

'OUR' ISLANDS

Indian Ocean Cruising Described by HENRY VINK

SO you are one of the yachtsmen whose boats are crowding the yacht basins in our harbours. Or perhaps you are one of those who do daily battle with planks and thousands of copper rivets on the dusty Highveld while you dream of the day that your boat, too, will join the crowd.

I often wonder where you intend to sail to; many of you will have to be content with day sailing from one of the big harbours.

The South African coast, particularly on the eastern side, is not a very attractive cruising ground, with its lack of shelter and often boisterous weather. Perhaps you dream of making a trip to the West Indies one day, but few of you will ever get that far.

The West Indies are far away and the route back a difficult one. You may never have the time to spare for such a trip.

Yet there are some very attractive cruising destinations within easy reach that you, the South African yachtsman, have not nearly given the attention they deserve. These are the islands of the Indian Ocean.

Some are mere atolls. A fringing reef on which breakers spend their fury, a deserted beach overhung by palm trees, white seabirds circling the lagoon within. Others are of volcanic origin, with snow-capped mountains rising from the sea to heights 10,000 ft., inhabited by a thriving population and complete with night clubs, opera and theatre. They support a multitude of peoples: Arab, Indian, Chinese, European, Creole, all are represented—each with their own customs and religions.

Here it is still possible to drop your anchor in a sheltered cove next to a dhow or native trading schooner and be the first yacht ever to have called there.

The islands also have a few things in common. Nearly all have sheltered anchorages, reliable winds that sometimes blow from the same direction for months and inhabitants who extend a warm welcome to visiting yachts.

Lonely Europe Island, where the only three inhabitants spent an afternoon running after wild goats to give us fresh meat for dinner; thickly populated Mauritius, where during a five-months stay I made more friends than I will ever be able to write to thank for their hospitality. The people of the islands live close to the sea and are sometimes at its mercy; they understand it and are able to appreciate many of the difficulties that face yachts and those aboard them.

Too far, you say?

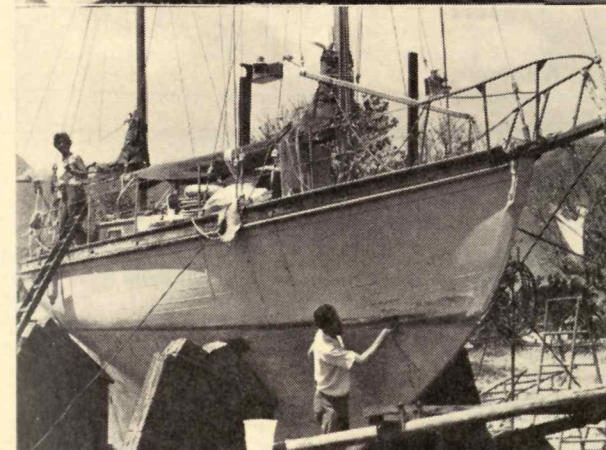
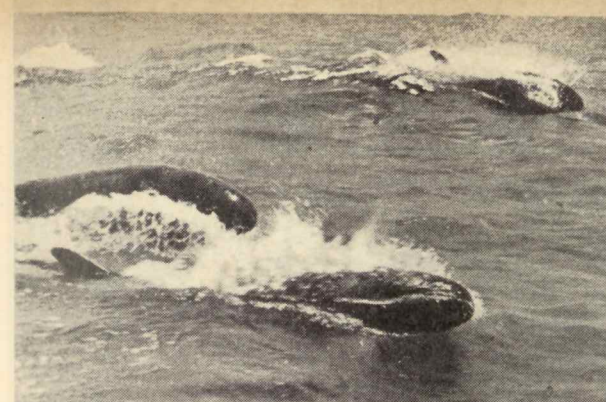
Madagascar is only 900 miles from Durban and places with names such as Gallion Bay and Murderer's Bay are waiting for your anchor. If you can arrange some long leave, the 92 islands of the Seychelles group are 2,400 miles distant and a return trip, by way of the west coast of Madagascar, can easily be done in four months, or three, if you do not dally too long at romantic anchorages.

You do not fancy the rough tradewind passage between North Madagascar and the Seychelles?

Turn round after visiting the Comoro Islands and hitch a ride back with the Mozambique current. One more thing: the direct route back to South Africa is usually the easiest, with winds and current in your favour. Once you get there, it is easy to return.

Some of my happiest memories are associated with cruises to these islands. The cyclone season ends in April. Arrange for your leave, get the boat ready. Go! This cruise will be the experience of a lifetime!

Island days . . . the author's Vertue-class sloop Aldebaran bustles along briskly, sailing herself to windward while the skipper attends to the sheets.
All photos: H. C. W. Vink



ABOVE, TOP TO BOTTOM:

Travel companions. Whales and porpoises are often seen, the latter will play around the boat before they depart, all in the same direction, for some destination over the horizon.
The Indian Ocean is not always rough. Here Jacques d'Arifat, who joined me for the trip back to Durban last year, enjoys his sun-downer in peace while we lie becalmed.
Occasionally one meets fellow yachtsmen. Pat and Kurt Frost slip their ketch Safari Too at Port Louis, Mauritius, for painting.

RIGHT, TOP TO BOTTOM:

Clear deep blue water, brilliantly white sand and shady trees. Aldebaran at anchor in a sheltered cove at Itapere, near Fort Dauphin, on the south eastern coast of Madagascar. Many such anchorages are found on the long coastline.
Pte des Galets, an artificial harbour at the north-western tip of Reunion, is easy to enter and safe. The mountains rise to 10,000 ft, the highest, Piton de Neige, sometimes covered by snow in winter.
Bird's-eye view of Port Louis harbour, Mauritius. On the left, next to the palm trees, Aldebaran lies alongside the quay of Blythe Bros, with whom it is a tradition to welcome visiting yachts.

