



The Coastal Passage

89th Edition
March 2022

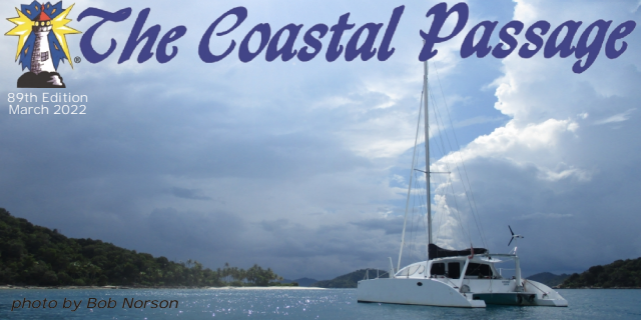


photo by Bob Norson

OK.. I know it has been a long time coming for this edition. It has been interesting times for me, personally and professionally. I'm working on that story.

Technology is changing and I want to know how this PDF edition is working for you on whatever device you use to access it. I don't use a "smart phone" so I can't tell. That is not because I am ignorant of the technology, the opposite. I know it too well. Really, tell me what you think. Mail me at bob at thecoastalpassage dot com, subject line should say "comments" so I don't toss you into the sin bin.

Putin's criminal war on Ukraine - TCP stands behind Ukraine to support the brave country that is digging in to fight the big machine. I remember another country that fought a patriotic war against a major power with a rag-tag army of volunteers and won, back in 1776, with some help from France. Ukraine deserves the same kind of help from us. I believe the world is at a tipping point on two issues, democracy and the environment. Sadly, I believe Australia is in trouble on both issues. However, I also believe Australians are smarter than average, so I hope that the next election turns out what I think is the worst government Australia has ever had at a time when it needs at least mediocre. We should elect a comedian, Ukraine did well with that.

Australia needs a Bill of Rights!!!! With monsters like Scomo and Dutton around it is really an important issue now. Barbados has shed the yoke of monarchy and Jamaica is next. When, oh Lord, when will Australia!? And don't tell me that Australia already had a vote on that, John Howard hijacked that referendum and twisted it into something that voters were wise to vote down. I am proud to be Australian, but our government is a disaster run by !?: "\$#%^ ^^ *

The cover photo:

After an unexciting motor sail from Tioman Island in Malaysia we found anchorages hard to come by in the Indonesian Anambas islands. The cover photo shows the exception.



The Coastal Passage
www.thecoastalpassage.com

No registration, no "security checks", no cookies...just FREE!

Bob Norson: publisher, editor, journalist, advertising, photographer, etc...

Kay Norson: senior volunteer, TCP format organizer and semi - retired postie.

The Coastal Passage logo and lighthouse are a registered trademark

All text, photos and drawings in this publication are copyrighted (not to be used without permission by author / photographer/ artist) by Robert Norson, The Coastal Passage. Delivering contributions inters permission to print. Contributors may be edited. Opinions expressed by contributors are not necessarily that of The Coastal Passage, & the editor assumes no responsibility for the accuracy or validity of information. Any party disputing facts contained within a feature are particularly invited to respond. Be prepared to explain or reference your assertions.

GOOD NEWS!

Dramatic comeback of Fin Whales reported south of the Orkney Islands. 1000 estimated number gives hope for the breed after being hunted to near extinction.

* GLOBAL SPREAD OF AUTOIMMUNE DISEASE BLAMED ON WESTERN DIET* said the headline of an article in The Guardian. Nonsense says TCP. The extensive use of insecticides needs to be considered but isn't. The chemical/phamaracutical industry that produces them are very clever at obfuscating their dangers. If you live in an agricultural area, spray drift can affect your health by stealth. The food supply is broadly contaminated as well. Autoimmune disorders are known consequences of chronic exposures. So they may have it accidentally right in that western food may be dangerous to eat. The article did note the global



News n Views

By Bob Norson

spread of the diseases that conform with the introduction of mass insecticide use in those areas.

Chemical pollution has passed safe limit for humanity, say scientists
"The cocktail of chemical pollution that pervades the planet now threatens the stability of global ecosystems upon which humanity depends".
"Plastics, along with 350,000 synthetic chemicals including pesticides, industrial compounds and antibiotics"... Have "crossed a "planetary boundary", the point at which human-made changes to the

Earth push it outside the stable environment of the last 10,000 years.

Will the Tongan volcano cause global weather disruptions?

Possibly. In 1815 the Tambora Volcano in Indonesia erupted releasing a cloud of ash and acidic chemicals that caused wide spread famine in the northern hemisphere. 1816 was known as the year without summer and 1817 was only somewhat better. Northern Europe was devastated, many died and history was changed. In north America crops failed and farms in New England states in the USA were especially harmed. Many fled beginning a western expansion to then frontier states of Ohio and Indiana.

Though the Tonga Volcano was less powerful it has discharged a large cloud of similar ash and may yet collect in the stratosphere to create a cooling effect due to the reflective nature of the ash cloud. In our peculiar case, this could be beneficial? Perhaps buying more time to correct our environmental sins?

Customs/ABF at it again!?

"Returning travellers made to hand over phones and passcodes to Australian Border Force" was the headline of the story recently run by TheGuardian.com. They quoted a spokesperson from the agency that stated, "if they (agents) suspect the person may be of interest for immigration, customs, biosecurity, health, law-enforcement or national security reasons", their phone may be searched. "if an individual refuses to comply with a request for an examination of their electronic device, they may be referred for further law enforcement action." To the credit of The Guardian they did publish in the article that in 2015 a man had his phone taken and used to send a text message that was then deleted before handing it back to him. It took a FOI request to obtain that information and The Guardian got a copy of that along with a formal apology from ABF for the action issued a year later.

There may be recent changes in the act to allow something like that but it will take more work to nut it out. If a reader has more information a contribution would be welcomed. Further in the act there is a specific language regarding extracting data from a device that requires a warrant to do so. If desperate enough and clutching at straws they may try to rely on a passage in the act, 243 SA, "failure to answer questions," but no joy there either. The law reads that they have to have the

right to ask a question and surprisingly enough, those powers pertain to questions regarding duty to be assessed etc.

In The Coastal Passage, Issue number 52 is the story of Neil Parry who had refused to relinquish his passcode for a laptop to a customs official in Darwin and was then the victim of an apparent false arrest when the officers there claimed he was smuggling drugs that the AFP revealed later to be nothing but shampoo. Neil sued and received a pile of cash and an apology from Customs CEO that TCP published. That CEO resigned shortly after that. But sadly it seems the ingrained disregard of citizens rights of the agency remains. Where do they get people that will do these things?

Something that has not been considered regarding the possibly illegal seizing of peoples phones is this; it may not be what they take out of your phone when in their custody, *but what they put in it*. The introduction of malware into a device that would give customs access to all your future activities and even transmissible to all your contacts should not be discounted. "I've got nothing to hide" may not be enough of an excuse to allow them to take it from you. Don't give up the privacy of all your contacts. Don't be a Mug. They are not nice people.

Australians need - DESERVE a Bill of Rights!

I am not a legal professional. Seek advise before confronting an agent.



News
n
Views
By Bob Norson

Cruising with Covid



BareBones at anchor in the Anambas islands, an Indonesian group east of the Malay penninsula.

from the beginning...

It was time to come home for a while. A family matter that required attention.

The trades were pumping, I knew it wasn't going to be a fun cruise. I cleared out of Ghizo in the Solomons, threaded my way through the Diamond Passage, out the bar, clear of the reefs and I was gone. Just on dark. My intention was to clear Rossel and Adele islands in the Louisiades to the east and make for Mackay, my home in Australia if I have one. I was hoping for more east than south in the wind... but got more south. That and the conditions were miserable, very lumpy, short interval. BareBones will go to windward very well for a cat but beating to wind in that shit would be too hard on the skipper. But I hung on just long enough to demonstrate how stubborn/dumb I was before I made a course through the islands and reefs to make Jomart entrance.

Continues next page

I played dodgem with the ships, the passage was chokers with them, but finally made open waters without getting run over. Now I could cat nap, I was exhausted. I set up for Cairns. I wanted Mackay because of it being my home address, and because I had never had a complaint about the Customs mob there that I had from most other Queensland ports. Since TCP provided coverage for a slew of misdeeds by that mislead organisation, I didn't want to temp fate if it could be avoided. Back in 07 TCP was inundated with letters from sailors about the wicked tricks Customs had pulled on them that saw massive fines and criminal convictions. Cairns was the fist port to make the

news. It was either going to be a cakewalk or the offer of a blindfold and cigarette.

I got through the reef leaving a trail of anything I thought AQIS would be interested in and made it into Trinity inlet in the afternoon though it was hard to tell as the sky was the same lead colour it was when I left the Solomons. I had heard the Customs office was at or near Marin Marina. I asked a local and he said by the cruise ship terminal, not very helpful. I Called up the marina office to find out more and they said I should get a berth and they would come to me. OK.... I got to the berth and went to the office and got whacked for \$94 a night!! Bloody ridiculous. I found out that Customs or "BorderForce" as they like to be called in the new militarised age of intimidation by title, do not

answer a call on radio. They heard me but would not help. I also found out I could have tied up on a fuel doc for free and they would have just shown up as theywatch for it.Funny that the marina office didn't mention that to me. It took three nights in the marina before all departments were done with me but the women were all courteous and professional. Twofrom Customs and one from AQIS. The only thing maybe a bit sleazy about them was the possibility that one of the Customs team kept me busy by batting her eyelashes and telling me what a beautiful boat I had and how impressed she was that I built it, while her mate hadher way,unobserved, as she roamed around the boat. I would rather I would have had an eye on them as they worked. And no, I am NOT paranoid. I know their record.

