

Nine of Cups – 45' Liberty Cutter – 7' draft – October 2006

Subject area: ***Ushuaia to Mar del Plata, Argentina and Piriapolis, Uruguay***

Our time in Ushuaia, Argentina was excellent, but each morning as we saw our breath, skated on the decks and watched the mountains succumb to increased snow cover, we knew our time was limited. Without a stove, we were uncomfortable and no amount of layered clothing or hot tea seemed to warm us up. We departed Ushuaia on 10 April 2006, heading east up the famed Beagle Channel to Mar del Plata, Argentina and hopefully, warmth!

We were traveling in “loose company” with a British single-hander aboard “Sadko” and made 40 miles our first day for a planned anchorage in Bahia Relegada in order to visit nearby Estancia Harberton, an historic “ranch” dating from 1886 which also included Museo Acatushun, famous for its interesting collection of skeletons, primarily marine mammals and birds of the area.

We managed an uncomfortable night in a Bahia Sloggett, then headed to Puerto Aguirre to await a good weather window for negotiating the Lemaire Strait. There was nothing much ashore at Puerto Aguirre except a small house and a couple of outbuildings. During the night, as winds and waves increased, Sadko, anchored next to us, dragged its anchor and we stood anchor watch and waited patiently during the night until it was light enough and calm enough to re-anchor. It snowed quite heavily during the night and the decks were treacherous.

We ended up waiting three days for a weather window to move on amidst snow, hail and strong winds. The next leg of the trip would bring us out into the Atlantic through a particularly treacherous piece of water, the Lemaire Strait. We headed out to ride the north setting tide and with the help of Neptune, timed it perfectly. Though waves in excess of 50 feet have been noted in this area, we motored through in nearly calm waters and light winds. Blessed...once again. Once in the Atlantic, the waves increased and all of us (that includes Jelly, the sea cat) became seasick for a few days. Even our trusty Stugeron seasick med didn't work. Time alone cured the problem.

We set out 15 April from Puerto Aguirre and 11 days later arrived in Mar del Plata. We celebrated Easter Sunday en route...no Easter Bunny for us, but we did boil a couple of eggs. We weathered one gale, but we were ready for it thanks to Buoy Weather, grib files and the Patagonia Net. We hanked on storm sails, removed the cockpit enclosure and bimini and hunkered down. We ran before the wind until it turned north, then hove-to until things settled down. All in all, we were a bit uncomfortable for awhile, but it wasn't that bad.

North winds meant warm winds now and though we preferred south/southwest to sail, light north winds felt warm on our faces. We had days of perfect sailing under bright blue, sunny skies to offset the heaving-to and heavy weather. Land ho! We arrived at the pier at Yacht Club Argentina on 26 April. This was heaven...side-tied to a floating finger pier, electricity, hot showers and it was warm! Mar del Plata proved to be a pleasant, hospitable city and is an excellent stop along the coast after the tough haul from the south or while making ready to head south.

Mar del Plata

Via the cruiser grapevine we learned that Piriapolis, Uruguay, some 225 miles north across the Rio de la Plata had a huge Travel Lift and economical haul-out services. A glorious 42-hour sail and we were med-moored in the small, minimal service marina at Puerto Piriapolis and on a waiting list for haul-out behind old friends “Pen Azen” and “Belair” whom we had met back in Ecuador. Though this facility is lacking in cruiser amenities, it is a reasonable option for haul-out and do-it-yourself boatwork.

Piriapolis, Uruguay

