



NEWS FROM *FLEUR DE SEL*

February 2017

DEAR FRIENDS AROUND THE WORLD,

There is a tradition, in France, that wishes for the new year may be sent as long as the month of January hasn't lapsed. Sadly, although we just made it for our newsletter in French, we are totally over the limit for this newsletter in English. We do hope, however, that all of you have had a good beginning in 2017, and we sincerely wish that the rest of the year may prove excellent as well for all of you.

These last months have been very busy, which explains our lateness in sending you this update on our travels as well as in updating our website with log entries and pictures. *Fleur de Sel*, our boat sweet boat, has been sailing extensively lately, covering more than 12'000 nautical miles in the last year, spending nearly 100 days at sea, and advancing about 130° of longitude westwards across the Indian Ocean. It has been a fascinating, if sometimes rough, adventure, and we would like to quickly run you through our explorations of this past year.

As always, if later on you wonder where we are, or if you would like to know where we've been or where we plan to go, the answer is on [our location page](#), which has all the maps needed. With some delay, our travels are also illustrated through [our photo albums](#). Finally, do not forget the [main summary page in English](#).

We hope to hear from you soon!

HEIDI & NICOLAS

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Australia** (November 2015 - June 2016) – Not only is the red continent huge, but we also chose a longer



and less travelled route around it: we passed south of Australia, not north. Last time we wrote, shortly after having visited Sydney Harbour, we had reached Tasmania. We visited the exquisite wild, remote and pristine areas of this large island, for example going up river to 40 miles from the sea. The Bass Strait then awaited for the second time, as we returned to the mainland in western Victoria.

Heading west from then on, we reached South Australia, calling at superb Kangaroo Island, spending time at the mouth of

Fleur de Sel "floats" over Snug Cove, Kangaroo Island, South Australia

the Spencer Gulf, and visiting the rugged west coast. This was the staging point for our passage across the Great Australian Bight, a 500-mile long bay, fully open to the Southern Ocean, and with no shelter whatsoever.

We reached the other end, in the Recherche Archipelago of Western Australia, just in time for nasty weather, and then pursued our explorations along the south coast of the largest state. White beaches and granite boulders were many as we reached the tiny town of Esperance and went on to the WA's oldest city, Albany. Autumn weather delaying our progress, we fled on a land trip into the majestic Southern Forests and the Margaret River wine region.



Having finally rounded the renowned Cape Leeuwin, **Magnificent encounter with a huge sea turtle, just off Broome, WA**

we were able now to start sailing north along the West Coast, beginning with a long pause in the harbour city of Fremantle. From then on, it was back into warmer waters, first in the Abrolhos Islands, the southernmost coral reefs in the Indian Ocean, and site of historic (and gruesome) wreckages. Then we got to explore the shallow and unique area of Shark Bay, before passing quickly along the Ningaloo Reef at the north-west tip of Australia.

A last run in boisterous conditions enabled us to reach Broome, our clearing out port, where we bid farewell to Australia, almost... For we stopped a few days in uninhabited Ashmore Reef further north.

- **Indonesia** (June - August 2016) – What followed was a total change, since we were now heading to Indonesia. Could we truly have sailed around the world without visiting Asia? We didn't think so. And what a better place to visit than the world's largest archipelago? Of course, we would have to content ourselves with a subset of the nation's 18'000 islands. Our voyage started off in the island of Timor,



before going on into the Solor Archipelago, where we crossed the main chain of islands. From there we sailed eastwards for 8 weeks, visiting the long snake-shaped and laid-back island of Flores, the many islands around Komodo (famous for its "dragons"), the large island of Sumbawa (famous for the Tambora volcano, which caused the "year without summer"), the sumptuous island of Lombok with its towering Mt Rinjani, and finally crowded Bali where we cleared out of the country.