After enjoying some time in Cairns I headed south, smack into the trades again. At least the seas were smaller behind my old friend the reef. A quick stop in Mourilyan and then next stop, Magnetic Island. I like the island. It still has an anchorage that hasn't been sold to developers or a coal mine. There is the last bastion of old fashioned Aussie cruisers there. God lovem. Like the guy in his Wharram cat parked on the shore. Council showed up one day to force him off but he told them to FO because they had no authority as he was below the high tide mark. Of course they knew that too but they tried to push him around and failed. Maybe TCP had something to do with cruisers knowing enough to challenge authorities. I like to think so.

While there I noticed a little tinny clinging to rocks on the south side and

rather far from the beach. There was a little blue tarp propped up and when I got close a head popped up. He was in the process of making his way up the coast as far as he wanted to go and he would know where that was when he got there. Well, why not. These are my kind of Aussies! Just when I thought we might be extinct.

I made a brief stop in Airlie beach. It was disappointing. First thing I noticed coming in was that there were a lot of moorings. Second thing I noticed was that they were mostly empty. Maybe 10% occupied. Maybe it was me but the town felt different. The smiles looked forced. Was it me? It was dismal and I left. I know there are good people in Airlie. I will try again next visit.

I was hard put to find a cruising boat anchored in the Whitsunday Islands.

Almost all bareboat charterers, or so it appeared. What I mistook for charterers were often the new Aussie cruiser. Atypical bio wouldread; made truckloads of money on Sydney real estate, flipped a coin to decide if they would buy a motorhome or a yacht or both. Their choice for yacht would be a Lagoon because they heard their resale value was best. So naturally I mistook all those floating apartment blocks as charterers. BTW Lagoons aren't bad boats, but I like to give em a stir. Anybody on a boat is OK. But a cat without boards is just wrong!Geez I'm asnob anymore!

I sailed to Scawfell and took a break for a couple days and then headed for Mackay Marina, my home of record in Australia. I got up on the hard right away.

Photo Page

Story continues on next page. I am trying this system out, tell me if you hate it or not.

In the Philippines I could not get black antifoul so took what I could get. The pink stuff worked pretty well but I hated the look. I contacted Whitsunday Ocean Services by Airlie Beach and got the Wattel Cu120 that I preferred at the good guy price, as always.

My next voyage into Asia I got a 10 litre tin to take with me, something I would advise to those making plans for a season up there. One can get spoiled by easy to get, high quality supplies in Australia. It is not universal.



But anyway... first day on the hard I ran into an old friend and former boatyard manager, Thommo. He didn't recognise me at first but when I said; "hey you old, how are ya?" his head snapped up with a big grin and we had a good time.

Ben, the marina manager dropped by and I waved and smiled beneath my respirator with the sander buzzing in my hands and anti-foul polluting the air. If I didn't like him I would have stopped what I was doing to give him a big hug and leave a permanent black stain, like a tattoo, on him.

Now for Percy Island. I had the tide right so drove right into the lagoon, turned about and set my anchor and backed into the mangroves to

tie up there. This is my home. I love it there and so does BareBones. It nestles into the soft sand with a sigh. Time to relax, no matter what the weather. Cyclone? No worries.

Had a nice visit with Cate and John. Those two deserve a statue in the park or something. They really have done good and helped so many travellers, even ones that didn't deserve it. They give Christianity a good name. True believers. Charitable, generous and honest. I met some people there that trip that were the



BareBones now has a place in the A frame carved into a piece of the homestead siding

opposite of that. Too bad there isn't a vaccine against them.

Photo page

Story continues
next page

For those not familiar, to left is West Bay showing the channel into the lagoon at low tide. At right is inside the lagoon at high tide. When I have told sailors of the six metre tides in this part of the Queensland coast they barely believe it. Caribbean tides are about 1.5 feet! BareBones has dagger boards and kick up rudders so sits on the sand nicely but I am fussy about the bottom and inspect it before drying out.



Anyway, we keep sailing.

Kepple island was a overnighter Off the next morning and my pilot died. Buggar! I stoppe d in at cape Capricorn among the most intense gathering of humpbacks I have ever seen. They are such an intelligent and gentle breed and I was sure glad. They got close but never touched. Just think what havoc we would have if they were as inhuman as humans? I had to have a look inside the machine to see if I could spot the trouble but my inspection revealed it was probably with the program, nothing I could do. I hand steered into Pancake creek, anchored on the outside and got a wink of sleep.

Next morning with an early start, I intended to make Burrum Heads,

where my Kay was living. Nothing was going to stop that. Progress was slow and hand steering is no fun anytime but really a pain in the arse single handed and BareBones is a twitchy thing, light and sensitive to the slightest change in conditions. The wind was now coming from the SE, light and flukey. My track was pretty wobbly but no matter, I was coming home to my lady.

I use a Simrad TP32 tiller pilot. Very neat little machine if you have tiller steering as we do. I had had very good luck with them, losing them only to horrific situations like running into a log that jammed the rudders so firmly that the machine smashed the mount trying to correct the course. They have a 2 year warranty but I didn't even try for that one. Hell, it

deserved to die! But this one was different. With nothing going on except easy sailing it just lost - it's - way. Anyway it was sent back to Withworths to forward to the maker for replacement. I received it along with a new machine I paid for to insure I had aspare.

I took off for Hervey Bay and the Sandy Strait. At the flats I spied my ol mate Bob Burgess on B52, his big cat. He was giving a tow to an old boy sailing north from Tasmania in an open Dory! The sailor had gotten stuck in the flats with no wind and would have been sitting on the mud for a while if Bob had not come along.

They were going north and I was going south.

We collide with a bloody Humpy

I made a brief stop in Jervis bay and then to Eden for final preparation for Bass Strait... the legendary waters that had claimed so many ships and ocean racing yachts over the years. I checked the weather and sailed.

Most of Bass Strait is only 200 feet deep but my course would take me over a dropoff that plunged to 9000 feet. Makes for interesting times but not the kind I anticipated.

We were sailing SW on a westerly wind. Pinching close with both boards down and deep, making only 6 kts or so but on track to make the Tamar river on the north coast. About 70 miles out of Eden I was sitting in my chair, watching through a front window, at ease but watchful and then we hit...

WHAMMO! WTF! BareBones came to an immediate stop like we had hit a brick wall and then spun us around about 90 degrees. I had no idea what happened. I ran out to the cockpit and looked aft to see a large reddish orange 4 meter wide pool about 10 meters off the duckboard. I still didn't get it but as I looked a humpback whale breached just beyond the stain in the water, the stain was blood, lots of it. A cut in that poor animal must have dumped a lot of blood instantly.

Now I turned my attention to BareBones. I ran into the starboard hull but saw no water and I really expected it. I had overbuilt the area in the hull where the dagger board

exited. I checked the port hull and then went on deck to inspect. The starboard side dagger board was able to go deeper but I could not withdraw it. We hit too hard to expect to get away clean. So I accepted and carried on. The whale was seriously hurt and I felt bad about it and wondered how it happened. My theory is that the whale was cruising just under the water and saw us coming from the opposite direction. I have often seen Humpbacks dive just under a boat to miss it. I think what happened is the whale didn't make out the dagger boards, thin and painted black, against the black painted hulls.

No whales are perfect I guess.....

I have observed a lot of water mammals and I am convinced that many breeds are as intelligent as humans but without human hands and fingers with opposable thumbs, so, they can't write a history, they can't share learning except by language. Those limitations aside, whales could rule the world and the world would be better for it.

I hope that big fella survived. The whale wasn't full grown, probably only 15 to 20 ton. More than a match for my 6 ton (gross) cat.

With one board damaged, the Tamar was no hope so we sailed for the northeast coast of Tasmania.

I disagree with anyone who says a cat only needs one board.

120 miles a day is no great record for BareBones but considering all it was acceptable. I slowed BareBones right

down at night when I wanted to sleep. In case of a sudden squall or shipping traffic though we encountered neither. We spent one day in St Helens and then a weather window came up that begged for a course up and around the top. I wanted to make the river in a day sail, until the little steel bit that the pilot snapped onto on the tiller broke off. After a few hours of hand steering we came by a bay that I got us into and anchored. Oh well, it was nice to have a close look at the coast.

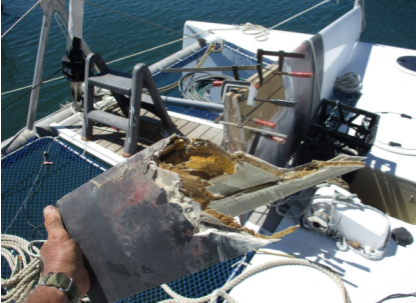
I found a sheltered spot in the bay among the sand blows and windmills, made a jury rig repair and had a good night. The next day we sailed into the River Tamar and anchored up a tributary in 30 feet of icy cold water. The day after that I met my family in a small park on the river. It was a joyous reunion.

Next day I dried BareBones out on a

mud/sand bank to cut off the poor remains of my daggerboard so I could extract it upward for repair.

A couple days later I was working on my motors when due to a sudden attack of brain fade I moved a control lever whilst I had a side cover off the motor which held the cables in place. A vital piece of metal flicked off as a result, doing a fine dive into that 30 feet of icy cold water mentioned earlier... oophs. I had to have that fixed as without both motors to manoeuvre I could not get into the marina to work on my dagger board. It took 1.5 hours to fabricate a replacement from spare metal and tools I had on board. Two years later and on the other side of the earth, the fabricated item still serves well, thank you very much..!

