to some islands 30 miles ahead, and by 1730 on 28 February I dropped the anchor under the lee of Sheikh el Abu, and went for a walk ashore.

The general advice on areas like Eritrea and Sudan is not to venture off the beach, as landmines are still a real hazard, so sticking to the beach I had a long walk round the island. The only thing I saw was a beautiful eagle and a few shells which I picked up for Amanda.

No longer in the danger zone, I disposed of my weapon and ammunition, glad that I had managed to buy it in the Maldives, and very glad I had not needed it. That night, after a hearty dinner, I slept soundly with *Pegasus* hidden in the anchorage, and awoke refreshed, ready for the next leg.

It was that morning, 1 March when I heard from my friends on *Imagine* that a Danish Yacht, *Ing*, had been pirated with all crew taken. Just terribly unlucky for them. It could have been any of us. Our tracks had crossed in Langkawi, although I didn't know them.

I pulled up the anchor and headed N and with light winds made good progress. With mixed conditions overnight, I tuned in on the SSB for the morning net.

Early that morning, 2 March it had been *Imagine's* turn. Flares sighted, skiffs seen, Mayday called, an attack in progress some five miles from them, a US warship on close support, helicopters and frightened crew. Luckily they got support so no damage was done, but it certainly put the willies up poor old Marc on *Imagine* and Roger on *Lapalapa*. Really not very pleasant, and as they were just 20 miles past Aden, they altered course and headed back for fuel and a rest.



Ghosting along off South Eritrea.



The boys enjoying their first camel ride.

## PARTY TIME

I was heading for Khor Narwarat, the first anchorage in Sudan. There were two boats 100 miles astern who had left the Maldives in convoy on 4 February. We had been in touch by e mail. The plan was to meet in Khor Narwarat for a party on *Pegasus*.



Crews celebrate a safe arrival at Khor Narwarat.

**“IT WAS THAT MORNING OF 1 MARCH WHEN I HEARD FROM MY FRIENDS ON *IMAGINE* THAT A DANISH YACHT *ING* HAD BEEN PIRATED WITH ALL CREW TAKEN.”**

Arriving in Khor Narwarat I started planning the next leg. Looking at the weather files, I had to push N to get into a light air window where I could motor the last 100 miles in calm conditions. That meant sailing hard upwind for three to four days to make Port Ghalib before Amanda and the boys were due on 9 March. ▶

## ITEMS TO HAVE WITH YOU IF YOU'RE SINGLE HANDING

- 1 A really good and reliable self steering system. We use a Raymarine 6002 hydraulic autopilot with handheld remote, which has proved reliable.
- 2 An effective method of detection of other vessels around. This could be a CARD system, Radar, AIS or in reality a combination of all. These systems help your awareness when you have seen no other vessels for days.
- 3 A masthead strobe light. We don't have one, but it's on my wish list. In Indonesia we could see a boat on the AIS but couldn't see her in the squalls or on radar. They activated their strobe. We got an immediate visual fix three miles away.
- 4 A loud, easy to use alarm clock. There's nothing like getting 20 minutes sleep, other than an unexpected 4 hour sleep. Having one that is easy to set but not to turn off is an advantage.
- 5 A couple of good books. The more challenging the weather, the less challenging the book. *War and Peace* is for ghosting conditions...or the grab bag!

*Glide* and *Amante* arrived and we had a great fun party on *Pegasus*. Everyone enjoyed themselves and it was dinghies at midnight for all.

The others planned to stay a few days and cruise up to Suakin. I had debated stopping but my heart wasn't in it. I really didn't want to be cruising when Amanda and the boys were in Port Ghalib. At any rate, I had a gate to get there and if I missed it I could be waiting in a Marsa somewhere for ten days while the wind howled.

By 1030 on 4 March I was on my way. I pushed on hard so by 2100 I was through the Suakin reef system and into deeper water. That was a relief. The charts were slightly out and the quality poor, being derived from old surveys. I didn't want to be anywhere near a reef system at night. With light winds, and being concerned about fuel for the last push, I turned the engine off in the early hours, and sailed slowly waiting for the wind to fill in.

With the wind due to strengthen I tried to make an anchorage the evening of the 5 March. It seemed close, but even with both engines full bore there was no way I could make it before dark. I resigned myself to a windy night offshore. I was tacking in a 30 mile corridor between the shipping lane to starboard and the reef to port.