These "dragons" really look nasty!
And they are found only in and around Komodo, Indonesia

- **Cocos Keeling Islands**

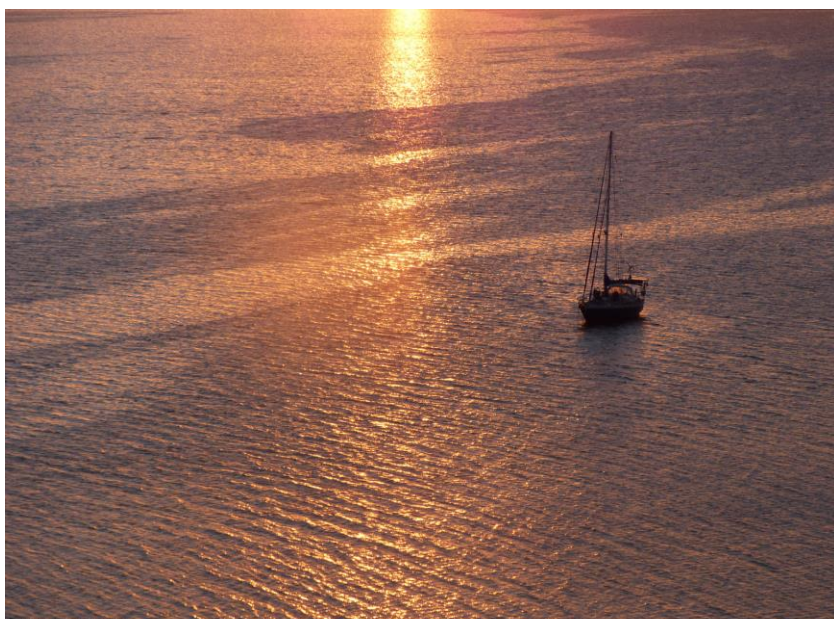
(August - September 2016) – After a fast downwind passage of 10 days, we reached our first island destination of the Indian Ocean: the tiny yet magnificent atoll of Cocos. Here we were in the middle of the ocean, enjoying a few weeks along sandy beaches, magnificent coral reefs, and floating on turquoise water again. Life was made of snorkelling, barbecues, dinner-parties among yachties, dinghy trips to



A stopover in a tidy paradise, that's what the Cocos Keeling are all about...

resupply, fishing, and even attempts at kitesurfing. When a weather window finally appeared, we set off again, for the longest and quickest passage in a long time. 2'000 miles in 13 days, that was fast, wet, bumpy and exhausting, but we made it there!

- **Rodrigues and Mauritius** (September - October 2016) – The island of Rodrigues (administered by Mauritius) was the welcome landfall, and what a lovely one at that. A friendly and authentic speck of land that barely anyone knows about was our exploration area for three weeks, with the crew enjoying fresh and tasty food, nice hikes with beautiful vantage points, and visits to a land-tortoise sanctuary and through lavatubes. We even explored the lagoon south of the island with *Fleur de Sel*, admiring the ballet of fishermen coming and going aboard their lateen-rigged sailboats. A three-day sail away in light winds lay Mauritius, and there we discovered a populous island far more genuine than the mass tourism propaganda led us to believe. Sugar cane plantations are very well alive, and the culture is highly



influenced by the massive Indian and Hindi immigrations of the 19th century. And we got to admire magnificent landscapes and vistas thanks to our car hire, so we were very happy with our stopover.

We needed respite after the Indian Ocean crossing and Rodrigues was the perfect laid-back place



Mauritius is your decidedly surprising cultural experience, with a mix of British, French, African, and here Indian influences

- **Réunion** (November 2016) – What a spectacular place! Just a stone's throw from Mauritius, or thereabouts, yet so different. Basing ourselves successively in Le Port in the north, and in St-Pierre in the south, we explored this very high volcanic island by car and by foot. We drove tortuous roads to craggy steep-sided Cirques de Cilaos and Salazie, hiked the rims of Cirque de Mafate, reaching altitudes just short of 3'000m above sea-level, drove across solidified lava flows dating to almost each of the last 20 years, drove into the pristine primary forest of Bélouve, drove again across a lunar-like ash plain on our way to hiking up to the rim of a very active volcano, the Piton de la Fournaise. It was a blast, and this was all underlined by the very welcoming and wholehearted attitude of everyone we met.



Ask for it, Réunion has it all: craggy peaks, sheer cliffs, white waterfalls, primary forest, a lava-spewing volcano, and some of the best hiking in the world

- **South Africa** (December 2016 - February 2017) – The 1'500 nautical mile passage to the African continent, south of Madagascar, is one dreaded by many a yachtsman, and we were among those. All

went fine for the first week, and while the second week was a bumpy ride and a mix of calms and windy days, we made it through unscathed, suffering only a single night of thunderstorms, but an intense one at that. Upon closing in to the African coast, the powerful Agulhas Current was nice with us and we made it safely into Richards Bay.