Next... The repairs



In the foreground is a smaller part that was torn away and saved for the photo. The boards are constructed with a wood frame and foam skin glassed on both sides.

Timber was replaced and then foam was glassed and glued in place, shaped and later glassed on the outside and painted etc.

It is well worth commenting here that all tools and supplies to repair the board was on hand on the boat!!!! Including paints. If you are coastal cruising in Australia it is not as important but when you sail off into the big blue it is crucial!

And yes, the weight slows us down but it is the price you pay. The further we sailed, the more I was rewarded for this philosophy.

A quick fabrication or weeks chasing the part

Again, all supplies and tools were on board for this. I happened to have some 3mm flat bar aluminium... As you do... And I had a second motor so I could remove and trace the outline I needed from that part. In the image on the left I have done that and to get the clean radiuses I needed I used a drill first for those. Then I made a rough cut with a hacksaw, the product of which is shown in the middle image. The rest was careful work with a file. I used a flat file, a rat tail and half round, all of which I have on board and all good quality. When buying things like hacksaw blades and files, the best quality available is what you get. Don't be penny wise and dollar dumb. Not on a boat going offshore anyway.

The finished item shown on the right next to the factory piece is close enough. The original is stainless steel, however my aluminium replacement has been perfect after several years and many miles. If it ever fails, I have more bar....



Chores out of the way, time to visit with family. My daughter is a disabled Iraq war veteran and was struggling to get by. I was there to fix stuff and Kay was there to help with the task of organising the paper work needed to get the official benefits she was entitled to. That was the harder job.

Since then she realised she was a he. It all made sense. Her love of fast motorcycles and blowing shit up. Which was why she got into the army. A natural fit. So now my narrative is changed. I am very pleased that he has found his way. It took guts to come out. He will be more comfortable in his own skin. Everyone deserves that. I don't think that people have changed recently, but that society has. Acceptance is now accepted!?!? So in days when it seems humanity is going backward this stands out as proof there is hope.

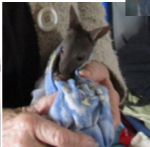
And besides, he let us borrow his hotrod Kawasaki! Tasmania is a wonderland.. In summer So kay and I explored a bit, like our old days when we had a garage full of motorbikes.

So here is a pic of the team that has brought you The Coastal Passage all these years, since 2003.



Norma Baker is a friend of our boy and a legend in Tasmania and around the world. She saves little animals. She protects, treats for illness and injury or abandonment, nurses the pinkies and then releases.

She doesn't like to be photographed so here are pics of the creatures roaming the wilds of her living room. Not many rooms have more living going on than hers.



The tube behind skippy is for the Wombats that prefer a nice dark tunnel to sleep in, or a jumper sleeve. Above is a nice pouch for the Joeys.

But now it is time to sail.

Eventually I did all I could do to help so time for me to leave. Kay remained as she had skills that were still in much demand.

BareBones was in good nick and provisioned. We left the River Tamar and were once again in the Bass Strait. Once again it was three days and two nights across sailing easy and slow. A light but fair wind and seas that were rougher than conditions seemed to warrant but no worries at all. We have all heard stories of the wild strait but in these days of access to weather reports good for over a week at a time and that information available via the internet to anyone means chances of a safe crossing are near 100%. Thank you BOM!

We fought the bloody East Coast

Current all the way to the Queensland border where it gradually moved off the shore and by the time we passed Morton Island we were starting to pick up the SE trades.

It's funny, but after the sailing I have done the East Coast of Australia was starting to seem small... I remember when sailing from the Gold Coast to the Whitsundays seemed like a big deal. But anymore it is just a leg of a bigger thing. I still didn't have a clear idea of where we were going, but I was confident BareBones would get me where ever I wanted to go, where ever that may be so it wasn't a big deal to work out. It would come to me as we sailed.

After a brief stop into Percy Island to grab a few liters of honey we sailed into the Whitsundays in the middle of the

night in the middle of a furious flying fish attack! It was like we were at war. The sound of the fish slamming into the topsides was like machine gun fire.

I got through the war zone and nipped behind Haslewood Island for a few hours sleep and off the next morning before the curse of Airlie Beach could infect me. With quick stops at Bowling Green and Orpheous Island, I was back in Cairns. I got some Wattle CU120 black antifoul to take with me where ever I would go as I had a hard time trying to find antifoul in Asia of a type and colour I wanted before. I overloaded poor BareBones once again and set off north with no further plan than getting back to Darwin where eccentrics like me are tolerated, even encouraged!

Photo Page

Below - Barrier Reef sailing! Flat seas and trade winds. This was taken before winds got best doing about 9 kts here



Seas and winds still mild but on the speedo on my nav screen shows 11.2 kts. We varied between 10 and 12.5 all day. Made good ground! BareBones best speed was made on this part of the far north coast at 18kts. As normal here I was sailing a double reefed main and full heady on a broad reach. Good balance.

I almost forgot an event I ran into at Port Clinton. I was at anchor deep into it and two young guys limped past under power with a small outboard with two broken, jury rigged masts on a small boat, maybe 23 feet? They had grand ambitions for the little thing but didn't know about the huge tides up there and the nasty seas that can develop when wind and tide oppose. They got rolled and were lucky to survive.

A couple days later a marine rescue boat showed up to take them alongside to get them to Yepoon after an attempt with a trailer at the boat ramp didn't work.

I felt for them but it looked like youth and courage were trumped by age and experience that time. I

know how that feels. I've been there!

On the way up the coast I took notice of the boats I saw and it was interesting/disappointing. Gone were the families on a shoe string with a home built steely or older GRP or third hand cat. A change had occurred.

Once again I used Seisia as a last stop before the Gulf of Carpentaria crossing. While there, just to prove myself wrong, I met a french couple on a tiny cat with a couple very young children. The poor cat would have been barely suitable for weekend sailing in sheltered waters by a couple with cut lunches. The poor thing had about 3 inches of bridgedeck clearance. They said they were leaving the next day as was I but I left earlier. I felt bad after getting out there. If they survived the crossing it must have been terrifying. For the sake of the kids I wished I had

hung back and shadowed them in case... I hope they made it all right. And if they did I hope they sold the boat in Darwin, as many do, when they realised....

I enjoyed my time in the far north. The Wessels are so good. I stayed quite a while near a popular entrance in case the little cat showed up but they may have headed to Gove. Hope.

There is something special about the Wessels. Something spiritual. So ancient, timeless. Lonely in a good way. No floating Winnebagos from Sydney! No anyone. Just me and the crocks. I took some time to 'decompress' and think about what I was doing and still didn't come up with a plan but felt more comfortable with no having one. Sail on....

Photo Page

The wild life in the wessels is prolific and unafraid.
A Ray flips as it is feeding? I think?



BareBones looks like a landed space ship here. A dugout canoe with black fellas paddling would be more in tune to surroundings perhaps. This is one of my favourite spots on Earth.

At Crocker Island, I stopped by an old shelling operation that I saw a few years before but this time I took time to explore. The wreckage of an abandoned settlement is something I find interesting. Guessing at the people that worked there. Speculating on their lives. It would not have been anything conventional, that is certain. Very remote.

Then through Bowen Strait, over the top of Coburg Peninsula and under Cape Don to anchor one last time before Darwin. The Van Diemen Gulf was good to me again. The trade was going good and we soon were keeping a sweet 12 kts with a double reefed main, blasting over shallows, ignoring the shipping channel and picked up the last of a fair tide through

the Clarence Strait and then limping into Darwin with stuff all for wind.

I missed the start of the latest Darwin Ambon incarnation, not enough time and too many distractions. Pity.

When I was ready I called Customs.. er.. Border Force... (shakes head) but was informed they didn't clear out on Saturdays, I was used to other countries or I wouldn't have asked. When I went to their office Monday it was chockers with crews of several nationalities, looking lost and annoyed. When my turn came I was addressed with gusto and a hand thrust at me to shake. Then told sorry but they required 48 hours notice to clear out. WTF! I said I was really wanting to get the hell out and had tried Saturday... ah... she checked and my phone call was logged on Saturday so I was good to go after some more paper pushing. She couldn't hide her disappointment. But just before I was

ready to take off another paper was thrust at me. They wanted me to put a value on BareBones... ?? I could see that my clearance docs were ready to go in her hand and should have refused but I was caught in the moment, stressed and stupid. I filled it out but went conservative on the value. It wasn't until I walked out that I figured out what I had signed on to. Australia is shitty about yachts that leave for more than 5 years at a time. If you do that they want import duties on your boat when you return. No mention of that when the paper was shoved at me. It was made to sound innocent. Bloody customs hasn't changed their act, still duplicitous and dishonest. And now with covid boats are getting held up all over the globe and even if you wanted to return right now, the government's response to covid would make it impossible.

Gone!

I had been concerned about getting a good weather window and having to warn customs 48 hours before narrows the window. I left under motor and that lasted for two days. Wouldn't have been my pick of timing.

So where am I going? I had a vague notion of going to the Caribbean but not sure how best to do it. I saw the AIS report of a boat laying close in to land to cut across the Jo Bonaparte Gulf to the Kimberly, the west coast of Australia or Africa. I decided for Indonesia. At least I knew the way.

