

Nine of Cups – 45' Liberty Cutter – 7' draft – February 2009
Subject area: ***Isla Grande de Chiloé, Chile***

Isla Grande de Chiloé is Chile's second largest island and South America's 5th largest island. It is 118 miles long and averages about 35-40 miles wide. Divided by the gentle peaks of the Coastal Range, Chiloé's eastern and western coasts are two worlds apart. To the west is a wilderness of endless beaches, dune habitat and temperate rain forests... much of it protected in one of Chile's national parks. To the east are the scattered islands of the Chiloé archipelago, sheltered from Pacific storms, intensely cultivated, home to a traditional culture of subsistence farmers, fishermen and craftsmen. A rich mythology, populated by trolls, sea monsters, and eerie ghost ships, is yet another mark of Chiloé's unique history. Renowned for its seafood, its woolen handicrafts and the warmth of its people, Chiloé is still a largely unknown destination and as such, even in "high season" (Nov-March), the cruising grounds are relatively uncrowded.

The last time we visited Chile, we were in a hurry to get into the canals further south and spent no time at all here. Before setting out across the Pacific this year, we decided to spend a couple of weeks cruising in Chiloé first. We're glad we did, but wish that we'd allotted much more time. There is so much to see and appreciate, we could have spent the entire season and still not seen it all. We used "Patagonia & Tierra del Fuego Nautical Guide" by Rolfo and Ardrizzi (aka "the Italian guide") as our main reference. Navtech electronic charts were excellent and detailed for the area, but the tide tables were way off. Our "WXTide32" program was much better, although still not spot-on. The tidal changes in the area are significant (up to 20' on spring tides) and traveling with the tides was essential. Chilean Hydrographic Chart #3749 provided our paper chart backup and was an excellent adjunct to the electronic charts. Chilean Armada regulations require checking in twice per day (0800/2000) either by radio or via e-mail.

We were feeling lazy so our itinerary planning included only anchorages that were protected, required no land lines and were within a day's sail and there were lots of choices. We left Puerto Montt late in the day on the slack after high tide and opted for a short 12nm motor-sail to Caleta Huelmo (41S39.40/73W03.46). It was wonderful to be alone and away and have the chance to relax after a hectic two months of repairs and maintenance (and social life). The anchorage was deep (50'), as are many here even close to shore, but holding was good. Salmoneras (salmon pens) and mussel farms are quite common and must be avoided, but they're large and well marked so it's not difficult.

We stayed in a total of five additional anchorages over the next three weeks (just couldn't leave!) and could have chosen from over a hundred more. Our anchorages included:

- Caleta Añihue/Isla Mechuque – 42S19.19/73W15.34 – Lovely, protected anchorage; good holding in 52'. Small village of Mechuque offers basic staples plus fresh bread, but we never made it ashore as we sat out 30 knot southerlies very comfortably here for two days (and had lots of power!).
- Estéro Pindo/Isla Quehui – 42S37.05/ 73W29.60 – Beautiful anchorage; good holding 50'. The little village of Los Angeles has a traditional, wooden church which you can visit; a small café which offers beverages and meals when given advance notice; a small mini-mart offers basics, some fresh veggies and fresh bread. We hiked around the area (all green, rolling hills and dirt roads/paths) and picked wild blackberries which are in abundance throughout the islands here. A dinghy ride across the bay offers another hiking opportunity and another church to photograph with great vistas from the top of the hill.
- Estéro Pailad / Chiloé – 42S51.43/73W36.00 – This, for us, was the essence of a lovely anchorage; good holding in 25'. We anchored just in front of a tiny village with a picturesque wooden church, sheep, cattle and horses grazing on its front lawn. The birdlife was astounding. Several pairs of black necked swans, magellanic penguins,

Chilean widgeons, speckled teals, steamer ducks, whimbrels, oystercatchers, southern lapwings and an entire beach covered with Hudsonian godwits. (Yes, we did need our bird guide to identify many of these. *Birds of Patagonia, Tierra del Fuego and Antarctic Peninsula* by Couve & Vidal). Sea lions and dolphins were in this estuary as well. It was crowded in all the right ways!

- Estéro Ichuac / Isla Lemuy - 42S36.90/ 73W43.73 – Good holding, 47'. This was a pleasant enough anchorage, but not in the original plan. Engine problems necessitated a stop here, but we did not go ashore. A salmonera exists across the entrance, but otherwise no obstacles and good protection.
- Marina Quinched / Chiloé – 42S34.68/73W45.37 – We hip-towed ourselves with the dinghy a couple of miles across the Canal Yal to a small marina we had heard about which was not listed in the Italian guide. William Bannister, the owner, could not have been more helpful. The marina offers moorings and dock space at reasonable rates including electricity on the dock, fresh water (from a well and in limited supply); free wifi on your boat (WOW!!!); free use of a washing machine with clothesline for drying; clean, hot showers; a playground and lots of room to run for kids; a club house with kitchenette and inside BBQ for cruiser use; free rides with William into Castro or Puerto Chonchi almost daily. (www.nauticabannister.cl) We planned to stay only a day or two until the engine problem was sorted out, but we stayed for nearly a week. Apples and blackberries were in season and William encouraged us to pick all we could...we took advantage to the best of our ability.

We traveled into Castro (“capital” of Chiloé) with William, but did not sail there. We were told that the anchorage is not particularly pleasant (some agree, others do not) and dinghy tie-up was not the best. Castro is a small city, but offers a good, modern supermercado (Beckna); basic hardware and services; diesel, gasoline; laundry; internet; an outstanding “feria” (fresh market) with local and “imported” fruits and veggies, fresh fish and shellfish and smoked salmon. The crafts market on the waterfront offers the usual souvenir-type trinkets and lots of locally knitted woolen wear including knitted dolls which are unique to the island.

William & Valeska Bannister, SSCA’s new Cruising Station Hosts for Isla Grande de Chiloé have lived in Quinched, Chiloé for well over a decade and can provide lots of information about the island and all it offers. Cata & David Tidswell on “Catch the Wind”, SSCA’s Cruising Station hosts based in Puerto Montt have traveled in Chiloé and the Patagonian canals extensively and are always willing to provide insight and information about the area to visitors.

This is wonderful cruising ground and we barely touched the surface. Check our website www.nineofcups.com for more photos and commentary. We’d return here in a heartbeat...the next time around.

Commodores Marcie (AA1ZM) and David Lynn (AA1ZL)