This is where we did a bit of boat maintenance, especially careening the boat on the beach there. We

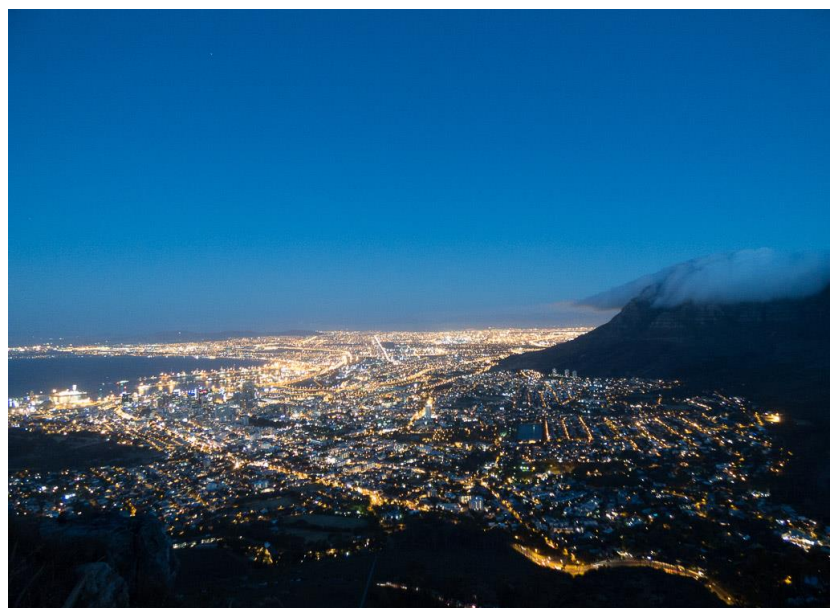


Were we the ones gazing at this kudu on the side of the road, or was he gazing at us? (KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa)

also left *Fleur de Sel* for a few inland trips: hiking in the lofty peaks of Drakensberg and driving into the Hluhluwe-Imfolozi wildlife reserve. And most of all Nicolas' family came in full strength for a full 10 day Christmas and New Year get-together. We spent some quality time together, something that had not been possible since 2008, and our various safari outings enabled us to see herds of iconic African animals: elephants, antelopes, zebras, giraffes, rhinoceros, hippos, crocs, buffaloes, and even cheetas as well as a sea turtle. Wonderful!

As our visitors left, we prepared the boat for the challenging run along the South African coast, and within a few days we had reached the metropolis of Durban, then the tiny holiday harbour town of St-Francis, the scenic and historical Mossel Bay, and finally Simon's Town in the suburbs of Cape Town. We sort of dashed along this coast, thus dodging its renowned gales, but also because the boat needed attention.

The boisterous conditions claimed a few victims, the most important being the autopilot and the genoa. We ordered a replacement for the former and had new sails made. We also had a few other jobs done, but in the meantime this gave us the opportunity to explore both the city and its mountains, as well as its surroundings – and not the least being the fine and picturesque vineyards of the Western Cape.



Cape Town by night, with the "tablecloth" of clouds atop Table Mountain

OUR PLANS

As we write these words, we are literally about to set sail from Cape Town and from South Africa into the South Atlantic Ocean. Our plan is to reach Europe before the end of the year, albeit via a circuitous route. We should stop in the islands of St. Helena and perhaps Ascension before reaching the South American continent at the north-eastern tip of Brazil. From there we wish to pursue towards French Guyana (will we be able to watch a rocket launch there?), and then on to the West Indies. Our stay there will be quite short, because we will move on towards Bermuda and back into the North Atlantic Ocean before the onset of the hurricane season. On our way back to the European shores, we will call into the Azores, and the voyage will then be over as we finally reach our departure point, in the little Breton harbour of La Trinité-sur-Mer. This should happen in September if everything goes as planned.

If there is a possibility that we may meet along the way, either because you will be cruising in the vicinity, or because you plan to travel to some of the places we mentioned, please tell us. We would be delighted to see you again, or at the very least to have news from you!



See you soon, from Cape of Good Hope, South Africa!