After a little touring around West Timor, I decided to get official in Lombok. It was only another 500 miles or so, piece of cake. Looking at the chart the route up the east coast and around the top of Lombok looked

interesting but longer. I looked at a cruising guide of Indonesia and they didn't make any warning of the current that roars through from the north in that channel. With the headsail drawing well and both motors going flat chat, we were standing still. We weren't going anywhere but we were getting beat up pretty good. We speared into a surf line and almost lost a fuel load that was stowed by the mast. The cabin was a disaster. Anything not bolted down made it's way forward. Our speed over ground should have been well over 10kts but we made no progress forward. I crabbed us toward some deeper water to the west and then finally made painfully slow progress north into the channel between Lombok and Bali.

If it wasn't for the fact I was using a

ripped off copy of that guide I would have sent a complaint.

After some time wasted hanging out, as one does, I sailed up the the north end of the island to have a look around. Anchorages up there are hard to come by and steep to but we got one OK. BareBones's shallowdraft helped. The locals were intrigued by the kickup rudders.

The next morning we set off across the channel and south, I decided to make for Africa. Half way across I changed my mind and made NW for Malaysia via the Java Sea and Singapore.

WTF, variety is the spice of life.

Photo Page



Just after that important if casual change of course, we found ourselves in the middle of a race of traditional sailing boats that I took as a good omen. They were beautiful and well sailed. Fast little guys.

We made a couple of day sailing stops, nice if you can, but then the Java sea and less opportunities for anchoring at beer thirty. The sea was covered in fishing boats. They work at night using huge, blinding bright lights run by little generators aboard. The fish are attracted to the light show and are then scooped up by nets. I don't know how there can be any fish left in that sea but what else do those people do to make a living? And the people of Jakarta are dependent on the supply. Sailing at night is good because even miles away you know where the hazards are.

Nearing Singapore my AIS started to show an amazing range, picking

off targets over 300 miles away! I chalked it up to a local phenomenon.

BareBones and I checked into a marina just across from Singapore. I had heard of the place mostly because of the manager that was reputed to be very helpful and knowledgeable. Nongsa is right across the strait and in sight of Singapore's towers. The marina is very expensive for Indonesia, but from the number of huge Singapore yachts there, I assume pretty cheap relative to the other side of the channel.

The manager I expected was no longer there. He was replaced by a retired Australian naval officer...

Huh!? I heard wherethe otherguy had gone and it would have been a big step down for him and the new guy didn't know anything. Not the seas or anything about sailing boats really. He was a bureaucrat. Considering he would have had a secret clearance from his navy position, I couldn't think of any reason for him to be there except one, if Australia wanted a man for surveillance at one of the most important crossroads of yacht traffic in SE Asia, I could see it. Call me suspicious but I have found you can't be suspicious enough of the Australian government.

So now another coin to toss. Left or right. I chose right.

Crossing that channel is something else. I had heard about the shipping traffic for along time and it hadn't gotten less over the years. I felt like a rabbit crossing an 8 lane freeway in rush-hour traffic. You have to be an action junkie to even consider it. Somehow we survived.

The main traffic was heading into the South China sea towards... China, so staying closer to the mainland shore kept us out of the fast lanes. The East side of the Maylay penninsula is very shallow to. A watchful eye for fishermen is wise. And that is where I saw my first AIS emergency beacon. We were making north about 5 miles offshore when I saw the icon on my screen. I had never seen one before. I thought it could be bullshit

but you have to check in case it is don't you!?. There was a motorvessel coming south as I approached a fishing boat lying ahull in calm waters. The fishermen had a good laugh at us and the motorvessel, both suckers. I found that the fishermen used these beacons to be handy tools for marking their nets, rendering them useless in an emergency. I saw numerous signals after that and never bothered with them. Eventually there was going to be a boy who called wolf thing happening.

Tioman Island is a duty free port on Malaysia's east and a fine little island. The marina is small and the office indifferent. There is a part of jetty marked as emergency only

but I saw a boat come in and use it. I asked them and they said they went in to ask about it and got a shrug. So they stayed.

Clear in at the ferry terminal right next to the town. Easy going when I was there.

The anchorage is deep. A few spots might be only 40 feet but most are around 60. The good news is it is protected and unlikely to be subject to rough conditions so, all good. I picked up a short length of very large heavy chain to connect between my anchor and the main 8mm chain. With that weight at the anchor shank, 2 to 1 rode works pretty good. But to make sure I made it 2.5 to 1.

Prices were cheap, I stocked up on beer and fuel. The fuel guy has a shack full of the ubiquitous 30 liter plastic jugs. To fill mine he used a 32mm hose that he stuck through the hole on his tank and then covered the rest of the opening with his mouth and blew in... pushing the first bunch of fuel in and creating the siphon. Filled my 20 liter jerry can like a good professional pump. About one minute.

There are cafes along the esplanade. Getting cash can be tricky but doable, ask around. There are ferrys commuting to the mainland for any urgent need. You can go or just order through one of the local merchants.

Palua Tulai is just north and west of Tioman by about 6.5 miles and the bay on the west side has good anchorage on decent depths and clear waters for snorkelling. The waters

right off the town on Tioman are also quite popular. Clear waters everywhere.

I had heard about the Anambas Islands to the east. They are about 100 miles to the nearest of the chain from Tioman. I motored most of the way. Light winds and heavy clouds a normal.

To officially enter the Anambas islands, which are Indonesian, you have to go to the furthest island and tie up to a ship mooring etc etc... along with most others I talked to, I didn't bother. Bara Bones and I had a look around several of the islands and though they are very interesting to look at, anchoring isn't easy. Steep, deep and heavy with rocks and coral. I found a very good place however. That is the cover shot of this edition. It is so perfect I hate to say where it is

exactly but if you really want to know send me an email and tell me why you are worthy and if convinced I will hand you coordinates. That is if the pandemic is over in our lifetimes.

Singapore again!?

Making south again I wasn't looking forward to the channel. We anchored in the mud on the east side of the peninsula to make an early start to it. My radio wasn't working well and the channel is controlled out of Singapore. They were going to have to live without my lively banter. I did hear entreaties for the "white catamaran" to respond... oh well. Play dumb (easy) and concentrate on survival. It is the Singapore side that is really active. I chose to cross the channel to work north on the Indonesia side and then cross again when away from the fray.

The Malacca Strait is famous for pirates. I would have liked to spot some, maybe stop and have a chat, compare notes, learn new techniques perhaps, but not to be.

Sailing the strait is easy. When you feel like stopping, pull over to the right, being careful to avoid nets, and anchor when it gets shallow. Not very hard really. I stopped at a marina near Port Dickson. They assisted me checking into mainland Malaysia. The duty free ports of Tioman and Langkawi are treated like a foreign country from the mainland. I would need to check in again later.

I met some very interesting people in that marina, yacht crew I would meet later that I have some fine memories of.

I wanted to get into another marina on the way as bad weather was heading my way but they were full. The marina

across from Island Penang is popular. So I found a couple small islands just off the south east tip of the island and found anchorage. Gotta be careful around here though, the nets.

But after all, the Malacca Strait is just a way to get to-----

Langkawi

Checking in again.. It is all done at the ferry terminal. Anchor on the north side of the complex, take your dinghy to shore and walk over or if you are in the marina down the road, just walk. Immigration is all done outback and toward the water. A big hall that processes people coming in on the ferry has a small side door behind the area where the immigration people stand behind their windows when processing a ferry's passengers. Outside the door is a small counter where there are forms and instructions on how to fill them out.

Knock on the door and enter when you have them done with your passport or when you have a question. To answer your question the agent will probably point at the instructions on the wall where that question is addressed making you feel kinda dumb... all part of the experience.

But you need to stop at the harbour masters office first anyway. They are up the stairs, again, knock and enter. Once they "have you in the system" you are good to go.

Last stop is customs, down and in the heart of the mess of shops and offices of the terminal. I had a lot of fun with the ladies, all the people I met were very good with minor exception of the immigration agents that seem to be less patient, but not mean.

Kuah is the big town and while it is right in front of you a visit to the Billion store is advised. Chinese run the retail business of south east Asia and pacific islands and a lot of the Caribbean. "Billion" must have been considered a lucky name and luck is very important to Chinese. I like Chinese people generally, as long as they don't live in China. The new Mao has made a mess of the place lately.

Sad about Hong Kong.

Once you have topped up on food (good prices) and alcohol (dirt cheap) you are good to go exploring. The anchorage near Kuah is extensive and safe but too tempting to grow roots. The fine places within easy range are very good.

Reebak island has a marina and

boat yard that are top stuff. Especially for cats as they don't double charge but you need to wait for a berth that accommodates a cat. There are others. One just north of Reebak but no boat yard.

In normal times, hoping this info is relevant in future, you get 3 months in Malaysia and then have to leave for a week. Ko Lipe (pronounced Lip-ee, Ko means island) is an easy sail northwest. There you check into Thailand in shorthand kind of way. Very informal and only semi official. This was a smart move for Thailand to grab some tourism from Langkawi and the yachties needing to freshen up their visa page. If you head deeper into Thailand you will need to check in more officially.

We were all just beginning to hear of

the covid affecting other parts of Asia. I went shopping in drug stores for rubber gloves and thought I should top up my supply of masks bought in the Philippines. I was told, "all finished" so I asked if another store might have and she she said, "no no, all finished everywhere". Every face mask in Langkawi had been snatched up. Who said Maya people were dumb. As opposed to the crowds of people, political leaders especially in America and Australia that think they don't work, or might even be dangerous, think of this... why do you think Surgeons wear them?

Asian people tend to live in crowded conditions and know the truth about masks and spread of disease. As far as population goes, their past may be our future.



Photo pages

Fantastic anchoring possibilities can be found in Langkawi, especially on the south west side.

