



# SKIP NOVAK

THE BEST PART ABOUT BEING A BOAT OWNER IS THAT EVERY MORNING YOU GET TO CHOOSE WHETHER YOU SEE SOMETHING NEW AND UNKNOWN OR THE OLD FAMILIAR

**A**t the age of 65, I have realised that I am in a rut of sorts. I am again returning to South Georgia in October for another month's expedition to this splendid wilderness. I have lost count of the expeditions I've made to the island but it must be well over 20, almost always involving deep field activities. As is usual, we have charter guests but also a three-man climate change team from the University of Maine and I will be helping them drill ice cores on the Szielasko Ice Cap.

This is a rewarding project combining recreation on one hand and a bit of serious science on the other – a great way to get our charter guests involved. There is some heavy lifting to and from the glacier that they don't know about yet. For them it is a chance to participate in something very relevant to the island's rapidly retreating glacier systems. The science team has been with us two times before, so all this is familiar ground for them and us.

I was reminded of how enjoyable this routine has been for decades during a recent correspondence with my friend in the Falkland Islands, Jerome Poncet. If I am

indeed in a rut in the far south with the *Pelagics*, he has made it his life's work and pleasure with his yachts *Damien II* and *Golden Fleece*.

He and his family have logged well over

40 years in the area and are in large part responsible for many of the classic 'ice with everything' BBC filming epics we see on TV. With their unparalleled knowledge of where the wildlife is hiding, the Poncets are famous for getting the film teams there and back safely with some very creative navigation in between.

Jerome is now on what he describes as his semi-retirement and is joining his second son Leif, who is cruising his own boat in Alaska this northern summer. That will be his first foray into that far side of the world.

This made me think: I have never been to Alaska or any of the Pacific Northwest other than an illicit cruise with an old girlfriend in Puget Sound many years ago. I guess it has been a full immersion with southern South America

and points further south and there was always scope for new places to explore and discover. I had no real desire to look elsewhere. And it has evolved into a business. There is that question of sustenance that must be considered.

While mulling this over there is evidence that there are two very different styles of cruising and exploring (if I might belabour that much misconstrued word again). On one hand, you have the globe-girdling sailors who island hop endlessly whether it be for a year's cruise or a ten-year cycle. They don't spend much time in any one place and are content always to experience the new and then move on. Seeing the coastal world is the object and arguably there is no better way to do this than on your own boat. It is a kaleidoscope of experiences.

Then there are the mugs like me and many others content to return again and again to those same places which, in the case of the south, is actually a very condensed region. In effect, we are living in the region rather than visiting. Familiarity is the main attraction: meeting old friends in remote farms and villages (and sometimes delivering essentials); coming into anchorages with the knowledge of the shoals and other navigational hazards in your head, rather than reminding oneself from the chart we take for granted. Then there is waking up to the morning's birdsong without having to get the bird book out for identification.

However, the interesting thing I have observed is that globe-girdling sailors can be much more inspirational in their writing about their voyages than the 'stay at home' grounded bunch of which I include myself. We were inspirational once, but the continually fresh experiences lends itself to better and more colourful descriptions in print, it would seem.

Those of us who have been time and time again to the same waters having similar adventures are no less enthusiastic, but might be more philosophically at ease. If asked, I would not have it in me to write another article about Cape Horn.

British mountaineer Tom Price was a member of the South Georgia surveys in the 1950s and spent many months roaming the interior. He sums it up: 'The more one becomes familiar with such grandeur, the less one has to say about it, the less in fact one thinks about it. But it is there nevertheless, and has its effect upon the soul.'

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