By 0130 on the 6 March it was all a bit dull. I was cold, it was windy and there was shipping about. I was making slow progress. At dawn things improved as they often do, but there was still plenty of shipping. I was close hauled in 30kn of breeze with a 3.5m sea on the port bow.

Another windy day tacking into the shipping and I was getting tired. Not only was the sailing physically demanding, but being constantly alert for shipping was draining too.

Thankfully by midnight the wind started to ease, and by 0630 we were motoring hard in glassy conditions into the expected weather window.

As the breeze filled in again on 8 March, I set on starboard tack sailing close hauled in 15kn towards Port Ghalib. I had no idea of the layout of the entrance, but knew I would be arriving at night. Luckily Amanda had been in touch with the marina and I had a position for the Fairway buoy. I suspected that as with most Marsa entrances - of which I had been in none - the entrance faced due east.

I approached the fairway buoy from the E at 2230 and, after arriving at the spot, picked up the port and starboard channel markers.

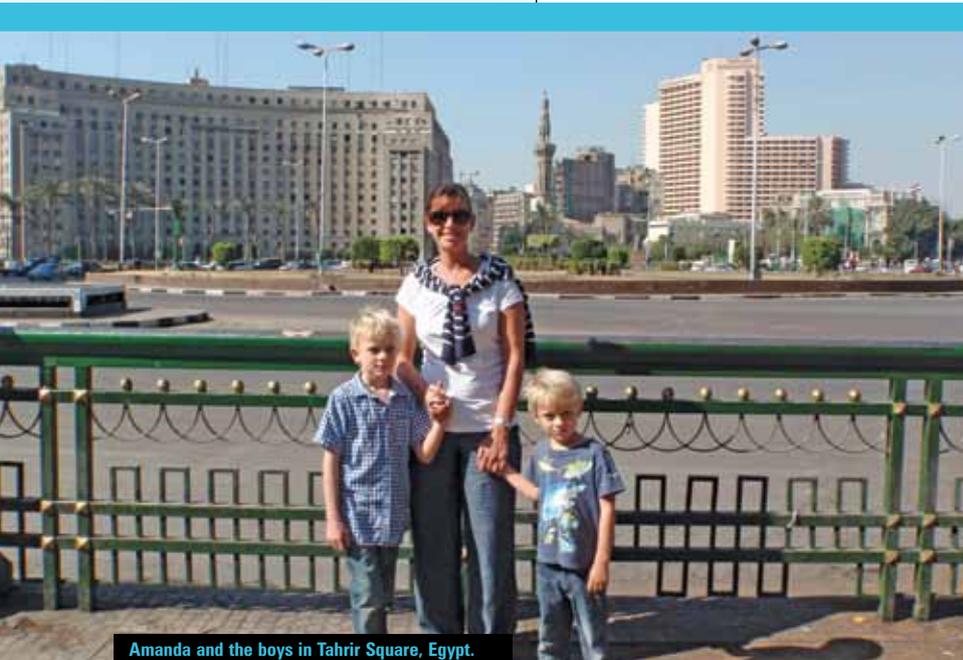
I didn't see the fairway buoy that night, but she was quite a beast when I saw her the next morning, as was the narrow entrance between the reefs!

At 2320 I was alongside the customs wharf with some quite excited officials waiting for me. After an hour they were satisfied I had no stowaways and I moved *Pegasus* on to the adjacent quay.

I sat in the cockpit thinking back over the hard sailing I had just completed and wondering if I would ever be back in the Red Sea again. It's such a shame that I had to push through so quickly, but the family's journey on *Pegasus* is about the sharing of experiences, and relating the old town of Suakin to Amanda would mean little.

It had been 31 days since we waved goodbye to each other and were all really looking forward to being back together as a family. We had two weeks booked in the hotel; *Pegasus* in the Marina and life was good again.

While I was on passage the four Americans on *Quest* had been executed by pirates and the Danish family with children on *Ing* were taken, and remained hostage. With the stakes this high I considered myself extremely lucky. ■



Amanda and the boys in Tahrir Square, Egypt.



Port Ghalib, where the family was reunited after 31 days apart.