Photo page



This street art really grabbed me. Malaysia is not known as a liberal country, yet here this is..

This is located on the main street in the resort area.

"Fight war not wars! Destroy power! Not people!

Prophetic.



The rice field above, is part of a resort in the heart of the tourist area. Romanticising traditional agriculture? Working boats fill this tidal creek. Real Langkawi is abundant behind the resorts and markets.





Rebak Marina and boatyard is the high end facility in Langkawi. It is located in a lagoon accessed by a channel in the middle of an island of hills. Like God was a yachty and made this place. Perfect shelter, world class. They provide a ferry service of high speed boats to run you over to the main island, no charge. There is a car rental guy that provides cheap cars to rent, pickup at the ferry landing.

I do not know how covid has effected the place. The attached resort (with pool free to use for yachties) was already in trouble when I was there.

There was no outbreak in Langkawi that I heard of but like I say, having respect for the locals, I was uneasy but that isn't the reason I decided to go. There were other matters pulling me west. So at the end of January, 2020, I set sail west for the Red Sea.

The Bay of Bengal has a reputation to live down to and we did sail on third reef in the main and with half the heady rolled up for much of the way. Also set up my drogue (heavy plastic beer carton on 12 meters of chain and 50 feet of rope) ready to deploy but didn't use it. It was 'fresh' but not threatening.

I made a course to the south west avoid the harshest winds that occur between Sri Lanka and India. It was still rough but not near what the boats were getting that ran close in. Then I put more north into the course to avoid having to sail through the Maldives. The islands are noted for being unwelcoming to yachts.



I had my 69th birthday at sea in the Arabian gulf. I loved this voyage. One day rolled into the next and I didn't care too much about speed. I wasn't looking forward very much to Africa. Entering the gulf of Adan above Somalla, winds were very light. Some days only making 60 miles, absolutely crawling for BareBones. Beautiful.

I wasn't worried about pirates. I heard that the US had had enough of the activity in a particular village that they were sending in a strike force to root the pirates out of the place but when they got there they found the place reduced to cinders... the Chinese were there first. The pirates had picked on the wrong flag. So thereafter, villagers were not keen on having pirates working out of their town. That's what I heard...

When the country fell apart and government ceased to function, Somalla's fishing grounds were savaged by outsiders, like the Chinese. With their principle industry wrecked, they turned to piracy. If that line of reasoning is accurate, it is possible to have a little bit of sympathy for them. Unless it's my boat they attack.

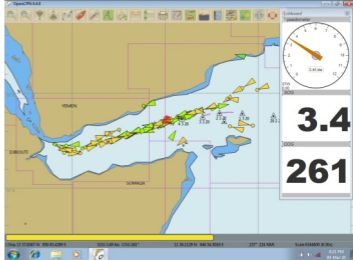
There was a mysterious plane flying around in the gulf of Adan that I noticed. I found out it was a Japanese plane keeping tabs on ship and yacht traffic in case of attack.



As I neared Djibouti the winds failed altogether so I motored the last 40 miles. The harbour master was useless on the radio but when I got close in a "coast guard" boat, a crappy old 18 foot open boat came near and instructed me to follow them to anchor. They showed me exactly where they wanted me to put it in and I ignored them and put it in the best place close to there mark. They had no idea what they were doing. These were not skilled mariners...!

Quicksmart another crappy open boat came along to make clearance. He presented himself as an official but he was a sleezy little creep looking to make some fast money. I put up with the charge to get to the harbour master and immigration office. Was worth it to find out what was where. The health inspector aka, "the doctor" was a guy in a white suit and mask with a temperature meter, \$20 USD please.

I kept thinking of an old Frank Zappa thing called Shiek Yerbouti. This is a place where preserving your sense of humour is important.



This image shows the extraordinary range I was getting from my AIS. Over 300 miles! It also shows the extraordinary speed, or lack of it, that we were making in the Gulf of Aden.

As foul as the place was, we (there were about a dozen yachts there), were worried about what we were hearing from the rest of the world. Covid!

There was one place where we could pull up our dinghy and the man that was in charge of security there was straight but interlopers tried to have one believe they were in charge and asking for money to insure the dinghy was guarded. But then the little creep got upset because we were going to a nearby french shopping mall instead of using him to provide provisions. So his friends in the Coast Guard, declared that part of the port closed and we would be arrested if we tried to use it. My intuition was that the coast guard were getting a cut of the little creeps action so attempted to limit our alternatives.

Djibouti is a former colony of France. They still maintain a navy base there. The French shopping mall must have been for the benefit of the navy personnel. High priced but top quality. But it was a jarring experience to visit there and a local market on the same day. Picture in your mind a scene from a biblical era, streets of rubble and dirt. The merchants, usually women, display their garden crops in rude, worn baskets, or bits of fabric or old canvas. Most of the stalls are in the shade of the surrounding buildings, term used loosely, while some have shade provided by wobbly poles and scraps of anything. If you are there with an agent or driver it is understood that the merchant will be expected to save a kick back for the agent from any purchase you make. Same deal for a money changer. Our agent that organized the trip into town was carefully keeping track and taking

notes of every exchange our group made. He was shameless. He tried hard to sell the group on going to a restaurant he knew for lunch, but no one was taking the bait. Everyone knew by then that he would be eating on our money and then taking a kickback from the total bill as well. Almost everyone in that miserable shit hole is relentless and on the make. In Australia one could say there are the same kind of people but the ratios are reversed. In Australia the merchants are strait and then there are the politicians....

There was a local owned supermarket in town that kept a reasonable selection and it was guarded by iron gates that sealed off the whole street they were on as well as the building itself. Fences are probably the only security measure they could take that wasn't subject to corruption and theft.

There were comedic interludes though. The taxis were the best entertainment. The worst I rode in had a smashed windscreen, a hole in the floor beneath my feet and I had to hold the door closed. Great fun! I really enjoyed it! (writer slaps head in wonder)

While waiting for more information on what was happening in the world I met some interesting folk. There was the Mexican family on the American flagged yacht with rego from Delaware. They explained that the yacht would have attracted massive duties but with Delaware rego they were ok. I have heard from people that swear you can't do that, state rego no good over seas however I saw this game played out on several occasions so you legal eagles, spare me your reading of the law. In actual fact it works out there in many countries. Or it was at the time I am writing about. The covid thing has made many borders ah, tighter.

Ran into another single hander there from Spain. We would meet again in Mallorca where he was within spitting distance of completing his circumnavigation to Barcelona. So many people I wished I had got contact details but perhaps that is the way it should be.



I love adventure! Good thing as the outcome of this ride was surely uncertain. I only managed one shot with the camera as my right arm was occupied holding the door shut. The driver had a good sense of humour. Well.. He had to didn't he.. He could not work at night as the wiring for the lights was dangling out the dash.

Photo page



At left is the harbour at Djibouti. Traditional craft are still the main traders in this region. They are charming to see unless they are approaching at night with no lights, no AIS.. Nothing.
At right is the port entrance at Djibouti. Seems there was a traffic jam of local livestock. There were numerous vendors nearby, selling what was purported to be fresh orange juice. I passed on that.

I ran the gauntlet of hands extended with wiggly fingers grasping for money to check out. In the port there were utes/pickups running around and they would ask if you wanted a lift to the gate, nice people right? NAH, they would invariably have their hand out demanding a "gift" once you were in the company owned truck.

I figured maybe it would get better when I sailed further north in Africa. No really, I thought that!

The Bloody Red Sea

The first 40 or 50 miles out of Djibouti were characterised by light winds just off the bow or none at all. When we got to the "Grand Detroit" or "Babel Mandeb Strait" we got some fair wind that we kept for about 50 miles. With rare exception it was to be

headwinds for the rest of the 1100 miles to Suez. Either your boat is capable of sailing hard on to the wind or you motor. We sailed but it was hard on the singled handed skipper. And the shipping traffic was awesome.

I would have liked to have stopped in Aseb Bay for a little rest but I heard the bay is disputed territory between Djibouti and Eritrea. That means itchy trigger fingers. We kept going. The shipping lanes are crowded. Sleep was gathered in winks. I noticed that the cat "Humming Bird Wings" was tacking along with me. I talked to the US skipper in Djibouti. He was delivering his boat back to the US after picking up the SeaWind in Vietnam where it was built. He was having trouble with numerous systems and was trying to keep his sense of humour after having spent

a fortune for the boat that was breaking stuff doing exactly what we were doing without incident.... so far. It was about the same length as BareBones but with bigger rig. It had boards instead of keels, a departure from normal Seawind production and lift up rudders which were a constant problem along with the boards. Seems Seawind got into a faster model over the old 1160 but hadn't quite worked out how to hold it together yet.

There is a large group of islands off Massawa where I grabbed an anchorage for a nights sleep and then off again. Eritrea can be bitchy about such informal arrangements but I didn't get caught. There is a military base on one of the northern islands, best to avoid that end. 250 miles of tough sailing can wear one out. Only about 850 to go.

The east coast of the red sea is either Yemen or Saudi Arabia. Barbaric frontiers best left alone.

We sailed another few hundred hard miles and I saw AIS reports from what looked like dry land on my charts. The boat names were familiar. They had motored all the way from Djibouti so had made better time than BareBones and Hummingbird Wings. I could use a rest so I made for them and sailed in to a series of lagoons. First beer, then sleep, then check out BareBones. I found a problem on my port side rudder stalk. It hadn't failed.. yet. So with my flick up rudders I disassembled the gear and brought my rudder into the cockpit to replace and improve the rudder pin assembly. This kind of work I considered recreational after the sailing we had done. While there the Sudanese Navy caught wind of this little flotilla and

sent a gunboat to check us out.

I figured we would be alright. Safety in numbers as there was about 6 boats there including me. I had not been ashore and I don't think anyone else had. I came in because I needed rest and to make a repair, which was even true, this time...

The gunboat: first of all I need to clarify "gunboat". This was a shabby old beat up wooden hull about 20 feet long with a machine gun mounted forward. I saw it proceeding from yacht to yacht and eventually made it's way to us. The other yachts it had stood off to question but for us they wanted to come alongside.. oh shit! I ran for fenders and only had time for 2 and then used my feet to help. I answered questions as best I could understand them and then gathered that they chose me to tie up to while

they waited for another navy vessel. I doubt they had a working ground tackle. While we were waiting I passed out face masks to the crew, a gesture of disease prevention if that is what they were worried about. Apparently not interested in that. Disdainful of them. Facebook must be everywhere!

While I was sitting there I had a closer look at the machine gun and realised it was a piece of shit! It hadn't been fired in years. It had once been a 50 calibre but now it was a corroded mess of what was once steel and brass. In that kind of environment it would have had to have been thoroughly cleaned every day. That would demand dedication, and discipline. I looked at the crew laying about. FAT CHANCE!

That's Africa for you, all style, no substance.

When I left the port of Djibouti, Egypt was open with a 14 day quarantine. That was OK with me. I intended Fort Gahrib and sailed hard to get in just ahead of a forecast strong north wind. I sailed in about 2100 and was met by a small boat yelling at me that I can not come in. *Egypt had changed their policy 7 hours prior.* I was frustrated, angry and exhausted. The port commander got on the radio to order me to go and I refused. I anchored in the channel so I could get a couple hours sleep. He had told me to go up the coast to a mooring... like I was going to go up the coast at night to find a mooring that was put on the reef by a USA charity to preserve the reef. Impossible! That he would suggest such a thing revealed him to be an idiot or a wrecker or both. Even idiots know you do not navigate in a reef at night even if you *know* the area. There were threats of military,

police and arrest but I figured the police nor army would be keen to come out at night so that is why I pushed it but early next morning I left and sailed into a gathering headwind. Would they turn back a plane approaching an airport because some moron had made a change of policy while the plane was in the air? Of course not. But sailors are less value apparently.

Sailing into a 40kt wind (apparent) is crazy. I was going forward to reef more of the main and we crested a wave that exposed both bows to the wind in free air. That jerked the bows around like we had been kicked by a giant foot. I wound up over the water hanging on for dear life to a backstay. Fuck this! I had to either turn back and run or find an anchorage. In good sunlight I could see the reef that lines the coast of the Red Sea for it's

length, and found a way through it to a small bay. It copped the wind but was sheltered from the seas, good enough! I saw some buildings and a small stone jetty. The relief of shelter after what I had faced was enormous. I had very little sleep the previous night what with the stress. While laying down on the settee, I heard men yelling. I got up slowly... WTF? They were waving at me to come to them. This was daylight, maybe I should play along in case they complain and call the police or military? So I unshipped the dinghy and made my way over. Four men were waiting and they didn't look too frightening. Conversation was difficult as they did not speak English and my Arabic was nonexistent. One thing did get through to me though. I was on an Egyptian Army base! Oh oh...

... with gestures and pantomime I got my message across. I was very tired, the wind was bad. I was not an Israeli spy. No mention of my shiflight with the port captain the night before... I was to wait as the post commander was coming. It got friendly with the men as they came to know I posed no threat. I was offered a cigarette. I do not often smoke so when I do I get a hell of a buzz. Their Egyptian cigarettes were strong and I was tired. My reaction to the smoke quite entertained them. By the second, we were mates! The officer finally did show. His English was good and he grasped immediately, why I was there. A glance out to sea was educational. What he wanted to know was did I have enough food? Water? Fuel? I told him I could use some water but mostly what I needed was sleep. So I took aboard some water and rested the remainder of the day and night. Infantry soldiers know more about the

sea than the commander at Port Gahrib. Next morning dawned much quieter. The wind was still on the nose but at about 15 kts was ideal for working to wind. We sailed on till just south of Hurghada, and anchored for a night at Ras Abu Sawma. This is just before the sea splits up to Suez on the port side and Elat and El Aqabah to starboard. As long as it wasn't a military base I was getting brave enough to sneak into an anchorage late in the day and off again in the morning. Get sleep where you can, the motto of every single handed sailor. As I sailed through Hurghada I tried to get in touch with local authorities via radio with no luck. I had heard this port may still be open to clear in with a quarantine period at anchor that I was willing to accept. I was worried I may

be required to enter Egypt officially to do the canal which turned out to be incorrect. The canal is a separate entity. International. I was a little concerned about fuel as well as threading through channels between islands like I had to do to get near Hurghada, uses fuel. There is a marina on the west coast north of Hurghada as well but out of the way. Sol made for a large island that looked like it should provide anchorage and no population around to hassle me. I got into the southeast bay just as the sun was going away. Shelter and 15 feet to sand bottom. Another good sleep! I was getting spoiled. I found out later that a reason the island is unpopulated is because it was covered in land mines during the war. The island is strategically placed at the entry of the western branch of the red sea. The Sinai Peninsula is now the east coast.



It was at Ras Abu Sawma that I first observed this. Tens of thousands of concrete shells of apartments. The numbers were staggering as I saw them scattered all the way to Suez. Winter units for cold weary Europeans? Tough business lately



That is the anchorage at Shadwan, AKA Landmine Island at left and Gubal Saghira on the right. Saghira is the end of the group of islands and beginning of the oil rig stretch of the red sea. Both impressive spots in a desolate kind of way.

The next morning we sailed or motored through a maze of small islands that I hoped would be empty but signs of new construction were everywhere it seemed. From that anchorage just south of Hurghada and onwards new or unfinished construction was the norm. Thousands of concrete apartments for whom? Finally it dawned on me, Europeans wanting a winter home, far from the icy drizzle and snow. Brits with money. I wondered how the covid thing was going to affect this business? Not to mention Brexit. All the better for the Scandinavians.

I barely did 20 miles the next day. Having a look at islands that promised peace and quite but finding industry and concrete instead. Took anchor early in the day at the tip of Saghira. Good sand to anchor. Most of these islands are steep to so finding shelter and good bottom is not easy. This would set me up well for the next day which promised to be stressful and lived up to that promise.

The charts showed many oil well platforms and ship loading stations. With those and the closer quarters of the smaller sea and the stream of shipping condensed into a smaller channel... no fun and I didn't even want to do this at night when tired. I sailed as much as I could but there were times when it was just impossible to do. I was still ok for fuel having been miserly with it all the way but I didn't know what was ahead. That afternoon I snuck into the port at El Tur on the Sinai side. I anchored in amongst a motley crew of local fishing boats and traders. Needless to say, we stuck out a little. No worries, no trouble.

New dawn, we left in still air but soon picked up a fair wind! First since the strait at the south end of the sea and beginning of the gulf of Oman. We had a peaceful and easy sail that day but ended a little rough. The west coast looked very industrial and busy. Best to avoid. I found a large earthen jetty on the east side extending out beyond the extensive reef and motored in behind it as the wind had now

returned to the north. I saw a government boat of some kind tied up to the jetty but by this time I could not hide anyway and turning around and running off would not have been a good look. Predictably I was ordered to come along side. The crew were considerate of Bare Bones and we came alongside without damage. I was offered bottled water, "thank you". I showed all my documents which I doubt anyone understood but they must have looked impressive. I had picked another government place, coast guard of some kind this time. This was a strategic area, oil producing, vulnerable. So their interest in me was reasonable. The tone was amiable however, and after a bit of time one guy pointed to an area south of the jetty and indicated I was to anchor there. Rolly and rough but survivable. The next day was back to the usual. Tacking into it all day and made anchor near a small town, again on the east side. Reasonable shelter and shallow water no worries, no trouble.



This is what the sky looks like coming off the Sinai... On a clear day

I had my eye on a place just south of the large bay by the city of Suez to anchor again. The idea was to get an early start the next morning to organize an agent for the canal. They say you are required to get an agent organized before getting to Suez, a thing I panned on doing at Port Gahrib. But officialdom struck again. I was intercepted by a coast guard boat (not the same one) as I was tacking from shore on the east side and was told in fractured English that I must not leave the shipping lane. Shit... I motored into Suez and anchored among the waiting ships. A boat was sent out to me. They were instructed by port control to move me to the sin bin or so it seemed as it wasn't the nicest place. A loud young guy on the boat demanded a gift. I offered two cans of Chang beer which he seemed happy about but wanted more, they always want more, will always try for it. I regretted that gift when I found out how hard beer was to get in Egypt.

Next day I was standing by the radio for instructions and the "prince of red sea" called me up. Would I like an agent? Oh

yeah! Soon I was given instruction from him to move to the yacht club basin. It was just around the corner. It is a dredged lagoon next to the south entry of the canal with fore and aft mooring balls and a ragged floating jetty. A young guy came out and lent a hand taking lines to them. He was the "marina manager". He asked did I need fuel and I said I did and asked how much? He told me and I told him I would think about it. He wanted \$1.50 USD per liter which seemed high.. later he relented and quoted \$1.20. I accepted. Later I was to find out the pump price was less than half that. Shocker! Egyptian..

The Suez Canal Authority in Egypt has three small places to tie up a yacht while, "in transit." in the south end - the port of Suez there is a basin with fore and aft moorings and a small and unkempt jetty. A yacht is forbidden to stay there for more than two nights while waiting to join the convoy north. This provides time to organise an agent, have the boat "measured" and take on any supplies of fuel and food.

No one was allowed to set foot on land. Covid.

There are a couple of agents but really, "Prince of the Red Sea" agent is the only one that matters to a yacht. Everyone you will be doing business with in Egypt is bent but Prince is smart enough to know that if he screws you over too badly, word will get around and he will lose business. He maintains a virtual monopoly on the yacht passages and is very prosperous as a result. The SCA will not deal with you directly, you must have an agent. He will push your papers through and organise the measuring guy that sets your canal fee and your pilot. You are required to have a local pilot on board in the canal. Your pilot may vary from venonous, demanding, useless layabouts to informed, courteous, helpful crew. Your agent can also organise fuel and food but if the marina manager mentions fuel to you first, there seems to be a protocol that will not allow competitive bids.



While waiting for our turn to start the canal we were in the yacht club marina... Term used loosely.. The ships passing in the canal right next to us made a interesting show.

Beware the marina manager A young guy, he is seriously... well... Egyptian. The use of the marina is a fixed rate of \$21 USD per night. Everything in the canal is priced in USD. They will take Egyptian currency, but there is a penalty for it. Before my lines were wet he asked me if I needed fuel. I asked, "How much?" he quoted 1.5 USD per liter... Youch! That seemed high and I said so, hesitated and changed the subject. Then he dropped his quote down to \$1.2 which still seemed high but I did have to get fuel before the passage. I was figuring on popping out in the Med with no real plan so best to be topped up as much as possible, especially since the canal itself is 80 miles and they do not allow you to sail and have a minimum speed. Also, I had no idea what kind of facility maybe ahead in the canal. I later found out that the regular pump price for petrol (the

fuel I use) in Egypt is about .5 USD per liter. Later he came over to my boat and asked if I knew a particular family at the local slipway. Well, go figure, I didn't know them. Oh, well then, he informed me their home had just burnt down and did I have some extra clothing, particularly souvenir T shirts from foreign countries.... It never stopped. But no, he didn't get any clothing from me. All lies of course. Other examples but you probably got the point.

And then there was the beer man. Prince and the manager were good muslims so would have no business with alcohol. Prince sent over the beer guy and he quoted me 75 USD per carton! I told him I guess I just won't drink in Egypt. The price went down to \$55... no thanks. I can live without beer but not self respect.

Prince got me food. When these people shop for you they get the worst shit available. I think they like to keep the price down so when they tack on their profit it doesn't look so bad or something. That and it looks like the Egyptian food supply is generally over-packaged and adulterated. A cultural thing apparently. He did get me very good UHT milk. It was a Saudi product.

Anyway, I got out of Suez on a very early start, I was told 0600 which was updated to 0500 and got woke up at 0400. We joined the canal ahead of the line of ships. Shipping goes one direction only. They are slowly adding another traffic lane but as it is, there is not enough room for those big things to pass one another. But they can pass us and they do. We keep a good speed as tide is favourable and wind is null.

. The pilot is courteous and friendly. He handles the radio when we pass stations that require contact and advises on course through some of the areas where there are options for it but that is all. I have heard terrible stories about boats damaged because the pilots mishandled them. I was not going to turn the helm over to him in the channel.

Then his advise went wrong. I ran over a fisherman's net. No damage to me but the net was no doubt second hand for the experience.

There is a stop over at the half way point. Just out of the canal and entering the wide bay where the quay we can use is, I handed the tiller over to the pilot. He had been keen to steer the boat and this was a low stress place to let him try it.

He had no idea. To turn right, he pushed the tiller to the right but it don't work that way dude.... I purposefully used a bit of open water for him to try. No worries, no problem.

This was to be my first attempt at Med style mooring, that is with a line from anchor or a mooring on the bow and sterns facing a concrete wall aft. So it was a little clumsy on the first try. On the second try I went for another mooring buoy and got it and from then on had help waiting on shore from other boats for stern lines .

Soon after getting to shore I learned that the situation in the Med was far worse than I knew. I had not had internet connection since Djibouti on the other end of the Red Sea. The half way point had no restriction, no time limit so determined I needed to stay until I could figure out a place to go.

The next day the bouy that I had first attempted to tie up to... floated away on it's own.

That was the port of Ismailia. I was there over a month, confined to the quay. At least I could jog along the quay instead of around my deck. But still felt like we were in jail. It was good to have the company of a few boats in the same situation.

I had seen some boats go and heard of a couple that made it to Italy where they were quarantined then let free. I also learnt of a port on the Greek Isle of Crete where they were very liberal with the term, "in transit" and let boats anchor off for long lengths of time and where an agent could get food and fuel.

Photo Pages



I am still trying to clean my sails over a year later. The only saving grace to this hell-hole was some fine company at the quay.

The quay at Ismailia was eating me alive as I was running low on USD and had to pay in local money obtained from a ATM. I was being gouged for fuel and food at a rate the manager in Suez would blush at. One guy in the office tried to charge me twice the store price and then charge twice that again for stuff I had already paid for! Fortunately the manager of the place was fairly straight and had done the translation on my original order and knew I had already paid... Did I get an apology? Ya gotta be kind in...

Between the creepy locals and the dust storms I was ready to go. I heard there were a few other boats in the same frame of mind so decided to join the convoy.

A morning start again but in daylight. Lines were flying and motors running, "pilots" arriving, gone. A good day, not blowing dirt around. Nice and clear. My pilot turned out to be ok. One thing I missed was in supplying a cushion or something for him to pray on. No worries, he took one of my settee cushions. The deal was that we motor to Port Said where I drop off the pilot and then we break out into the Mediterranean. Simple, right? Well, it might have been but... the first problem was the tide. This part of the canal we had a strong current against us. And the wind was foul as well. This part of the canal was militarised. Guards were evident and armed. There were tall embankments on the canal and they patrolled them.

I saw local boats out. Interesting sailing craft and a few others propelled by paddles. In spite of the conditions we motored along at reasonable speed. I wanted to make the Med in daylight if possible and the pilot was very happy to make good time.

Then we ran into trouble. Well, we didn't but a small boat did.

Ahead of us a small paddle boat had flipped over. The dummies had paddled far out into the canal and the wake from a passing ship had turned them over.



Feeling small.....



Now we get to feel big... For a minute



And there is a ship to make us feel small again. My accidental passengers at right were very lucky. It was foolhardy of them to get out by the wash of those ships. It doesn't look like much until you get close.. Then... Too late

. The dummies had paddled far out into the canal and the wake from a passing ship had turned them over. I passed one man who was keeping his head above water and went to the boat that was overturned with another man clinging to it. I figured to try to save their boat for them as I thought it might be an important possession. I was throwing a line to them but not having much luck and the guy wasn't catching very well. I miss read the situation. I got aa line to him and was trying to arrange to right the boat which we did but the guy panicked and lost it again. When I came on a close pass to try to pick up my rope for another try he lunged at BareBones. An all out full on panicked, eyes' bulging life or death dive for the port side aft deck. The pilot stepped in and grabbed him. I immediately came

about to retrieve the other guy floating away downstream. There was another yacht coming and I was surprised to see it pass the swimmer. WTF? I backed into him and we got him aboard the starboard side aft where he would not move from. He had a death grip on a handrail, wasn't moving. My pilot then filled me in. These were a father and son duo, and neither one knew how to swim. They didn't care about the boat, they were convinced they were going to die. The swimmer, the son, had hold of a floating piece of debris that with a little dog paddle action kept his face just above water. And even if they had made it to land, according to my pilot, they would have been immediately shot and killed by the military guards. Wow... it is hard to imagine a regime that tough. They

have not yet got over having Israel kick their asses and seizing the Sinai all those years ago?

My pilot was congratulating me for taking the brave action of rescue as it could have attracted gun fire. I told him that in the rest of the world you must rescue. It is a duty. I wonder if he believed me?.

The pilot called the canal authority as we needed to put these guys ashore somewhere. We were ordered to a branch of the canal and came into a dock made for a police boat. We got tied up and the men on shore were not smiling. The rescued men were also demure. They may have been in serious trouble with the law. But for me... no worries, no problem.

I pegged the throttles and blasted out of there and caught up with the others in the port. A boat came for the pilot and that was that.

Night fell as we sailed into a shallow area offshore that we would be in for most of the night. Fishing boats were working the shallows intensively, trawling. I was exhausted but no rest until tomorrow. It was about 350 miles to Crete and the winds were inconsistent and foul most of the time. I insisted on sailing it while the others motored a more direct course. By some hours I was the last to arrive at the port of Ierapetra. Crete was beautiful on approach. Snow was still evident on the tallest peaks of the mountainous island. The crisp white of the buildings on shore was like a picture book. Later while waiting near shore for my agent I saw a customs agent chatting to a work mate near me and she looked like an

image from a thousands year old pottery. Classic is the word that comes to mind.

Now what?

I got word that Italy has closed down for all non-EU boats and is even ejecting Australian boats that had entered before. There is no port open in the Mediterranean as I write. We have all had to pay about 2 to 3 times the normal rate for an agent, about 3 times cost of food and fuel only about double. Exploited is the best word to apply to us.

On the good side, we were able to visit amongst ourselves. There was a Croatian boat, and French, Scot and British.

Weeks later I found out the deal, why we were here. While talking to my

agent while I was standing in my dinghy by the quay, we were interrupted by a fellow on a motorbike. There was a friendly chat between them for several minutes and then my agent informed me that the fellow was a personal friend of his and he was "president of all the ports", whatever that means. Regardless of the technicalities of the title I had heard that a port policy in Greece was likely reflective of the official in the port. So I surmise we are here because of a personal relationship between commander and agent for the purpose of making the agent a living, a good living, while his other business as travel agent languishes. We are cash cows for a mate.

I had not walked freely on land since Djibouti, months ago.



A few weeks later we were allowed to sail about the island and I took advantage of that. BareBones and I sailed into some eastern bays that were magic. But also dangerous as I found how the winds can come off the mountain peaks at horrendous strength. I learnt how to cope with it. We weren't supposed to go ashore but... It was deserted terrain. No worries, no problem.





There is a wild beauty about this coast. The seas can be treacherous, ancient wrecks must litter the bottom, but it drew me in. If I were living here, I might sail to this coast often for the isolation. I would only ever meet the rare goat herder that built the rock shelter above.

Then we got word, next week we could go free and enter the EU via Greece. The official port was Agios Nikolaos near the Spinalonga lagoon. We were allowed to sail there in advance and one and all took off. I ordered fuel before we left and as we were exiting the bay my port motor died. It was an overnight motor sail and next morning I was disassembling the carburetor trying to work out what was wrong. Between lack of sleep and a peculiar lack of odor, it was not until the next day I finally got that in spite of very clear and explicate instruction, my agent had got me diesel, not petrol. Grrrrrr!

And on the 7th day, god granted visas. A funny note about that. As we were waiting in the hall at immigration, with all the sailors sitting around, no one spoke a word. All you could hear was the tapping of phone screens....

Except for me.

Agio Nikolaos and the Spinalonga Lagoon are worth taking some time to explore in. I won't go into the history, I am not qualified so will just comment that there is a lot of it. I do think though, that seeing these places gives a feeling and color to mere words learnt in school. I would like to spend a year in Greece, if they would let me.

Agio Nikolaos is a pretty old town. The harbour is typical up to a point. The deep water boats are crowded into an outer harbour protected by a man made breakwater. Most islands are steep to and protected anchorages like Spinalonga are rare. A point that makes life a little easier is that tides in the Meditterain hardly exist, mere inches. Most ports will have a concrete quay to tie up stern to. Tricky business if you aren't used to it. Many boats

from the Med are equipped with a boarding plank at the stern run with tackle to lower and raise for boarding and a fender aft is a must. But in Agio Nikolaos there is also a modern marina, but you still tie up stern to in most berths. The outer wall/breakwater has along side accommodation for larger craft and Cats. Drive your car to your boat.

An interesting bit is the inner lagoon. Branching off from the main harbour in town is a very deep (I am told) pool that suits small craft. There is a low bridge to enter it. From the look of the waterline the water may be fresh or at least brackish.

There are anchoring opportunities off the town but not many and nothing that equals the security of Spinalonga.



At left is the inner harbour at Agio Nikolaos. It is a pretty town, oriented to tourism but not gratuitously. It keeps its charm. The modern stores are behind the hills so the old town isn't lost. Everything is in walking distance if you are healthy. At right is the view off the road to Elounda looking back toward Agio Nikolaos to the left. The island you see is the anchorage for the town.

Spinalonga is about 5 miles from Agio Nikolaos as the crow flies but the entrance is on the opposite end so figure about 8 miles to sail. As you approach the bay/lagoon there is an ancient fortress on the island to protect the bay. Once around that watch your sounder report depths of around 3 meters/10 feet. That deepens to about 6 meters/20 feet inside. The main town is Elounda on the mainland side towards the southern end. There is little development on the island though it is connected by a road on a causeway that crosses the southern end. There is a bridge suitable for small craft. Like everywhere around Crete, the wind can blow hard off the mountain peaks but fortunately the holding is good.

There is regular bus service to Agio Nikolaos. Don't be tempted to walk it as the terrain is irregular. In Elounda there are a good selection of shops and a very good butcher. I found good beef cheap everywhere I went in the Med. And I like how it is sold. You see the whole section in the case and tell/indicate by hand signals what you want cut off and how thick to slice it. That is the way in the supermarkets as well. A fine custom.

But if you want to replace your computer printer... take the bus to Agio Nikolaos.

The view at left shows Spinalonga as seen from the south





Elounda, the boat harbour is right in the very middle of the town. Even the hard working fishing boats are immaculate. At right, the waterfront viewing toward Spinalonga Island.



Elounda boats are all beautiful, all perfect! This is one that takes tourists out to the fortress. I looked at every one and none were shabby. Not even close. The public areas are all a delight to the eye.





I tip-toed into a small village on the north coast just to explore and found it to my liking. I walked up a hillside and took a seat at a restaurant where I could look down on BareBones. I noticed swimmers at a beach on the inland side of the tiny harbour. After I sat down I noticed two swimmers had made their way closer to BB. The swimmer to the right, a woman, left after a while but the man stayed and stared until I was walking back after my meal.

Australian made BareBones attracts Europeans. I had several people approach to ask what design it was? One was keen to buy! The market in Europe is dominated by French made boats that follow a pattern, box shaped. Outremer, Catana and a handful of others excepted.

Sailing north and then west, the next anchoring opportunity is Dia Island. It has four bays facing south but only two are feasible. Very steep to but doable if not to many boats.

If you are cruising west anchorages become rarer still. The bigger towns will have man made harbours, breakwaters and marinas perhaps. My favourite was Rethymnon/Rithymna, an ancient city I could have spent a year in. the town itself and, I understand, the country inland from it drips of history at every turn. Over 500 years ago the Venetians took over the place and made it into a trade and export center, as they did in many places. From what I have learnt, nations

still weren't well established then so the arrival of the Venetians would not have raised a war, the opposite, just good business for the locals. Their mark remains in the form of a small harbour with breakwater and a lighthouse, also fountains and buildings. I saw a new municipal building that mimicked the old Venetian style. A lovely place really.

The marina is cheap and crowded. There are alongside berths on floating jetties but the ones available are stern to usually.

From there we sailed to Sicily, just passing through though. We made anchor off Taormina with Mount Etna signaling the way with a cloud of smoke.

And then on to Sardinia/Sardegna. The wind was rotten foul and I was tired. We motored to get behind Pt Stephano on the south of the island. Beautiful, easy anchorages. Very nice. A few days there to regain energy and then off to Mallorca and mainland Spain, then La Linnia by Gibraltar. The Atlantic and the Caribbean where I write this anchored off St. Martin. but those are other stories and by the time I am game to do another one of these reports.. who knows? We could be anywhere.

More photos next pages.....



The Venetian harbour in Rithymna. How this marvel has defied destruction over the centuries of African pirates and Nazi bombs is amazing. And it is a living town, not a museum. It was a privilege to visit.



After all these hundreds of years, the Venetian fountain still runs free.
Happily not scared by taggers





What a job this has been!

Lack of practise made this the hardest edition I have ever built. Most of this I had to relearn from scratch and I am not the one that was ever the best at that. Kay was the patient hacker that taught me how after she got it worked out.

And speaking of Kay, she is taking care of old people, she wanted that profession and I know enough not to argue with her. No future in it. Besides, at my age I might want her to have those skills!

I mentioned the AIS reception i was getting in the article. It was amazing till i fixed a connection. Now it is normal, 25-30 miles. I am trying to work out why it worked sol canunfix it.

I apologise for my uncreative writing of the Red Sea saga. "Next day..next day.. Next day..." But that is what it was like, a daily slog. It was a lot harder than I wrote so you have been spared the worst. Tacking across one of the busiest shipping lanes in the world, all night with no sleep... Real hardship. We made good a little less than 4 miles for every 8 sailed so it was over

2000 miles of that. The Med wasn't as bad but still a lot of windward work. Cats with boards rule in that environment. A boat that doesn't do windward should only attempt the route with big tanks and fat wallet.

I have more to write but 70 pages is enough for now. There is more of the Med and Atlantic crossing and time served in paradise, captured by Covid in the Caribbean and more.

I have not organised advertising for this as I am so out of the loop anymore. Maybe later. So this is all for you people reading. I do hope you enjoy and hope further that you might contribute your own stories. And do let me know how this works on your device. I won't be so long for the next one.. Promise! I already have thematerial waiting...

But... I have one more page up my sleeve. If you are in love with your phone and social media, you might end this here.

This was written as a song I was playing in my head at the time but I do not know how to write music so could not save that. Maybe someday... or give to a musician to write a score I had kind of a punk, Bob Dylan thing running round my brain at the time.

This is a short version..

maybe I should read a book instead...

Facebook sells your privacy
Google censors what you see
but it doesn't matter much to me
I've got nothing to hide

I love to smoke a cigarette
but for my health it sucks
tobacco I can quit
Facebook not so much

I'm bored shitless with my life
which enables the addiction
Zucky says it's private
but I know that's a fiction

Sergie says don't be evil
do not be a villain
now I know the price of principals
and it's about a hundred billion

where's the money come from
that makes these guys so rich?
The tumcumcari motel ad
from off highway sixty six?

Nah, the government writes them
checks
with money they invent
to decelve and spy on dissenters
and the stupid and innocent

The FBI and NSA
have saved themselves
embarrassment
what they used to steal they now
buy

quite the clever arrangement
Does it make us safe
protect us from evil vices
to live in a panopticon
of our own devices

Facebook sells your privacy
google censors what you see
but if yer a useless drone like me
it really doesn't matter

a part of me says it's wrong
there must be a better way
but everybody's doin it
so it *must* be OK?

so I reach for my phone
whenever it is handy
I've sold my soul
for a piece of internet candy